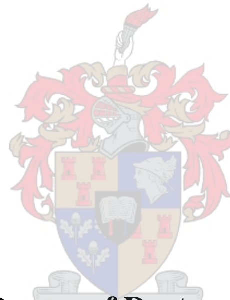
THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN HUMANISM IN THE NARRATIVE WRITINGS OF ES'KIA MPHAHLELE

LESIBANA JACOBUS RAFAPA



Dissertation presented for the Degree of Doctor of Literature at the University of Stellenbosch

Promotor: Prof. A.H. Gagiano
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

L.J. RAFAPA **16 DECEMBER 2005**
Signature: ………………….. Date: …………………….

ABSTRACT

The introductory chapter of this thesis – in which I place Mphahlele's works within the Afrocentric, postcolonial theoretical context within which he wrote – consists of three sections that explain the three different ways in which I contextualise my investigation of the ways in which Mphahlele represents his concept of African humanism in his narrative writings. In section 1.1 I detail the historical background and context within which Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism will be shown to have evolved, alongside my analysis of a selected few of his poems and all of his narrative writings, articulated in the main body of the thesis. I approach this introductory sketching of the historical context by tracing the development over time of antecedent concepts articulated by other writers, followed by a chronological tracing of the progressive, successive articulations of the idea of African humanism in Mphahlele's own discursive writing . This is followed in section 1.2 by an outline of the theoretical notions or concepts from various sources by means of which the analysis is executed, some of which are Edward Said's notion of "the integrated vision", Fanon's idea of "national culture" and Bhabha's metonymic notion of "mimicry". Section 1.3 dwells on a description of the conceptual approach I use throughout the thesis – that of viewing literature as anchored in the empirical milieu constituting the referential framework of its subject matter. In this section I also highlight the analytical method of scrutinising Mphahlele's works from the sociolinguistic point of view that links dialogue and the symbols yielded by fiction to the local cultural orientation of the people for whom artefacts were composed. The organisation of the later chapters of this thesis according to literary genre is also explained and rationalised in section 1.3.

After looking briefly at Mphahlele's poetry and more fully at his short stories in Chapter 2 in order to trace how he represents the concept of African humanism in a more distinct and recognisable manner in the latter compared to the former genre (focusing on dialogue and imagery), this study proceeds in Chapter 3 to demonstrate how this concept is interwoven with the fabric of Mphahlele's autobiographies, *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music*, exhibiting the author's concern with this concept and his expression of it in these texts, without his violating the conventions of autobiography by articulating it discursively. Further instances of the incorporation of African humanist tenets into Mphahlele's literary works are explored in a consideration of his two early novels (*The Wanderers* and *Chirundu*) in Chapter 4. In the commentaries on the novels which are addressed in this chapter, the many stylistic and thematic parallels with the texture of writing in the texts considered earlier are discussed – in order to explore what appears at this point to be a more profound and extensive exemplification of Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism. Chapter 5 dwells on Mphahlele's last novel to date, *Father Come Home*, arguing that the apparent simplicity of the work deceptively conceals the author's most vivid literary representations of his theory of African humanism, conveyed by means of particularly dexterous implementations of his trademark literary devices, here

engaged most effectively by introducing to the reader a novel kind of character who embodies African humanism in a manner that is unprecedented in Mphahlele's literary career.

In Chapter 6 cumulative evidence is put together to demonstrate that Mphahlele, through his narrative writings, has succeeded in developing and perfecting his concept of African humanism, with the result that it has been shaped into a coherent, nuanced and lucid theory or philosophy.

OPSOMMING

Die inleidende hoofstuk van hierdie tesis – waarin Mphahele se werke gesitueer word binne die Afrosentriese, postkoloniale konteks waarbinne hy geskryf het – bestaan uit drie gedeeltes wat die drie verskillende metodes waarvolgens ek my ondersoek na die manier waarop Mphahlele sy konsep van Afrika-humanisme in sy narratiewe werke weergee, kontekstualiseer. In 1.1 detailleer ek die historiese agtergrond en konteks waarbinne Mphahlele se fiolsofie van Afrika-humanisme ontwikkel het, teenoor my analise van 'n paar geselekteerde gedigte van hom asook al sy narratiewe werke, wat in die hoof-gedeelte van die tesis geartikuleer word. My benadering tot hierdie inleidende beskrywing van die historiese konteks is om die ontwikkeling, oor tyd, van voorafgaande konsepte (soos deur ander skrywers verwoord) na te gaan, gevolg deur 'n kronologiese belyning van die ontwikkellende, opeenvolgende artikulasies van die konsep van Afrika-humanisme in Mphahlele se eie teoretiese en lewensbeskoulike werke. Dit word opgevolg in 1.2 deur 'n omlyning van die teoretiese konsepte uit verskillende bronne met behulp waarvan die analise uitgevoer word, sommige waarvan Edward Said se idee van 'n geintegreerde visie, Fanon se konsep van 'n nasionale kultuur en Bhabha se metonimiese idee van nabootsing is. Gedeelte 1.3 konsentreer op 'n beskrywing van die konseptuele benadering waarvan ek dwarsdeur die tesis gebruik maak – die beskouing van letterkunde as geanker in die empiriese milieu, wat die verwysingsraamwerk van die literêre wêreld uitmaak. In hierdie gedeelte belig ek ook die analitiese metode om Mphahlele se werke vanuit 'n sosiolinguistiese vertrekpunt, wat dialoog en die simbole wat uit fiksie voortvloei verbind met die plaaslike kulturele omgewing van diegene vir wie die artefakte geskep is, te skrutineer. Die rangskikking van die latere hoofstukke van hierdie tesis volgens literêre genre, word ook verduidelik in 1.3.

Na 'n kort bespreking van uitgesoekte gedigte deur Mphahlele, gevolg deur 'n volledige bespreking van sy kortverhale in Hoofstuk 2 – met die doel om te analiseer hoe hierdie skrywer (deur sy gebruik van dialoog en beeldspraak) die konsep van Afrika-humanisme progressief verdiep in die 'oorgang' van een genre na die ander – word daar in Hoofstuk 3 gedemonstreer hoe hierdie konsep verweef is met die outobiografiese tekstuur van Mphahlele se eie-lewensbeskrywende werke *Down Second Avenue* en *Afrika My Music*. In hierdie twee werke word die skrywer se betrokkenheid met en verwoording van sy konsep van Afrika-humanisme uitgelig, soos hy dit uitvoer sonder om die biografiese konvensies te verbreek deur die idee diskursief te artikuleer. Verder voorbeelde van die

beliggaming van die beginsels van Afrika-humanisme in Mphahlele se literêre werke word ondersoek in ’n bespreking van sy twee vroee romans *The Wanderers* en *Chirundu* in Hoofstuk 4. In die kommentaar op die romans wat in hierdie hoofstuk bespreek word, word die vele stilistiese en tematiese paralelle met die werke wat vroeer in die tesis bestudeer is, bespreek – met die doel om te bepaal wat op hierdie punt na ’n diepere en meer wydlopende verbeelding van Mphahlele se filosofie van Afrika-humanisme lyk. Hoofstuk 5 konsentreer op Mphahlele se tot op hede laaste roman, *Father Come Home*. Hier word geargumenteer dat die oppervlakkige indruk van die skynbare eenvoud van die roman misleidend is, omdat dit die skrywer se helderste literêre voorstelling van sy teorie van Afika-humanisme versteek – hier oorgedra deur midde van ’n besonder vaardige implementering van Mphahlele se kenmerkende literêre strategiee, deur die leser voor te stel aan ’n nuwe tipe karakter wat die Afrika-humanisme beliggaam op ’n manier wat sonder presedent in Mphahlele se literêre loopbaan is.

In Hoofstuk 6 word die opgeboude getuienis saamgestel om te bewys dat Mphahlele deur sy narratiewe werke daarin geslaag het om sy konsep van Afrika-humanisme te ontwikkel en te vervolmaak, met die gevolg dat dit gevorm is tot ’n koherente, genuanseerde en heldere teorie of filosofie.

DEDICATION

Without the many sacrifices and immeasurable support of my lovely wife Ramokone Margaret , and precious children Thabo Monona Stanley, Mokgathi Katlego and Raesibe Mothepa Rachel Lillian, I would not have completed this work. This dissertation is for you. This is also for Dr Khomotšo Reginald Kganyago, who has affectionately accepted to be my younger brother. I dedicate this study also to my elder brother Jacob Malose Isaiah Rafapa for his moral support throughout my learning career.

How it smarts my heart to be celebrating my obtaining of the doctoral degree without the physical presence of the following members of my family! It is partly as a way of dealing with this pain that I dedicate the success represented by completion of this thesis to my younger sister Gloria Rankotsana Ntshegi (died 1999); my mother Lydia Rachel Raesibe Rafapa (nee Leso, died 2000); my father Rev. Elias Malesela "Molemi" Rafapa (died 2001); my niece Vinolia Seja "Poppie" Ntshegi (died 2002); and my father-in-law Alfred Madimetja Thebetha (died 2003). I know you are all alive and well in the land of the ancestors: so please share in this joy with me. I dedicate this doctoral thesis to you all.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Concept of African Humanism: Problems of Definition; Socio-Historical Background; and Evolution in Mphahlele's Own Writing

Within the South African intellectual, social and political context, as well as internationally, a great deal of confusion has arisen around attempts to combine the concepts "African" and "humanism". It is thus necessary to look at how Mphahlele has resolved the intellectual or definitional dilemmas inherent in devising his concept of African humanism. As the term "African humanism" combines individual terms whose meanings are already clouded by incoherent usage and historically acquired meanings, it naturally inherits the problems coming with the definition and use of the terms "African" and "humanism". As such, problems can be expected to vary from context to context. It is hence useful and enlightening to approach the problem of definition that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism has had to face chronologically.

According to Mphahlele, the roots of fundamental contemporary differences between Western and African humanisms are traceable "back to ancient Greece and Rome" ("Notes Towards" 135). In his view, thus, although the two kinds of humanisms have co-existed since the genesis of these ideas or practices, because of the different geohistorical environments in which the two broad cultural clusters lived their distinction can be said to have started showing pronouncedly since Classical times. A scrutiny of Mphahlele's discursive writings reveals that in his view the divergences between the two types of humanism narrowed somewhat during Renaissance, when Western humanism "came into prominence in reference to the Renaissance (AD 1300-AD 1600)" ("The Fabric" 149). What this means is that according to Mphahlele's thinking the distinguishing characteristics of the new thinking that surfaced in Europe during the historical period known as the Renaissance, i.e. European humanism, correlated with some core premises of African humanism. In respect of European humanism, however, Mphahlele holds that "dissociation occurred between the Renaissance intelligence and the moral content of humanity [especially] in the world of science, exploration and commerce" ("Notes Towards" 135). Enrichment of the African humanist existential outlook by social and scientific developments associated with the Renaissance resulted dialectically (according to the way Mphahlele delineates his concept of African humanism) in a change of character that was different from that of post-Renaissance European humanism. That this was the case is evident in Mphahlele's remark that in the post-Renaissance world of today "the black African … [still] cherishes a world view that perceives an organic universe [in which] a dichotomy between the realms of the intellect and spiritual experience would be untenable, even inconceivable" ("Notes Towards" 135). The world-view of African humanism, according to Mphahlele, entered the next historical period (known as the Enlightenment) in this shape.

This study will demonstrate that since his beginnings as a theorist Mphahlele responds implicitly to what he perceives as skewed Western critical opinion on the nature of Africanness. Such distorted or myopic European or Eurocentric views about

Africanness gained a huge dominance during the Enlightenment. Africanist thinkers faced in later periods with this kind of lingering bias, spawned by the dominant theoretical climate of the Enlightenment, had to adopt Afrocentric attitudes in order to counteract its pernicious effects – as this dissertation will illustrate. Without the terms "Afrocentric" or "Eurocentric" being used in social analysis in these early historical times, dominant Western discourse of these eras was undoubtedly informed by Eurocentrism, while that of Africanist theorists who protested against Eurocentric attitudes (which intensified especially during the Enlightenment) was fuelled by Afrocentrism. This is because Afrocentrism refers to an attitude that directly combats European hegemonic discourse in order to negate its inherent Eurocentrism as a pole diametrically opposed to that associated with Africanists. One of the most prominent Africanist theorists, Ali Mazrui, confirms the accuracy of the way I describe Afrocentrism above, in his explanation of what it entails:

> Afrocentricity is … the term used [to describe] global Africa as the sum total of continental Africa [as well as] the diaspora of enslavement created by the dispersal of enslavement and, finally the [later] diaspora of colonialism or the dispersal caused by the destabilisation and long-term consequences and disruptions of the colonial era … [as well as] a dialectical method, seeking to negate the … negative portrayal of the most distorted history in the world, that of the African people [so that where] the thesis is euro-centricism, the antithesis is afro-centricity. ("Global Africa" 17)

The Eurocentrism that gained huge momentum during the Enlightenment could loosely be referred to as a type of racism. However, I strive throughout this thesis to maintain a distinction between Eurocentrism and racism – in the way Mphahlele makes the point never to confound the two distinct phenomena. As this study will demonstrate, to be Eurocentric or Afrocentric is not necessarily to be racist, despite the fact that the two opposed theoretical perspectives may be evaluated as racist by those interpreting them. While it is true (as this study will illustrate) that racism emanated from and became rife in the same historical context as Eurocentrism, it is a separate issue in its own right, as is the case with other modes of thinking that will be discussed at the different stages through which Mphahlele's definitions of his concept of African humanism has gone.

What a study of this nature has to take into account is that before the concept of African humanism can establish itself, the humanity of African people needs to be acknowledged. A battle with a long, even ancient history of its own, this took a particular form because the conbribution of European Englightenment thinkers to European humanism involved a nearly uniform denigration of Africans: a questioning of their intellectual capacities and their status as human beings. One Afrocentric theorist who has commented on Enlightenment thinking is Simon Gikandi. He highlights the British philosopher Hume's claim that the African is "incapable of artistic production and, by implication, [of intellectual] aesthetic judgment" ("Africa and the Idea of the Aesthetic" 5). According to western thinkers like the one-time American President Jefferson, questions of morality and art are intimately bound together and the capacity for aesthetic judgment is seen as one of the crucial attributes of *homo sapiens* ("Africa and the Idea of the Aesthetic" 5). Within the context of Enlightenment thinking, the implication of Hume's verdict is hence that Africans could not quite qualify as humans. It is as an individual theorising within

this historical trend that Lucien Levy-Bruhl sees an African as emotional and affective, and as incapable of thinking and reasoning (see Trinh T. Minh-ha's article in McClintock, Mufti and Shohat 417).

According to the African American Afrocentric writer Henry Louis Gates Jr., forerunners to challenge the denial of humanity to Africans include persons like Crummel whose activism started in 1833 or 1834 (Gates, *Loose Canons* 73). The intellectual premise of Africanists such as Crummel can be regarded as prefiguring Pan Africanism, which is a refinement of the Afrocentric attitude in terms of contour and content. Hence Crummel's reference not narrowly to African Americanism, but to world-wide Africanism (*Loose Canons* 74). It is the Pan Africanist ethos that later impelled leaders like Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda and Jomo Kenyatta to view the problem of colonisation commonly impinging on the human dignity and freedom of Africans as necessitating a concerted way of thinking and resistance – hence their championing of some form of Pan-Africanism in later decades. At a later stage the rise of African Christian intellectuals such as Bishop Crowther (since 1841) resulted in a strengthened Pan Africanist feeling that enabled them and their followers to transcend state boundaries and regard themselves as a global Africanist formation (*Loose Canons* 73).

Notions from which Mphahlele's concept of African humanism later drew strength are discernible also in the orientation of some of Crowther's contemporaries and predecessors (such as Crummel). As Mphahlele acknowledges, Bishop Crowther and his contemporaries "admired and adopted some aspects of Western culture for African advancement, but not at the expense of traditional institutions and self-determination" (Mphahlele, "African Identity" 46). Here are evident the foundations of Mphahlele's acknowledgement of hybridity as inevitable within the consciousness of Africans on account of historical-environmental contingencies, along with his insistence on the management of hybridity so as not to allow it to degenerate into unmediated mimicry. As from 1865 Africanists such as George W. Johnson (Gates, *Loose Canons* 74) enthusiastically furthered the concerted efforts of their fellow Africanists in asserting the humanity of Africans. Mphahlele has recorded his awareness of early American Africanists such as Edward Wilmot Blyden, who was born in one of the Danish West Indies, but later became a citizen of both Liberia and Sierra Leone and who entered the American Africanist scene in the early 1870s (Mphahlele, "African Identity" 46-50). Mphahlele approvingly ascribes the following standpoint to Blyden; explaining why later in his own formulation and practice of African humanism he makes sure to point out the danger of a culturally effacing agenda beneath the veil of language:

> Language would be one of the first elements of the West to use; plus the ideas that language carried e.g. democracy, liberty, franchise, civilization, and so on. These were foreign to African thinking and he had no vocabulary for them, i.e. foreign as concepts to theorize about. ("African Identity" 47)

The citation makes clear why Mphahlele subsumed an Afrocentric stance in conceptualising African humanism, to correct the distorted views of the West about the mental abilities and social worth of Africans. The quotation reveals Blyden as a

precursor of Mphahlele's literary practice of abrogating* the English language. It is interesting that foundations of Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism are discernible in the thinking of early Africanist thinkers such as these, in order for Eurocentric ideas to be recast within African modes of thinking. That Blyden, like Mphahlele (and later African thinkers like Nkrumah, Kaunda and Nyerere) was Afrocentric in negotiating the meeting of his African consciousness with European thinking, is revealed by the following quote from the same essay by Mphahlele:

> Blyden lived in a century when European anthropologists were trying to prove that the White man was superior to the African. He, on the other hand, knew that the races of the world are different, but at the same time he attacked the theory that White intellectual achievement was any higher in value and standard to the African's culture. Each race, he argued further, sees from its own position a different aspect of the Almighty God within us, and we have by virtue of this freedom to be ourselves and contribute our cultures to the total whole. ("African Identity" 48)

Not only do the quoted statements confirm an implied intellectual reaction among Africanists to the Enlightenment's Western philosophical bias regarding the humanity of Africans, but they also testify to the 19th century genesis of the Afrocentric strategy of abrogating the English language.

In his essay "African Identity – Nationalism – The African Personality – Negritude", Mphahlele significantly specifies "the Berlin Convention of 1884" ("African Identity" 46) as the formal commencement of the piecemeal colonisation of the African continent. This was the formal start of a major historical process that was to result in what one of the best known African writers, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, desribed as a both crafty and violent subversion of African social systems:

> Berlin in 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. (Ngugi, *Decolonising* 9)

More importantly, though, this cataclysmic European gesture gave birth all over the African continent to the (consequent) theorising on the experience of colonisation by Africanist writers.

The outline above of dominant Eurocentric thinking into the 1800s reveals the enmeshment of perceptions of Africans' supposed inhumanity with assumptions concerning their purported inability to create art. It thus makes sense that reference is made to the status of African art alongside repudiation of misperceptions that denied Africans their humanity. The African American scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. emphasises the African mask's power to symbolise the distinctiveness of African lifestyles, on a Pan Africanist scale, in the following words:

> Out of all artifacts out of Africa, it is indeed the mask that most compels. The principal artistic attraction at the 1897 Exposition in Brussels was a magnificent collection of African masks and sculptures … [It] impressed French artists to such

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*This term will be discussed in section 1.2 of this introductory chapter.

> an extent that the concepts of movement, rhythm, and self-contained interiority that gave rise to cubism and dadaism arose from a transformation of the African mask … For [in the African mask] is contained, as well as reflected, a coded, secret, hermetic world, a world discovered only by the initiate. (Gates, *Figures in Black* 167)

Gates highlights the need for non-Africans to be prepared to learn about Africans in order to appreciate the distinctiveness of Africans' consciousness and way of life in the expression "a world discovered only by the initiate" (Gates, *Figures in Black* 167).

It is significant that all of the 19th century Africanists cited above are acknowledged by Mphahlele as having adopted Christianity and ascended to the social status of Christian leadership among their African compatriots. This fact explains why later Africanists including Mphahlele, are not characterised by a simplistic or reductionist rejection of western Christianity. Instead, in keeping with a tradition established by the 19th century Christian nationalists cited above, Africanists are known for linking nationalism with the abrogation of western Christianity – in theory or in practice. It is in the form of an affirming perpetration of this 19th century Africanist leaning that Mphahlele invariably alternates the definition of his theory of African humanism with descriptions of the way latter day African Christian leaders embraced religious nationalism as a weapon for liberation, epoch after epoch. Mphahlele employs this discursive refrain to such an extent that his delineation of the way some Africans have abrogated western Christianity has attained the status of a bona fide aspect of his concept of African humanism.

After the fabric of Africanist thinking took on the texture described in the preceding paragraphs of this chapter, the dawn of the 20th century gave birth to a robust championing of Pan Africanism among Africanist writers. Pan Africanism as a movement was formed in 1900, "when the West Indian lawyer, Henry Sylvester Williams, then living in England … convened the first Pan-African Congress in London" (Mphahlele, "Africa Day" 242-43) – although it had of course existed earlier as a consciousness (as implied above in the survey of the way Africanist critical thinking evolved). That Pan Africanism existed in the consciousnesses of Africanists before its formalisation as a social programme is also borne out by Mphahlele's explanation that:

> Pan-Africanism is based on the belief in a bond between the Black peoples of Africa and the external areas to which the slaves were sent. It is recognition that we are linked to this continent by a common ancestry and experience of oppression and slavery; of racism being used by Europe as a tool of economic self-enrichment. The Pan-African movement and the idea that gave birth to it came out of Black people's desire to rediscover and regain their identity and heritage, coupled with the desire to rid themselves of colonial rule. ("Africa Day" 242)

Phenomena that gave birth to a Pan Africanist consciousness mentioned by Mphahlele in this excerpt all occurred prior to its formal adoption as a movement, as the earlier parts of this work explain. Mphahlele summarises the manifesto of Pan Africanism as:

> The decolonization of the mind, especially where cultural directions are concerned, and … renunciation of helpless, grovelling dependence on White leadership and patronage … the fight against poverty, disease, and ignorance,

> made worse by political tyranny … collective active renunciation of [black] dictators … [and facing] the realities of independence. (“Africa Day” 243-44)

The difference between the former and latter quotations, both detailing what Pan Africanism entails is that in the former its earlier manifestations as a consciousness are almost clinically foregrounded, while the latter characterises it qualitatively more as a concretised political programme. Mphahlele not only remarks that organised Pan Africanism was born in 1900, but proceeds to highlight the intensity with which Africanists gave impetus to its solidification. He observes that by initiating “five international congresses” starting in 1919, “W.E.B. Du Bois … [gave] reality to the long-standing dream of Pan-Africanism” (“Africa Day” 243).

Recognition of associations between Africanist thinking articulated in America and in Africa in considering the environment that offered a workable theoretical climate for Mphahlele is not far-fetched. It is African Americans such as Williams and Du Bois who initiated perceptual formations that preceded Mphahlele’s project of formulating and refining his own concept of African humanism. It is for this reason that, besides his tribute to 19th century American Africanist theorists, Mphahlele consistently reinforces the memory of America-based progenitors of concepts like African humanism – as when he acknowledges the decisive role of intellectuals who belonged to the African American movement of the 1920s known as the Harlem Renaissance (“Your History” 173). He takes care to indicate indebtedness prior to commending the Pan Africanist spirit that became strong in South Africa in the 1930s and helped stamp out divisive tribalism. In true Pan Africanist spirit, Mphahlele’s analysis of African American thought in the preceding decade is followed swiftly by his scrutiny of Africanists who were active in the 1930s on the African continent. This is seen in his initial sharp criticism of negritude thinking, followed later by his appreciation of the fact that negritudinists later “turned back to home ground” (“My Destiny” 435). One of the ways the negritudinists achieved this was by discarding foreign linguistic formulae and inventing original ones that would enable them more effectively to express their Africanness. Of course it also meant their turning to an African audience rather than appearing to market Africanness to Europeans.

Negritude was an attempt by some Africans to resolve the challenges of cultural assimilation that accompanied imperialism and colonisation. As a movement it was started “in Paris in the 1930s” by students from Francophone African states such as Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Leon Damas who “were writing poetry” and “showed concern that they had been uprooted from their African cultural origins” (“African Identity” 53). Despite their admirable concern (acknowledged in this quotation), from the onset negritudinists adopted approaches that invited acerbic chastisement from Mphahlele. Mphahlele is known for his outright rejection of the practice of negritude in its unrefined form of the 1930s when it was introduced, as when he censured negritudinists’ for “imposing a foreign language on the form of an African culture that has its own ancient language” and for “defining a culture in ideological terms” (*African Image* – Revised Edition 39). Mphahlele differed vehemently with aspects of negritude that undermined what he perceived as the implied role of those defining Africanness in order to offset the distorted views (shown above to have been

inherited from the Englightenment) – of defining themselves in a manner that defies definiton by the coloniser.

What Mphahlele mentions about the existence of negritude in the 1930s among Africanists associated directly with the African continent ushers in his acknowledgement of the simultaneous existence of negritude and Black Consciousness. Co-existing with these two ideologies within Africanists in the 1930 was also Pan Africanism. Mphahlele's praise of a vibrant Pan Africanism in South Africa around 1930 (in "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence") reveals Pan Africanism to have been one of the currents of thought that influenced him in pondering the African condition. The complexity of the theoretical atmosphere of the 1930s resulting from these three co-existing modes of thought naturally brought about problems. One such problem is that Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism are sometimes confused. It is precisely because Pan Africanism (the earlist manifestation of which is described earlier in this chapter) overlaps historically with Black Consciousness, that the two are sometimes confused. But from Mphahlele's explanations it is clear that Black Consciousness mainly focuses on building the consciousness of the individual black, while Pan Africanism goes beyond this to inspire collective resistance to social, economic and political oppression, whether by black or white leadership. While Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness began co-existing visibly as from the 1930s, they emphasised different areas requiring attention in order for blacks to be regarded and treated as equal to people of other races. For many black intellectuals like Mphahlele, the slight shades of difference were confined to varying emphases on whether to change both the consciousness and material plight of the individual or those of entire local and international communities of blacks rather than being irreconciliable. It is for this reason that throughout this dissertation I refer to both Pan Africanist and Black Consciousness theorists. It is from Pan Africanism/Black Consciousness that individual, improved concepts like Mphahlele's African humanism were developed.

Philosophical emphases deriving from both Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness are equally evident in refined, refracted forms in Mphahlele's concept of African humanism. The mode of their dialectical syntheses with Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism alters from time to time as the situation demands, much as the former two Africanist ideologies mutate from one theoretical-critical setting to another in their own substantive ways. For this reason, Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is not the sum total of earlier and current theories on the condition of being black. Mphahlele characterises it as a different, new entitity, leaving the other philosophies to develop along their own lines – beyond drawing on their raw aspects and transforming them into some of the novel aspects constituting his own concept of African humanism.

Mphahlele has remarked that the Black Power Movement, which had its origins among African Americans, dominated in South Africa in the form of Black Consciousness around the 1940s ("Your History" 181). This should be understood to be his concession that in the 1940s his theory of African humanism (which he engaged in from the South African terrain) was partly shaped by the way he interrogated ideas that originated in the Black Consciousness stable. Mphahlele's remark about the eminence of Black

Consciousness in the 1940s indicates his concession that the 1940s were a complex intellectual setting in which Africanist theorists like himself had to respond vigorously and in a circumspect manner to the thrusts of Pan Africanism, negritude and Black Consciousness. The former two ideologies having coalesced and begun to acquire prominence during earlier decades, it follows that their continual reinvention and continued influence were part of the 1940 intellectual landscape. For this reason a writer like Ursula Barnett remarks in one of her essays that, notwithstanding the tendency in the 1940s by "writers in the English colonies … to reject negritude as a label … [this] was, however, an argument mainly of degree" (*A Vision of Order 29*). This shows that Mphahlele's aim of defining his concept of African humanism even in the 1940s could not ignore debates about the relevance and soundness of negritude. According to Barnett, in the 1940s Mphahlele and the other relatively radical Africanists agreed basically with negritudinists' mission of defining Africanness from an Afrocentric perspective that sought to quash distorted perceptions. She rightly observes that what Mphahlele and the other relatively more wary Africanists rejected was the negritudinists' laxity in attempting to express Africanness by using unmediated terms of western origin.

Mphahlele's 1949 polemical essay "The Unfinished Story" reveals sensitivity in encompassing all Africa-based people of non-European descent in his reference to the "Bantu". This is evidence of the Pan Africanist premise described earlier in this chapter. The terms "Pan Africanist" or "Pan Africanism" are absent from this text, similarly to the way reference to non-Europeans as "Africans" cannot be traced in the article. Considering that the origins of Pan Africanism illustrated above are in the form of a consciousness rather than an articulate use of the word itself, Mphahlele's essay predictably embodies symptoms of the Africanist theoretical context of 1949. The insistence on adequate descriptions of Africans that had been fermenting since earlier decades among Africanists is reflected in the content of Mphahlele's essay, stressing this aspect but projecting it to the need for rounded depiction of non-European characters in the South African English fiction of the time as written by whites. One sees this in what he says as a student in his UNISA newsletter article:

> So much has been written on the Bantu, but I have always felt something seriously wanting in such literature. I told myself there must surely be much more to be said than the mere recounting of incident: about the loves and hates of my people; their desires; their poverty and affluence; their achievements and failures … (31)

In this 1949 essay Mphahlele uses the term "Bantu" to refer to Africans who are not mulatto, of Indian origin or diasporic. At this stage, he had not yet settled on articulately referring to his conception of African identity as African humanism. For this reason, at this stage he does not yet consistently refer to the practitioners of African humanist lifestyles as Africans. All the same, his implicit references to the philosophy of Africanism underlie this early expository piece, thus marking it as part of his beginning as a theorist piecing together the concept known today as African humanism.

From 1953 on Mphahlele published "a series of short stories" (Woeber and Read, *Eskia Mphahlele. A Biography* 6) in a number of journals including *Standpunte* ("The Woman" 1953) and *Drum* ("Blind Alley" 1953), as Woeber and Read note. The short story

“Blind Alley” tackles the theme of gangsterism in black townships. It details the painful assault and robbery of a man whose meager wages are cruelly removed from him, followed by exposure of the stark poverty through which his family is going (this story is reproduced in *The Unbroken Song* 4-14). The drama of the story implicitly contrasts the debauchery among the thugs with African humanist ways that are supposed to put the welfare of fellow humans above economic survival or place value on “the sacredness of life for life’s sake” (as Mphahlele puts it in “African Humanism and the Corporate World” 127). Behaviour that similarly conflicts with African humanist ethos is implied once more in the 1954 story “Reef Train”, in the detailed description of inhuman conditions under which poor township blacks are transported to and from work to benefit white prosperity without their (blacks’) humanity being properly appreciated (story published in the August, 1954 *Drum* 34-35). In other words, this 1954 story stresses the humanity of Africans by insisting thematically that they deserve equal regard and treatment with other humans such as whites.

One of the Africanist theorists focusing on discursively asserting the humanity of Africans who displays an attitude similar to Mphahlele’s (demonstrated by the 1954 short story described above) is G.M.M. James. James (*Stolen Legacy* 1954) evokes Africans’ self-constituting capacity that they have manifested since prehistoric times, thus invalidating racially biased arguments that hegemonic dominance is necessary to assist ‘subhuman’ Africans in order to improve their lot on humanitarian grounds. James claims that Greek and Roman philosophy as well as Christianity rest on the foundations of African thought and practices. As a reaction to the dominant Eurocentric theoretical atmosphere continuing in the 1950s, ideas of this nature featured in the writings of Africanists such as James and Mphahlele are a symptom of their awareness of the need to fight the low self-esteem hegemonic discourse threatened to perpetuate among Africans – by rectifying distorted perceptions of their inherent humanity. As described above, James highlights the humanity of Africans in a radical way, seen in his recasting of history in a mould that ascribes advances in thought to the African genius. On the other hand, Mphahlele’s short stories highlight the humanity of blacks in a subtler, more moderate manner by portraying black characters in a way that displays their completeness as humans. The values informing the actions of Mphahlele’s admirable characters prove to be African humanist. But their African humanism is not explicitly articulated. This correlates with the lack of overt assertion of the concept of African humanism in Mphahlele’s polemic writing produced by this stage of his career.

Mphahlele’s stories published in 1955 are “The Suitcase” and “Across Down-Stream”/”The Coffee-Cart Girl” (reproduced in *The Unbroken Song* 15-23 and 93-101 respectively). The former story maintains Mphahlele’s practice of depicting blacks as rounded human beings by illuminating the existential challenges against their African humanist sensibility posed by their degrading living conditions. This is illustrated side by side with the African characters’ ability to endure degradation, even to appreciate the humorous or ironic aspects of life. The action of the story entails a man who steals a suitcase from the bus he commutes in daily to and from work. Upon opening the stolen container, the man discovers that inside are not valuables stolen from whites as he expected, but a dead child. This fact lands him in prison rather than the original owner

he has inadvertently saved from punishment by the law. Conflict between African humanist values and unAfrican values that put material well-being above human life ensures that Mphahlele's implicit expressions of his own concept of African humanism is maintained in these writings of the mid-fifties. The aspect of African humanism of viewing women as the economic pillar of society is introduced more centrally in "The Coffee-Cart Girl". The protagonist is a woman who earns a living for her family by selling coffee near a factory. The effects of black deprivation ricochet onto her when industrial action by discontented black factory workers results in looting of the food she sells from her cart. She becomes a symbol of the degradation, loss and impoverishment suffered by all blacks under the harshness of the inhumane apartheid system. This story is the earliest among Mphahlele's short stories in which he pits an African humanist consciousness conspicuously against apartheid's lack of African humanist values.

Mphahlele's 1956 depiction of depraved conduct among blacks living in the townships (in "Down the Quiet Street") extends the overt apportioning of blame to the cruelties of the sociopolitical system first shown in "The Coffee-Cart Girl". A series of Mphahlele's stories, the first of which was published in *Drum* in 1956 portrays the impact of apartheid conditions on the Lesane family of Newclare township. Stories from 1957 such as "The Master of Doornvlei" intensify the almost allegorical depiction of apartheid's friction with an African humanist orientation. This (1957) is the year in which black South African intellectuals fiercely debated apartheid and the best way of deflecting its assault on the survival of African identity. Hence the foregrounding of the public conflict between blacks and whites under apartheid displayed in the short stories is a reflection of the same issues dominating black intellectual discourse in South Africa at this time. The question of whether or not to include whites, coloureds and Indians among the peoples for whom liberation was to be fought for was central to the intellectual atmosphere of Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness within which Mphahlele continued to write until 1957, when he went into exile. This can be discerned in the way Mphahlele explains in his essay "What's New in the New South Africa" how a split of the Pan Africanist Congress from the ANC came about in 1958. He writes that Robert Sobukwe and Zeph Mothopeng "believed that the ANC had betrayed the cause of African Nationalism by allowing itself to be led by the Communist Party (predominantly white) and the Congress of Democrats (all white)" ("What's New" 253). The concerns of Mphahlele's 1958 short story "The Living and the Dead" as expressed by the two white characters central to the plot are whether or not blacks should be included in the South African parliament of the time. The short story thus partly mirrors South African intellectual debate across the colour line in 1958 on who was to be included in state institutions – irrespective of whether such institutions represented black or white sentiments.

Woeber and Read note that among the discursive essays Mphahlele published in 1959 are "The Dilemma of the African Elite" and "Negro Culture in a Multi-Racial Society" (*Eskia Mphahlele. A Bibliography* 17). Questions of poverty and its implications for a rising black elitism as well as the survival of African lifestyles in the midst of other cultures addressed by Mphahlele's essays (cited above) are some of the central concerns treated explicitly or implicitly in his 1959 autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*. In this book, Mphahlele contrasts robust exemplification of African humanist consciousness

with vividly detailed manifestations of apartheid's dehumanising practices. Apartheid-induced behaviour of black policemen striving to ascend the social ladder by treating fellow blacks callously as illustrated in this text can be seen as Mphahlele's satirisation of attempts by Africans at forming some sort of black elite. The same goes for those woman characters involved in the illicit sale of types of liquor that damage the health of African consumers.

The group of South African writers of the fifties including Mphahlele (usually referred to as *Drum* writers) generally handle the themes of the impact of apartheid on township blacks, who were forging their new kind of urban identity. They also reflect and reflect on the rise of black elitism – themes of Mphahlele's short stories and autobiography of the fifities as discussed above. According to Chapman, "Mphahlele set out with conviction to encourage a new level of seriousness" in the contemporary writings of black authors (*Drum Decade* 213). The same critic observes that "[the fact that] the *Drum* writers constituted something 'new' has variously been recognized" (*Drum Decade* 221). Chapman further affirms this by describing the generic attributes of the *Drum* writers: "like Dhlomo [they] reveal what on the surface could be described as a petty-bourgeois contradiction between identification with a specific local reality and the desire to find in art a universalising, even a transcending image of experience" (*Drum Decade* 217- 218). By this Chapman means that the *Drum* writers of the fifties took over from an earlier school of writing to reveal in their own writing a tension between the assertion of their Africanness and striving to be and live like the 'civilised' white man. It is important to establish whether and how Mphahlele affiliates with these traits of *Drum* writers outlined by Chapman. Affiliation – in the sense in which Mphahlele approves of it – entails a sense of belonging to an ongoing black writing tradition as revealed in his description of "all the authors who wrote for Johannesburg's *Drum* magazine as of 1950" as "Peter Abrahams's inheritors" ("Your History" 171). Of Peter Abrahams, Mphahlele says that he employed "a concrete, imagistic style that is generally American but has its own special African American tension and breathless urgency" ("Your History" 171). Such acknowledgement of past influence should not be mistaken for enslavement in Mphahlele to authoritarian prescriptions that would have deprived him of intellectual freedom. For this reason he notes that as *Drum* writers "[they] evolved and developed individual styles independently, untrammelled by any particular canon" ("Your History" 172).

Acknowledgement of a broadly defined tradition (in the preceding paragraph) highlights the reality that tendencies of earlier black South African writers did have an impact on the directions taken by writers of the South African fifties. An important factor that links earlier writers and those of the 1950s *Drum* era singled out by Njabulo Ndebele is "spectacular representation" of experience, or a "penchant for the spectacular" ("The Rediscovery" 39). What differentiates the *Drum* writers and the earlier African writers similarly concerned with the impact of apartheid on their compatriots is put by Ndebele as follows: "In *Drum Magazine*, we see a similar penchant for the spectacular, although the symbols are slightly different. It is not so much the symbols of oppression that we see in most of the stories in *Drum*, but those showing the growth of sophisticated urban working and petty-bourgeois classes" ("The Rediscovery" 39). According to this critic,

"spectacular" representation of experience spills over into the *Drum* era, but the foregrounding of apartheid tapers off with the dawn of *Drum* writing.

One of the aspects that will be probed during textual analysis of Mphahlele's narrative writings is whether indeed in his works there is "nothing beyond" the depiction of despair among Africans in the face of apartheid, a fault of spectacular writing diagnosed in Ndebele's essay ("The Rediscovery" 46). But while this point is applied to Mphahlele and his contemporaries, it should be borne in mind that Ndebele has also pointed out some of the achievements of this group of African writers, as follows:

> The writers of the fifties are surprisingly silent over questions of political relevance in their writings. Perhaps there was an intuitive confidence in the knowledge that resistance to oppression was a complex multifaceted undertaking, such that the political was understood in an inclusive, holistic sense rather than in the narrow sense of party politics. Political resistance, in other words, can also be understood as total communal self-assertion … The task [of the writer] is to reflect the outward features of the popular imagination while vigorously subjecting them to inner critical scrutiny. ("Actors" 94)

In the light of this quotation from Ndebele's essay, this study has to probe to what extent and for what reasons Mphahlele's early writing can be credited with these putative positive attributes of black writing in the fifties. It will also be relevant to examine how some of his contemporaries fare in this regard. It will be illustrated, for example, that the fiction of, Can Themba, and of a few other *Drum* writers, depicts township culture differently from the way Mphahlele does, probably due to varying intentions that are more or less consonant with their individual theoretical positions and personalities. Regarding the texture of the prose, it is true that some *Drum* writers did little to contribute to the abrogation of English. Their abrogation of English would mean that they turned English against its intended effect (by colonisers) – that of inculcating a belief in hegemonic western cultural superiority in black South Africans.

Traces of tradition weaving through the writings of *Drum* writers just discussed imply the carrying over of ideologies such as Pan Africanism from earlier decades into the fifties. Clearly, these critical-theoretical perspectives influenced the writing of the fifties in the same way they have been shown above to find reflection in African fiction of earlier decades. Pan Africanism proves to be the heritage most emphatically sustained in Mphahlele's expository writing of 1960. That is why in the 1960 essay "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence" Mphahlele juxtaposes sociopolitical circumstances in Nigeria with those in South Africa in typical Pan Africanist style, transcending geopolitical boundaries. Apart from maintaining the Pan Africanist outlook most Africanist writers were known for by 1960, this essay introduces Mphahlele's consideration of tribalism – an issue that received his outspoken attention for the first time in this year. This is made evident in his remarks that "oppression [in South Africa] has now made *tribal identities irrelevant* and there has had to be a strong intellectual front over the past 20 years to meet this challenge" ("Eve of Independence" 319, emphasis added). He confines himself to highlighting the need for Africans both in Nigeria and South Africa to abandon negative ethnic loyalties that threaten national unity. He laments the presence of such divisions in the Nigeria of 1960. He perceives the common need for a nationalist spirit between

Nigerians and black South Africans. This is an indication that his use of the terms "black" and "non-White" in his essays tends towards the invocation of a national consciousness from as early as 1960. In this essay, Mphahlele reveals his recognition of the need to harness localised cultural cohesion towards a proper, culturally confederal and broader cohesion at national level. That is why, in mulling over prospects of stability in postcolonial Nigeria, he highlights local cultural tendencies that if left unchallenged could imperil national unity:

> The NCNC has a looseness of structure that has something to do with what one may call the republican spirit of the Easterners – the individualism and independence of mind of the Ibo … The tight organization of the AG reflects the profound sense of authority of the Yoruba: almost as if, without someone to pay obeisance to, a man would not survive one day … The AG is now committed to a lifelong battle, if need be, to form more ethnic states … Equally authoritarian is the NPC. Muslim sanctions give it a feudal look and character – and indeed it is often feudal in its attitudes and in its dealings with those it rules. (318)

This quotation confirms the fact that, since the fifties, Africanist theorists took a conscious stand against ethnicity in favour of an ethnically confederal nationalism that they perceived as conducive to the psychological and political liberation of Africans. Testimony to this environment can be detected in Mphahlele's statement that "Most of us who supported the ANC in the 1950s did so because its founders and their successors set out to unify the ethnic groups into a strong nationalist base" ("What's New" 253).

Although some well-known aspects of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism (demonstrated above to be resistant to tribalism and supportive of nationalism) were already receiving eloquent articulation in 1960, in the entire essay "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence" the term "African humanism" never occurs. Neither is his reference of Africans commonly as "Africans" in any explicit way associated with his concept of African humanism in this 1960 essay. Mphahlele refers at this time separately to blacks in Nigeria as Nigerians (as in the phrase "the peace-loving qualities of Nigerians") and to those in South Africa as non-Whites and as blacks (as in the phrases "university college for non-Whites" and "Black … external students") ("Eve of Independence" 319, 320). This is not to deny the fact that its presencing as a cultural consciousness informing the behaviour of Africans is unmistakable in Mphahlele's writing of this period. It remains to be probed whether in his later writings on nationalism he conceives of South Africa as a single nation of blacks and whites, or as two separate nations split along lines of citizens' pigmentation. It will be relevant, too, to examine whether his conception of nationalism changes over time.

After his earlier essays culminating in the 1960 piece discussed above, Mphahlele published the short stories "He and the Cat" and "Dinner at Eight" in 1961. The foregrounding of African humanist traits in the 1961 stories occurs in inverse proportion to the way the theme of apartheid is played down. The protagonist in "He and the Cat" is a blind man. This slow-paced story can be interpreted as Mphahlele's externalisation of African humanist values that are embodied in the blind man – those of being at peace with nature and aligning oneself harmoniously with the communal ethics of fellow men. In "Dinner at Eight", Mphahlele's writing seems oblivious of ambient apartheid, yet he

strongly projects the nature of African humanist conduct in the way he depicts the influence of communal ethos on the peace of mind of the individual in his or her daily interaction with others. The thread joining the two stories together is Mphahlele's highlighting of the environment as responsible for shaping the way a person thinks and behaves. This should be understood to be Mphahlele's contribution to the debate on essentialism that seems to have entered Africanist discussions during 1961 and gained momentum in 1962.

It is as an index of the nature of theoretical debate among Africanists in 1962 that Abraham explained the distinction between African and European cultures in terms that depart from the usual understanding of essentialist concepts, as follows:

> in an essentialist view one holds that man's nature cannot be changed in any respect that matters; and it is precisely this which the scientific view of man rejects … Cultures, I have suggested, are linked with an essentialist or a scientific view of human nature. [African] culture is, I believe, linked with an essentialist view. (*Mind of Africa* 23, 43)

If, as African writers such as the one quoted in the preceding paragraph indicate, African cultures and concepts such as negritude, Black Consciousness or African humanism are only essentialist in a strategic sense while they are not actually essentialist (due to their link with nurture rather than biological endowment), then it must be because (as Abraham asserts) African cultures are "linked with an essentialist view" of culture (43). This implies that Africans believe that the qualities of man – whether European or African – can only be modified or altered by environment to a certain degree. It would then be the modifiable sphere of human nature that has led to environmentally bred distinctions between Africans as a cluster of broadly related cultures, and Europeans as another such cluster. This is presumably why Mphahlele makes sure to explain the historical juncture at which European and African humanisms parted ways. After such separation, historical events including European imperialism and colonisation (on which Mphahlele's writings comment) began to be interpreted differently by the two clusters, as the cultural equipment by means of which they made sense of these events and processes differed. That is why Abraham remarks that "the same event, occurring as it were between the frontiers of two different cultures, should be invested with differing significance, with different capacities for arousing strong reaction, and with different capacities for determinng the direction of policies arising therefrom" (*Mind of Africa* 11). In Mphahlele's terms, the colonial experience for the African has given rise to the "dialogue of two selves", while for the European it can be seen as having sparked off a different, novel sensibility. While ideas like Mphahlele's African humanism cannot rightly be described as essentialist due to their shaping by the environment, they are all the same defined within the broadly essentialist view of the cultures of different human groups. Hence the boldness of proponents of such concepts in acknowledging their essentialism within appropriate contexts, while vouching for their non-essentialism in other contexts. It is for this reason that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism comes across as strategically essentialist (because of the cultures it uses as constituents being described within the broad essentialist view), while it is at the same time not essentialist *per se*.

The non-essentialist stance of Africanist writers around 1962 includes analyses of the role of history in the environment that moulds a person's cultural consciousness and conduct. That is why Abraham wrote during 1962 that "interest in our own cultures [being] not historical or archaelogical, but directed towards the future" – it should contribute "in solving the question not what Africans were like, but how we can make the best of our present human resources, which are largely traditional" (*Mind of Africa* 42-43). Abraham's observation is that historical cultural memory emanating from past experiences or contexts should inform Africans' decisions on how their distinctive cultural heritage can be harnessed to make the best of the present while ensuring preservation of their particular African identity. These words define African modes of self-expression and interrogation of the cosmos as one way of reclaiming the agency of Africans which was denied by colonising forces, so that they could not therefore actively determine their own destiny within the modern world order.

It is in this spirit, continued from the Africanist theoretical context of the early sixties, that writers like Fanon stress the inevitability of the oppressed countering oppression with violent revolution because of the nature of oppression, in the following words (published in 1963):

> The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessy drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. ("Concerning Violence" 31)

As Mphahlele's concept of African humanism took shape also in this atomosphere of the sixties, its development and the way he clarifies it through instances in his narrative writings has to be considered in comparison with views on violence such as that expressed above by Fanon.

In another 1963 essay Fanon remarked that "it is the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation" ("On National Culture" 197). Clearly, Fanon here sees the value of culture in as far as it is dynamic enough to carry the existential problems of its society. Fanon's writing reveals a preference for a "national consciousness, which is not nationalism" ("On National Culture" 199). Such a "national consciousness" transcends state boundaries and takes in the whole of Africa, as he differentiates it from nationalism with its focus on the cystallisation of an identity relating to one country only, or emanating from a tribe ("On National Culture" 199). Fanon remarks that such a consciousness is essential before a people may join hands with others with which it shares a history of devastation – with a view to contributing towards liberation at a global level – in the following words: "It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture" ("On National Culture" 199). The Pan Africanist bent of this statement is Fanon's way of tackling issues of essentialism as cited earlier in recognition of the non-monolithic nature of the context – which includes modes of thought connecting this with earlier periods such as Pan Africanism.

The theoretical debates forming the context within which Mphahlele wrote at this time (the sixties) also influenced other of the *Drum* writers. Bloke Modisane's long 1963 autobiography *Blame Me on History,* for instance, examines the condition of being distinctly African while at the same time belonging to mankind as a whole, as when he remarks that "in spite of everything that was doctrinated into me, in spite of my colour, I believed that I belonged to the enormous family of man" (*Blame Me* 168). In this statement Modisane responds to the debate on essentialism by stressing that Africans are essentially human in the universal sense of distinguishing humans from other species, yet the environment Africans have gone through has endowed them with a distinctively African identity.

The depiction of Africans relishing life in its fullness as if the inhibitions of apartheid did not exist, is a way of displaying the African humanist trait of zest for life – treating the present and future with unflustered hope rather than despair. In 1964 Mphahlele produced the stories "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" and "In Corner B". In the former, he depicts Uncle's culturally hybrid life more in relation to his African friends and wife than in terms of the harassment he receives at the hands of the few racist characters representing apartheid. The latter story also offers a slice of African traditional practices functioning in the event of death by means of the kind of communal interdependence and mutual support that becomes an active spirit of cultural self-determination. In both stories, the past is appropriated as a tool to conquer the present and shape the future – rather than a freezing prison from which no agency can be derived. This should be seen as Mphahlele's way of paying tribute to the theoretical trend in Africanist thinking that continued to be expressed in 1964 – that of stressing the non-essentialism of African identity while simultaneously highlighting the function of historical memory.

During 1967 Mphahlele published "A Ballad of Oyo", "A Point of Identity", "Man Must Live", "Mrs Plum" and "The Barber of Bariga". In all of these stories the locale is shown as exercising a determining influence on characterisation. Without the market place – connected to the fertility and economically central position of African women in "A Ballad of Oyo" – the abusive husband's frailty would not have been successfully delineated. If the township in which the coloured protagonist Almeida lived were not inhabited by blacks of different degrees of racial 'purity', the poignancy of Mphahlele's depiction (in this story) of deprivation tied to racial identity by the apartheid machine would not have been achieved. The characters Zungu and Karabo in "Man Must Live" and "Mrs Plum" are unimaginable without the railway station and urban maid's backroom respectively constituting the milieu. The womanising disposition of the barber (in "The Barber of Bariga") is difficult to imagine without the barber's shop as the keystone of the setting. Mphahlele's crafting of these 1967 stories in order to emphasise the role of social environment is testimony to the continuing prominence around 1967 of engagement with the idea of environmental moulding of character rather than attribution of behaviour to innate qualities among Africanist theorists.

Fanon's 1967 remark about the African intellectual who has been alienated from his or her own people (*Black Skin, White Masks* 16: "The Negro arriving in France will react against the myth of the *R*-eating man from Martinique … Furtively observing the

slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech …”), is yet another acknowledgement of the spell the environment can have on the coduct of a person. Nkrumah’s 1968 comment that “positive action” is within the power of the people if they act at once, with resolution and in unity (*Neo-Colonialism* 259) reveals the premise of Africanist social analysis in 1968 to have been the primacy of agency in order for the environment to be shaped to the advantage of a people. This is another way of highlighting the value of agency (among Africans), seen as embedded in their basic sense of interdependence demonstrated in various local forms of practices that constitute a broad African humanist way of life. In line with the theoretical milieu of the time of this publication, Nkrumah is (at least in his text) vigilant about the need to avoid the trap of neo-colonialism facing newly independent African individuals and polities (*Neo-Colonialism* ix, x, xi, 11, 34, 35, 246, etc.) – a practice which could result in Africans complacently ceasing to use agency to determine their own destinies.

The need to define the characteristics of agency in keeping with the African word-view – such as interdependence – continues to occupy the minds of Africanist writers in 1969. Mbiti described the African individual’s relational attitude as follows in his 1969 publication: “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am” (106). Communal interdependence – that should characterize individual African practice according to Mbiti – is what Mphahlele’s concept of African humanism came to be associated with from 1969 onwards. This is proof of Mphahlele’s absorption of current trends in Africanist intellectual debate. In discussing the African concept of time as “Sasa” or micro-time, and “Zamani” or macro-time, Mbiti demonstrates that African cultures do not classify reality into water-tight categories:

> Both Sasa and Zamani have quality and quantity. People speak of them as big, small, little, short, long, etc., in relation to a particular event or phenomenon. Sasa generally binds individuals and their immediate environment together. It is the period of conscious living. On the other hand, Zamani is the period of the myth, giving a sense of foundation or ‘security’ to the Sasa period; and binding together all created things, so that all things are embraced within the Macro-Time. (*African Religions and Philosophy* 22)

Mphahlele probably formulated this aspect of African cultures (highlighted above by Mbiti), that defies the view of time separating memorial and lived times, into a constituent of his concept of African humanism at this time – aligning it to a continuous, holistic view of reality.

During the 1970s Mphahlele found company in his attempts to give a name to the distinctively African humanist identity by fellow Africanists like the Zambian Zulu (in the latter’s 1970 text *Zambian Humanism; some major spiritual and economic challenges*). Zulu (6) describes “Zambian humanism” as “an act of faith, a profound belief in Man”. As the South African theologian B.J.Van der Walt has observed, Zulu’s “Zambian humanism” sees man not only as being at the centre of society, but also as its growing apex (*Liberating Message* 244). Such a description shows that in Zulu’s view, Zambian humanism did not only adequately characterise the distinctive personality of Africans found in Zambia, but was also a tool with which to shape their African identity in its passage towards the future.

After Zulu's reference to his (Zulu's) narrower notion of African identity as Zambian Humanism in 1970, Mphahlele started using the expression African humanism explicitly in referring to his own wider concept of African identity that he (Mphahlele) had been defining in implicit terms long before 1970. The year 1971 is decisive in the development of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism, among other reasons because he started clarifying it more coherently for the first time by comparing and contrasting it systematically with European humanism. Using this new method, Mphahlele made the following point in his 1971 essay "The Fabric of African Culture and Religious Beliefs":

> Areas we share with Western humanists amount to the value and love of life which we cherish; openness of mind; love of self which refuses to be shackled in stifling, suffocating codes of conduct laid down by some authority who commands obedience; and a conscience that emerges from one's own character as a social being responsible to the community, rather than a conscience that is built on the fear of authority … ("The Fabric" 151)

Mphahlele here expresses the belief that while deceptively seeming to share the feature of communal cohesion with cultural clusters whose existences is animated by African humanism, practitioners of European humanism are identifiable, among other kinds of behaviour, as being "kept together only because they share the spoils of economic production and industrial progress, which began as a development of individual initiative and free enterprise" as well as glorifying "personal wealth and advancement" to such an extent that "the good of the community has been sacrificed" – with this resulting in "the social remedies that are planned merely [ending] up being amoral" ("The Fabric" 151). While this description of European humanism comes across as extreme, Mphahlele arguably assumes a radical position deliberately in order to highlight how unchecked materialist individualism may lead to extremely inhumane practices such as colonialism and apartheid. Mphahlele's most serious point is his recognition of failure to regard human life as sacred. Mphahlele's seventies approach of attempting to elucidate his concept of African humanism by contrasting it with European humanism is evidently responsible for the extremism of the materialist scenario he conjures up with regard to his allegation regarding European humanism losing its moral criterion in judging worth. It is likely that he wanted to highlight the differences between the two humanisms by stylistically exaggerating their distinctive features at this stage of the development of his theory.

During 1971 Mphahlele continued to illuminate the distinctiveness of African humanist thought and behaviour by contrasting it with European humanism. To this effect, he remarks that it "parts ways with Western humanism as [it] has developed today, which distrusts belief in supernatural forces" ("The Fabric" 151). Unlike Christian humanism, African humanism in his view does not include the view that man will be saved, as it does not point to alternatives such as some promised land or the prospect of hell ("The Fabric" 154). In African humanism it is man's present moral and spiritual life that deserves our attention and care, not the imaginary rewards and punishments of the future or some authority outside humanity that tries to censor and control our thoughts ("The Fabric" 146). African humanism also needs to be distinguished from scientific humanism ("The Fabric" 151), which could be described as extremist in believing that

man holds his destiny in his own hands and that religious authority or conscience is something imposed from outside of man's own self. African humanism differs with scientific humanism in its outlook on religion (Mphahlele suggests) because (being originally a religious state of mind) today "African humanism still has a religious base" with morality remaining the primary criterion to assess the ethics of conduct ("The Fabric" 154-55). In other words, while both European and African humanism frown upon intrusion by extraneous authority in their human affairs, such rejected authority includes religion in the former while in the latter it exludes it. Mphahlele's specification of the form of European humanism as scientific not only points to the fundamental difference between the cluster of varying African cultures and an equally broad coalescence of varying European cultures. It is also a significant admission on his part that such peoples as are describable within the category of European humanism are not monolithic in outlook, as some may align with scientific humanism while others do not.

In another 1971 essay Mphahlele remarked that while he was writing short stories with an urban setting during the period including 1971, fellow black South African fiction writers who "were creating out of a rural sensibility" were writing novels and poetry that "depicted the intrusion of Western-Christian values and custom into a non-aggressive pastoral humanism" ("My Experience as a Writer" 119.) In this way, his focus in the 1971 essay (cited in the preceding paragraph) on the consequences of the transplantation of western Christianity into the African setting is a response to current debate among fellow African writers. His thoughts as expressed in "My Experience as a Writer" expose the unAfrican nature of western Christianity against the backdrop of Africans' "pastoral humanism". In addition to paying homage to ambient philosophical debates about western Christianity within the Africanist context, by the subject of this essay Mphahlele is contributing to the then current theoretical debate about whether the environment (rather than biological innateness) is responsible for the shaping of specific cultural traits – ideas at this time still vigorously discussed by fellow Africanists. Hence his metonymic representation of European humanism (from an environmental point of view), highlighting differences between the European social context and landscape and those of Africa – because of the latter's still predominantly rural context and cognitive inclination (signified by the term "pastoral humanism").

The subtlety with which Mphahlele indicates the complex critical fabric of the period during which he wrote (1971) is another illustration of the sophistication of his articulation of the moorings of his concept of African humanism. He declared in the 1971 essay "My Experience as a Writer" (written when he had left his land of birth) that "a decision to forget the South African experience or to allow it to recede into the background would amount to a rejection of Africa as a whole" (119). This exposes the inevitable inclusion of the condition of being a black South African within apartheid South Africa as an aspect of his undivided Pan Africanist consciousness that Mphahlele takes with him into exile ("My Experience as a Writer" 119). This reaffirms Mphahlele's affiliation with the core aspects of Pan Africanism that would not allow the partitioning of the African experiences into disparate geographic entities. More importantly, an emphasis on a South African sensibility within the broader Pan Africanist otlook is a pointer to Mphahlele's view of African humanism as considerate of localised differences

in as much as it appreciates broad similarities on another plane. This part of the essay also clarifies the point that (in Mphahlele's view) Pan Africanism more narrowly refers to the plight of Africans on the entire continent and in the diaspora (as felt commonly and needing unity of effort to uplift all Africans) – without broadening the idea as African humanism does to locate this within a definable, existential matrix that is culturally distinctive. Such a discerning of finer detail that marks out subtle differences between concepts is yet another quality that begins to manifest itself in Mphahlele's 1971 mapping out of his concept of African humanism.

In the same essay, Mphahlele makes statements on how an African humanist outlook accommodates religious authority. He couples this with a highlighting of Pan Africanist tenets, while recognising the validity of distinct, localised African behavioural patterns that can be dialectically aligned with aspects of his concept of African humanism. This should be understood as his acceptance of the broadly common conception of religious authority among African humanists, co-existing with acknowledged differences among the religions of Africans belonging to varying locales. Here he clarifies the point that the authority of religion in human affairs (hinted at in preceding paragraphs) is defined differently in European and in African world-views. When African humanists accept the authority of religion (according to Mphahlele's explication of the concept of African humanism), it is a notion of religion that differs from the way it is understood within western Christianity. The important point is that members of the two opposed outlooks do not differ superficially with regard to accepting or rejecting the authority of religion, but do so in a profound way, emanating from their different conceptions of religion.

The markedly nuanced manner in which Mphahlele begins to define his concept of African humanism in 1971 is evident also in his differentiation of deceptively equivalent notions of African humanitarianism and African humanism. He clarifies African humanism as a concept "based on communal relationships and [focusing] on the betterment of human existence … [with] compassion [being] *one* of its pillars" ("The Fabric" 148). Mphahlele clearly identifies compassion as only one of the many aspects of "communal relationships" and not as equal in extent to culturally-defined communal relationships ("The Fabric" 148). In the 1971 essay "The Fabric of African Culture and Religious Beliefs", direct descriptions of some phenomena as African humanist is coupled with direct use of the term itself, as when Mphahlele states that "African humanism, because it is based on communal relationships and focuses on the betterment of human existence, is not exclusive; it is inclusive" (148). The inclusive nature of African humanism is expressed alongside a direct use of the term here. That Mphahlele's formulation of the concept of African humanism appears simultaneously to be integrationist and essentialist could be explained by his description of African humanism as comprising of traditions "where 'myth' and reality, life and death, the natural and the supernatural are not separate realms" ("The Fabric" 153). Mphahlele holds to an integrating notion of African humanism, by which "reason and emotion are not separate" ("The Fabric" 153). To stop at describing African humanism as either an emotional or intellectual state would be to narrow it down to correspond with types of Pan Africanism or Black Consciousness. In other words, two ideas that are separated by binary opposition can combine in harmony within an African humanist context – as a way of

accepting diversity as a manifestation of the complex, inclusive nature of Africanist lifestyles.

Mphahlele's major improvement of his definition of African humanism in 1971 lies in the circumspect manner in which he detailed its nature – matching the scrupulous way in which he highlights finer details and nuances in his crafting of the 1971 novel, *The Wanderers*. His graphic description of characters like Steve Cartwright serves to alert the reader concerning the difference between being white and being racist. Even more importantly, through the portrayal of Steve Cartwright alongside other white characters such as the Goshen farm owners and their labourers, Mphahlele impels his readers to become aware of the even subtler link of having an African humanist consciousness irrespective of the colour of the skin. The massacre of freedom fighters described towards the end of the novel – that does not distinguish black from white in practising brutality – is Mphahlele's way of emphasising the overriding power of consciousness defying racist categorisation. Such handling of narrative coincides with his and his contemporaries' decision, in 1971, to move away from vague or simplistic references to a distinctive African identity.

It is significant that this novel was published at the time when Mphahlele's expository writing stressed African humanism's inclusivity and the unrelenting persistence of African humanist consciousness even in exile. These are among the most evident and rigorously treated themes in this narrative. References in Mphahlele's 1971 essays to the non-essentialist nature of his concept of African humanism also find expression in the way he handles the theme of nonracialism in the characterisation of *The Wanderers*. He portrays characters like Cartwright as Africanised in their consciousness and conduct – because of the environment in which they interact intimately with African humanist characters such as Timi and Naledi. That is why Cartwright manages to align himself with the African conception of marriage in the way it is directed by the African widow he marries. If Mphahlele defined Africanness in essentialist terms, a character like Cartwright by virtue of being white would be incapable of acquiring the Africanist practice of widowed marriage as Mphahlele portrays him doing.

One sign that the way Mphahlele explained his concept of African humanism had matured considerably by 1973 is his reconsideration of ideas like negritude, this time critiqueing them more convincingly by contextualising them within the new theoretical milieu. This is seen when, after an outright, vehement renunciation of the notion of negritude when it took root, Mphahlele softens to identify with Senghor's "longing to return to the ancient shrines – even though his lifestyle is completely European" ("Exile" 286). Such an appreciation of Senghor's counterpointing of the memory of traditional African customs (signified by the phrase "ancient shrines") with a culturally hybrid lifestyle (meant by "his lifestyle is completely European") is an indication that he (Mphahlele) agrees with the idea of according status to the memory of the past in the present consciousness of Africans, as long as such an idea of the past is not ossified to reject dialectic fusion with the present. That is why in in this 1973 essay he expresses his appreciation (contrasting with earlier vitriolic rejections) of negritude, "without necessarily supporting [it] as an aesthetic programme, as more style than theme, as

Senghor will have it" ("Exile" 286). In other words, Mphahlele supports (in the 1973 essay just cited) the manner in which negritude can evolve to abandon romanticised adherence to traditonal cultures without sanctioning its separation of form from content as far as African art is concerned. This is because such a separation of different parts of a whole (Africanness) is against the holistic approach to reality that Mphahlele believes to be a central aspect of his concept of African humanism. Apart from separating parts of a whole, negritude as "an aesthetic *programme*" would suggest the imposition of an authority to which writers would have to submit, which goes against the grain of an aspect of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism which identifies itself with rupture from any form of external determination ("Exile" 286, emphasis added).

As early as 1973 Mphahlele sporadically applies a more mature, subtler way of asserting his theory of African humanism by presencing it without having always to refer to it explicitly as "African humanism". In the 1973 Essay "My Destiny is Tied to Africa", Mphahlele uses this technique in statements like "African scholars try to avoid 'worship' because the term does not define accurately our relationship with our ancestors, nor even our connection with the Supreme Force" (434); and "Everyone who has ever been colonized has two selves and, therefore, is ambivalent" (432). These statements reveal Mphahlele's recovery from the mistake of most Africanists in the seventies of using unAfrican terminology in trying to describe concepts that are looked at from an Africanist perspective. More importantly, there is refinement of expressive style in that African humanism is advocated in a subtler manner (to those who may be its detractors) by weaving it organically within the essay without canvassing for it by egotistically repeating its name. The unobtrusive positing of African humanism in this manner also serves the other function of describing his concept of African humanism in a circumspect way. After indicating that western Christianity conflicts with the African humanist conception of religion, he now continues to explain in detail what African humanist religion consists of ("My Destiny" 434).

Sustaining the balance of boo and applause, in the same 1973 essay Mphahlele laments that a sentimental sense of spiritual exile or alienation informed negritude poetry – while admitting that the poetry was at the same time a valuable reassertion of African values ("Exile" 285). Mphahlele expresses the nativism of African humanism as an inspiration only in order for Africans to reclaim their sense of history that should empower them to shape their present circumstances with a requisite feeling of adequacy. In these citations Mphahlele's description of the concept of African humanism as "an ideal" and as answering the need to "return to the ancient shrines" ("My Destiny" 441; "Exile" 286") is an acknowledgement of the requirement for theory to consider anteriority as necessary to the imaginative memory, while at the same time challenging whatever claim to immutability it may threaten to assume. In the seventies Mphahlele implicitly or explicitly desribes Africans by means of the term "African", as when he writes in his 1973 essay that he is "recording African thought and attitudes as the times change and [he] changes, too" ("My Destiny" 434). That reference to Africans by means of the term "African" is sometimes implicit is a sign of Mphahlele's achieved self-assurance resulting in a refinement of his concept.

Mphahlele's discreetness of procedure and his careful intellectual distinction of his position from any homogenisation of the group to whom he ascribes African humanist thinking and behaviour is borne out by his remark that "African humanism is an ideal at one level, is non-homogenising as far as black worlds are concerned , and is non-racist" ("My Destiny" 441). The new dimension he has added to his concept is the view of its social function as ideal. To admit that a notion is ideal in one sense is to concede that it can be used as a strategy one employs to grapple with existential problems at an appropriate point in time. This should explain why Mphahlele stated in 1973 that "imaginative literature is … at best a compromise, something that may mature, that may be relevant today and irrelevant in the future, and again relevant at another time" ("Exile" 286).

Mphahlele concedes the existence of such a consciousness within postcolonial Africans in his 1974 remark that one "[walks] with this double personality as a [once] colonized man" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 41). On the possibility of a mutual transformation of western and African ways within the psyche of an individual, Mphahlele has described the dual personality that he perceived in himself – borne of the historical marriage of Africa and the west – as the 'irony' of his existence and the existence of Africans in general (*African Image* - Revised Edition 137). Such an existence of ambivalent culture that is neither purely African nor European within the person and practice of Mphahlele as a writer has led inevitably to the imagery and symbolism of his poetic and narrative writings portraying a world of mixed sensibilities. That is why he remarks in an essay entitled "White on Black" that "the irony of the [cultural] 'clash' should be rich material enough to interest a novelist and a poet" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 137). What Mphahlele meant in this 1974 essay is that it is unthinkable for a postcolonial African writer to write works whose imagery and symbolism do not reflect ways of thinking that have been altered by the encounter with the west brought about by colonisation. As he sees it, "the irony … lies in the conflict of cultures that need not always clash but are supplementary" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 137). What this means is that the distinctiveness of African culture that set it off from European culture should be acknowledged and respected, but the conflict (as contrasted with a dialectical synthesis) is ironical in that the real resolution is regard by either side of the other's culture as a practice and system existing in a complementary relationship with his or her own. What Mphahlele means by terms like "double personality as colonized man" and "dialogue of two selves" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 41, 70) relates to the postcolonialist concepts of hybridity or ambivalence as well as to the idea of freedom from pre-determined norms. Because the social habits of the former oppressor and those of the formerly oppressed are culturally different, the dialectical integration of the two will invariably result in a hybrid personality. Mphahlele's idea of a "dialogue of two selves" or of "dialogue between two streams of consciousness" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 70) pertains to the rigorous demand on the African's part to modify the distant African past he/she cherishes with the way he/she implements his/her African humanist consciousness to propagate a culturally distinctive lifestyle in the face of contingent demands.

Mphahlele did not posit the necessity facing postcolonial Africans, of managing the double-sensibility described above, without highlighting the challenges concomitant to such an undertaking. This he did by exposing the trap of hegemonising language into which many African writers writing in English fell, of "unwittingly imposing a foreign language on the form of an African culture that has its own ancient language" – something which unfortunately led to reductively "defining a culture in ideological terms" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 39). This statement was not unfounded. For example, some Africanists such as Julius Nyerere, were not yet sensitive in 1974 to the need to appropriate the English language. They even went as far as to censure African "subsistence farming", calling for its radical replacement with western modes of "scientific" farming, as if in "subsistence" farming (as a traditional way of economic activity) there is nothing distinctively African that could be given the advantage of modern technology without necessarily requiring replacement by western traditions of individualistic farming. Paradoxically, none of the writers of this type confronts the question why, in pre-colonial "subsistence farming" masses of people did not starve to death or suffer from malnutritional diseases while compatriots enjoyed the luxuries paid for by selling excess food to far-away territories. Such contamination of terminology continuing up to the late seventies signifies the gradual way in which abrogation of English terminology progressed, with vestiges such as those cited above still remaining.

Mpahlele's 1974 concern with scrupulous employment of terminology leads him pointedly to clarify the stance he adopts in defining his own concept of African humanism vis-à-vis ambient theory of the period that concerned itself with ideas like racism. That is why he explains that, in his writings, "African [refers] to all the people who are culturally natives of Africa"; that he talks of coloureds "as Africans of mixed descent"; that "The Indians … will one day find a common destiny among Africans"; that "the term 'black' refers to all people who are not of European descent"; that "whites [can] earn this affiliation" as "the white man will have to choose to quit or adopt the majority African culture or be marooned by history"; that "Afro-Americans dance in performances that do not contain choreographed movements" because "they are African"; and also that "independent Africa" must show interest "in the Afro-American and the Caribbean" because they are Africans (*African Image* - Revised Edition 14, 35, 103, 121). Mphahlele's 1974 essays explicate his subscription to non-essentialism and nonracialism in defining Africanness by significantly justifying his position in African humanist terms. His professed African humanist criterion of allowing whites to earn inclusion in the appelation African (which normally disqualifies whites as a group) (*African Image* - Revised Edition 56, 58) seems to be a refusal or desertion of oppressive relations with other humans. This appears to be the case because oppression, with which apartheid is associated, conflicts with the central tenet of African humanism, of regarding human life as sacred. To accept exclusionary or oppressive practices in the name of African humanism would thus be self-contradictory.

The specific challenge of settling on distinct terms with which to refer to Africanness still persisted in 1974 among some Africanists, although Mphahlele had started using the term "African" in a distinct manner, as well as consistently referring to his own philosophy as "African humanism". Some theoretical developments added to the existing, general

confusion surrounding the use or meaning of the terms "African" and "humanism". The concept of "humanism" or "botho/ubuntu" within the context of African cultures (i.e. black African-continental social life) was still narrowly equated by some Pan Africanist thinkers such as Nyerere (1974) to denotations such as Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism. These terms are clearly not equivalent in nuance, profundity and scope to Mphahlele's concept of African humanism. Mphahlele's idea of African humanism not only redefines and reconstitutes itself according to the mutations of the historical, political, social and economic milieu, but seeps through to pervade all spheres of life: education, economics, politics, etc. The following statement testifies to this: "Our humanism must try to deal with the problems of power, of national army, of education, the arts, land and house ownership, poverty, medical care and so on. Our humanism must bring about a second productive revolution" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 36). What Mphahlele means by this statement is that social spheres such as politics, the military, education, the arts and social welfare should be shaped in ways that are compatible with African humanist values. This quotation is also a revelation of Mphahlele's understanding of African humanism as a dynamic consciousness that flexibly addresses contingencies in a meaningful, beneficial manner. Here he is also positing African humanism as an option for resolving humanity's existential challenges irrespective of whether the affected peoples are African or not. It is for the same reason that elsewhere Mphahlele indicates that cultural education should be institutionalised within the education system – the education system that, in order to link up with other areas of life, should be guided by a national philosophy of education that will establish and define national goals (*African Image* - Revised Edition 21, 40).

Since Mphahlele's conception of African humanism is all-encompassing with regard to (different) spheres of life, it could not exclude his idea of what the post-independence nation-state should be. Appropriate nationalism should ideally produce "A society in which you had to earn the name African and elections cut across ethnic divisions", Mphahlele stated in a 1974 essay (*African Image* - Revised Edition 52), "with everybody who owes loyalty to Africa, and who accepts the democratic rule of the African majority, being regarded as an African", because actually "we are fighting against the Calvinistic doctrine that a certain nation was specially chosen by God to lead, guide and protect other nations" (54). In keeping with his inclusion among aspects of African humanism the attitude of regarding human life as sacred, Mphahlele suggests that Africans should give "the white man the theoretical choice to stay and undergo a process of acculturization and civilization as aspiring Africans, and the choice to leave" (56). No brutality is suggested against humans who may not prefer or manage to acquire African humanist lifestyles. Mphahlele declares the crucial criterion in building a nationalism that conforms to African humanist tenets as ensuring the distinctive qualities of Africanness by allowing nonAfrican humanist individuals to retain their varying identity if they choose to do so – rather than sacrificing the unique African identity by promoting an uncritical inclusivity. It is for the same reason that he declares in the same essay that he supports "the ideological creed of the ANC as expressed in the Freedom Charter", because "it is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state" (55). He adopts this position because he views the European idea of socialism as extraneous to African humanist lifestyles.

Analyses of the fitting postcolonial forms of nationalism dominated theoretical debate among Africanists in 1974. Nyerere's detailing of his notion of the African individual, family and nation is a symptom this tendency. Nyerere philosophised about what he called *ujamaa*/familyhood, in which individual and group attitudes of mutual respect, the obligation to work and the value of sharing constitute an African socialist order with the family unit as basis (*Freedom and Unity* 9). The communal orchestration of economic activity that Nyerere illustrates displays a similar complexity to that which one discerns in Mphahlele's hierarchical concept of African society, observing social hierarchy while at the same time appearing externally to eschew it (*Freedom and Unity* 11, 33). What might become excesses of hierarchical authority are kept in check by the customary demands that the right to personal property should not be abused as licence for acquisitive hoarding, as no member of society can be allowed to starve or die of exposure due to want of such property – according to Nyerere (*Freedom and Unity* 10). Nyerere notes that socialism, African socialism or traditional socialism requires that men think of themselves as members of a society and that this is opposed to systems that operate on the basis of individualism (*Freedom and Unity* 10-11, 166). Nyerere as an Africanist theorist in this context wrote that the feature of communal sharing can strengthen and equip African peoples in the postcolonial era. Championing the need for self-constitution, Nyerere indicates that there is no absolute and simple rule which can be easily applied everywhere and to all aspects of life in relation to equality (15). It can be seen that concerns by Mphahlele's fellow Africanists go beyond the plight of people during colonisation and focus on postcolonial challenges threatening to invade their different communities from political, economic, spiritual, psychological and other angles. It is concerns of this nature that have led to Mphahlele's concept of African humanism invariably refining itself in consideration of how the individual, family and society exist in relation to one another.

In his 1974 expository writing, Mphahlele displayed a bond with fellow Africanists in their inclusion of unique propensities governing the creation of imaginative art among Africans – in their comprehensive views on what constitutes Africanness. That is why, within the same broad intellectual milieu of 1974, Mphahlele wrote that "No-one can ever think it healthy … to keep hacking at a social structure in overcharged language … The distance contracts and extends between the public and the individual voice" (*African Image* - Revised Edition 82). In these statements Mphahlele maps what he perceives to be the position of the African writer in society or in the nation. Clearly he expects creative literature to express seminal ideas that transform the plain voice of the public on topical matters into a potent tool with which to tackle existential challenges. In his view the gap between the creative artist's voice and public voice should not be rigid, but should diminish and enlarge from time to time according to altering empirical situations. Mphahlele also asserted in the same year that there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between literature and real life events (*African Image* - Revised Edition 72-73). By this he means that a writer of fiction should interpret reality rather than reproduce it as an unrefracted mirror image.

Mphahlele's 1976 poem "Fathers and Sons" concerns itself with the Africanist definition of religion that dominated Africanist theory during the 1970s. The way Mphahlele puns

on words associated with western Christianity, such as "resurrection" "Father" and "Son" in this poem, reveals psychological rejection of the Eurocentric concepts which these terms denote as well as an insistence on their African humanist dimensions. His other 1976 poem, "A Prayer", expresses the theme of religion as central to the African's selfdefinition. The poet longs to return to South Africa where his individual contribution can benefit a community of like-minded Africans. In a way, this highlights the African humanist aspect of traditional religion which regards service to the community religiously and views human life as sacred. Such a consideration of the religious aspect that could be indentified with Africanness seems to have been the concern also of other African writers in the seventies. This orientation seems to have been a way for black South Africans to regain composure through sound self-deninition, after the atrocities of apartheid authorities had manifested themselves in a number of brutal acts including the June 1976 student killings. Spiritual concerns with the plight of his fellow Africans back in South Africa points to Mphahlele's valuing of an individual's historical memory – in his case, the memory of South African conditions even while he is in exile. Wishing history away, from the point of view of someone like Mphahlele who believes that "we need to keep reminding ourselves that there is a living African tradition that should interact with the demands of modern life … [as well as] consciously forge a reconciliation between our traditions and the best of Western values" ("Prodigals" 342), would involve a severance from South African cultural memories in the face of the western modes of living to which he was exposed during exile. With regard to Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism, what he reinforces in this 1976 poem is its hopeful orientation towards the future, sustained by the conviction that the African humanist consciousness always survives foreign territorial influences.

In one of his 1978 essays, "African Identity. Nationalism – The African Personality – Negritude", Mphahlele states that the "twin weapons" of "Western modernity that was socially engineered to uproot Blacks from their being and to assimilate them into White culture" were "mission education and Christian religion" (43). This focus should explain why Steve Biko wrote within the same atomosphere in 1978: "We never knew anything about hell – we do not believe that God can create people only to punish them eternally after a short period on earth" (*I Write What I Like* 44). This is a revelation of Biko's sensitivity to the African theoretical context of the seventies, in which matters of religion and African identity were vigorously interrogated. Probably the African writers cited here were prompted by the realisation that the African's self-constitution cannot succeed without immaculate attention to detail in their characterisation of the African identity. Such details touched on every sphere of life, including the impingement of modernity on traditional African religions.

Possibly a critic like Mzamane ("Mtshali, Sepamla" 352) was indirectly referring to the mammoth task of defending African humanism within such complex social debates, including its plausible representations in literature (as Mphahlele sets out to do) when he significantly included Mphahlele in his essay among some *Drum* writers whose contribution should be lauded. According to this critic's view, the contributions of the *Drum* writers were lost, particularly as their work was banned prior to the militant, overtly protesting (South African) Black Consciousness writers of the 1970s, thus

depriving the Black Consciousness writers of an opportunity to learn from them. Mzamane sees familiarisation with and resultant continuation of the concerns of Mphahlele and some of his contemporaries of the fifties as a *sine qua non* in the perpetuation of a tradition of social relevance among all South African writers of the period.

In the 1978 essay included in the collection *Es'kia Continued*, direct use of the term "African humanism" occurs frequently – as on page 46. Africans breaking away from western Christianity to form AICs (African Initiated Churches) is approved and the reduction in stature of African traditional leaders by Europeans to menial minions is identified as conflicting with African humanist consciousness ("African Identity" 51) even at this fairly early stage of Mphahlele's progressive characterisation of the concept of African humanism. This shows his advance from earlier highlighting distinctive African notions of religion as differing from the role religion plays among Europeans (as he did in the early seventies), to fully articulating what religious vision and practice entail among African humanists (in the mid-seventies), culminating in essays of the late seventies describing how the African humanist consciousness stimulates Africans to abrogate western Christianity in the breakaway denominations that they form. Mphahlele clearly emphasised the religious aspect of what he understands African humanist lifestyles to be because of his awareness of other Africanists attempting to define the religious aspect of African cultures. An example is what Biko observed about Africanist eschatology in his 1978 essay (quoted above).

Emphasis on the distinctions of African humanism from European humanism in the seventies by Mphahlele and fellow African theorists using their own theoretical concepts (cited above) is reflected in the former's 1979 novel *Chirundu*. This is evident for instance in Mphahlele's delineation of Chimba's amoral conduct, which contrasts with his wife Tirenje's moral strength. Chimba opportunistically parades African customs on the pretext of desiring a healthy equilibrium between Africanness and western lifestyles. Ironically, his acquisitive personality is geared towards benefiting his selfish, individualist greed rather than uplifting the lot of the community of which he is a leader. The distortion or corruption of the original African humanist psyche he acquired as a boy parodies and betrays this culture. Chimba's materialist self-centredness is based on no identifiable African humanist moral values, despite his claim that he is acting in defence of African humanist customs. The philosophical theme of nationalism shown as having dominated Africanist thinking in the seventies also finds exemplification in *Chirundu*. Chimba is portrayed as a political leader in a postcolonial African state in which the agitation pervading the affairs of the state is echoed within his family through the agency of his wife (Tirenje).

If novelistic discourse, as Bakhtin observed in 1981, lives in fundamentally social modes and is in essence always developed on the boundary line between contending cultures and languages ("Discourse in the Novel" 50, 259), the structure of the novel cannot be the same across all languages and cultures except if one loses sight of the need particularly evident in anticolonial and postcolonial writing to abrogate. This statement cited above signals the shift in theoretical emphasis from about 1981 when the abrogation of

normative ideas began to be proposed as an effective tool with which to negate imperialist hegemony. According to Mphahlele, no proper balance of the postcolonial African's dual sensibility can be achieved unless western ideas – for instance concerning the proper form of the novel and the state, are recast in the African humanist mould. This point is brought out when, in a 1982 journal article, Mphahlele laments the failure of African figures in postcolonial societies to strike a successful dialectical balance between their western and African modes of consciousness, as follows:

> The idea of nationhood has been falsified by the ruling class … we realize what cleavage it has brought about between an educated elite and the masses, between the indigenous self and the new sensibility, in the individual that *moves away from the collective sensibility and glorifies individualism*.
> ("Towards a Humanistic Philosophy" 36; emphasis added)

This remark shows that uncritical disowning of Africanness is as unacceptable to Mphahlele as the persistence of separating reality into two opposed categories of Western versus Africanness which leads to a perpetually binary view of reality. In Mphahlele's view, succesfully refraining from seeing reality as consisting of binary relations is proof of the soundness of the African humanist outlook, as such an approach is one of the central aspects of his concept of African humanism. Mphahlele's statement (above) which laments the "cleavage" that the neocolonial view of nationhood "has brought about between an educated elite and the masses" ("Towards a Humanistic Philosophy" 36) makes clear that the African humanist citizen as envisaged by Mphahlele in the context of postcolonial Africa has to live up to the perception that "I am because you are, you are because we are", while at the same time taking pride in being an Africanist individual. The African humanist individual (as illustrated in the way Mphahlele idealises the decolonised citizen) is one who identifies unashamedly with the ethnic society he/she belongs to and thus forges a sense of history or anteriority while at the same time sacrificing the excesses of individualism to the collective needs of the group. That this is the case is attested to by Mphahlele's statement that "only a free mind that is sure of its identity, that is not ashamed of it, can, from a position of strength, go beyond mere survival" ("Towards a Humanistic Philosophy" 22). Survival as distinguished from meaningful living has to do with failure to mediate the merging of western and African influences within one's mind, thus effectively utilising an African humanist consciousness. Later on in the same publication Mphahlele states: "Indeed, white rule has succeeded in cultivating in us a sense of shame. To seek our own historical identity looks like supporting [apartheid's] separatist ideology" (23). What this means is that in Mphahlele's view difference is not necessarily destructive as far as sensitivity to communal needs is concerned – communal needs here implying a unified, nationalist force needed for the liberation struggle to be fought, without debilitating dissipation of needed efforts in ethnic strife. In this way he clarifies his African humanist belief in individualism and ethnic culture as much as he believes in communalism and nationalism, rather than separating the smaller unit from the larger whole and putting the two into a binary opposition. His concept of African humanism can hence be recognised as a nuanced construct.

Mphahlele's handling (in the essay cited above) of subjects such as postcolonialism, elitism, ethnicity, agency and nationalism is not a mere repetition of earlier discussions.

At this point of his gradual refining of his concept of African humanism he now focuses on the hazards of insidious hegemonic discourse. His priority at this time is to direct the agency that Africans should reclaim after the fall of colonisation in a correctly African humanist direction, rather than merely highlighting agency as a means towards successful self-determination.

The ability to abrogate entails agency. Mphahlele's philosophical writing in 1984 emphasises the need for Africans to reclaim the agency formerly denied them by colonising forces, as when he commends the characterisation of Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* in the 1984 article, "Literature: A Necessity or a Public Nuisance – An African View". Assumption of agency for Mphahlele thus includes abrogating the form of the novel to serve Africanist objectives. He specifically appreciates the fact that the African characters in *Mhudi* "were makers of history, whereas it was generally believed that the European alone made history and the African merely reacted to it" (15). Mphahlele's focus on Africans' ability to make history heralds his aesthetic belief that the practice of art in the African humanist framework involves uniquely African humanist devices such as "resonance", "myth" and "perspective". With this perspective in mind, any reader of African literature should assume that Africans were makers of history and of art because they invented unprecedented methods of artistic creation. Mphahlele's praise of *Mhudi* (above) hence implies that Plaatje made history by inventing adaptations of the European novelistic form. Mphahlele's ability to reinvent the form of the novel in writing *Father Come Home* is evidence of his heartfelt concern with the theme of his 1984 essay (cited above). By creating mythmaking characters like Mashabela in this novel and including numerous folktale images to form the fabric of the narrative Mphahlele wrenches the novel as a genre from its normative European structure and infuses it with African humanist aesthetics. In the autobiography *Afrika My Music* it is the episodic nature of the plot that superimposes African aesthetics to accord with aspects of Mphahlele's theory of African humanism and uphold a localisation of the European genre.

In 1986 Mphahlele continues to proclaim the efficacy of abrogating hegemonic concepts by adapting them to African humanist matrices. It is for this reason that he declares that Africn humanist practices "will absorb … new influences in ways peculiar to its own traditions" ("Poetry and Humanism" 10). He maintains in the 1986 essay that European and African humanism as differing world-views need to have their intersections recognised ("Poetry and Humanism" 23). This is a new move on his part to externalise the intersection of European humanism and African humanism. Consideration of how the two opposed world-views interact now focuses on their outward manifestations in terms of issues such as global economics. In the essay quoted above Mphahlele proposes a counterpointing of the two as a strategy to ensure a resolution of possible conflict that may result from over-emphais of either side.

Mphahlele believes that all the concerns mentioned above should be the concerns of every African writer. However, it is reasonable to concede (from an African humanist perspective) that no single writer will approach this task in the same way as another. This is the case because individual idiosyncracy is an accepted component of the African sense of community, as exemplified in traditional forms of self-eulogy that highlight how

proudly different one individual or clan is from another – with this healthy self-assertion counterbalanced with a prioritisation of communal self-pride. At the centre of an African writer's social function should be the goal of the revival, reconstitution and sustenance of African humanism, which is a common denominator among all African peoples the whole world over. This gives a sense of concerted effort, as different African writers and theorists go about their enterprise in their own individual ways. Against this background, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 1986 accentuation of the need to decolonise the mind of the African writer and reader, for example, should be seen as nothing other than a call for the writer to achieve this by aggressively analysing the consciousness of the community primarily as a means towards purging the African individual of the distortions effected by colonisation: "Writers are surgeons of the heart and souls of a community" (*Decolonising* ix). In the same essay Ngugi affirms the interactive nature of writing within the African context, in his statement that "even literary creative work is not the result of an individual genius but the result of a collective effort" (x). This is proof that theorising about the nature of African aesthetics (which naturally includes the position of the writer in society) continued among African writers in 1986. While Ngugi's 1986 publication focuses primarily on the soul of the community in order to reach that of the individual who is a building block of such a community, Mphahlele advocates a primary focus on shaping the consciousness of the African individual as a way of achieving the same effect in the wider community. He achieves this through his projection of an African humanist consciousness that can direct the life of an African individual and manifest itself in the African personality. That I am describing Ngugi's approach in analysing society during this period accurately is revealed by his reference to the challenge of forging "a way of life distinguishable from other ways of life [and developing] a distinctive culture and history … the set of spiritual eyeglasses, through which [Africans] come to view themselves and their place in the universe" (*Decolonising* 14). The example of Ngugi is proof that the African theoretical environment of the eighties was so occupied with self-definition that even the idea of aesthetics had to be recast in Africanist fashion.

Out of the same concern with self-definition, Ngugi laments the unfortunate dilemma of African writers having to write on African experience by using an alienating language such as English, Portuguese, German and French. In the 1986 essay he puts it this way: "Language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds" (12). Surely an African writer whose soul is not dislodged from Africa to territories of the foreign language that he or she uses should take care not to describe seedbeds of African indigenous knowledge systems disparagingly in a Eurocentric discourse in which Eurocentric prejudices are embedded. Exposure of such misappropriated descriptions of the self should not be confused with a demand for romantic lauding of everything traditionally African. Ngugi would be the last person guilty of this romantic nativism, for in the same collection of essays he hastens to acknowledge that "African communal culture could be cruel in some of its practices" (65). In this way, the concerns of Mphahlele and other Afrocentric writers about the pernicious cultural by-products that the use of English could have (unless it is appropriated effectively) are an admission on their part that their consciousness after the encounter of Africa with the west is hybrid. If the Africanist component of the hybrid postcolonial mentality is to be effectively balanced with its westernised aspects, the use

of indigenous languages should be regarded as an empowerment rather than a drawback. This is because African cultural knowledge is best preserved in the African languages. In a manner that displays attention to rigorous conceptual analysis typical of Africanists at this time, Ngugi stresses in his 1986 publication that "… the development of ethnic languages would not be inimical to national unity and consciousness" (73)

Mphahlele's 1987 expository writing shows careful attention to the issue of language use by African writers. That he does this in an essay appearing only one year after one in which Ngugi raises the same issue indicates that this matter was one of the preoccupations of Africanist debate of this period. Mphahlele uses the term "subsistence farming" while at the same time he explains how dynamic it has been as an economic practice of some African peoples, evolving into "cash-crop farming" (240). Instead of adopting either the unmediated use or evasion of Eurocentric terms, his strategy is to use them while compensating for their inbuilt Eurocentric prejudice by explaining their positive connotations within the African humanism context. This is shown by his use of the terms "ancestor worship" and "subsistence farming" in the 1987 essay ("Social Work" 240). It remains true of Mphahlele's writing (looked at comprehensively), however, that he uses his own equivalents of English words that could project concepts that are in conflict with what he regards as African humanist notions. For this reason, it is important that any reader of Mphahlele's narrative writings should recognise this stylistic feature of his work. That Mphahlele attached immense importance to purging English terms of their possible Eurocentric bias is demonstrated in his concern about the way the term "ancestor worship" is used by western writers, expressed as follows: "We do not worship the ancestors. They are our mediators, intercessors with the Supreme Being" ("Social Work" 240). What can be deduced from this remark by Mphahlele is that the term "ancestor worship" coined by westerners (whose consciousness differs from communities that practise African humanism) should not be taken literally. By the same token, Mphahlele admits that there are blemishes Africans have inflicted on African humanism – with which they are associated – that still haunt us today, such as war, witchcraft, ritual murder and the killing of twins in certain African communities ("Social Work" 242).

At this advanced stage of his theorising career Mphahlele could not stop at explaining terminology without delving deeper into explicating crucial socio-economic concepts, whose content could be confused with Eurocentric use of similar terminology. In his 1987 essay "Social Work and the Politics of Dispossession" he significantly explains that:

> Kinship is crucial in the fabric of social relationships and organization. It has economic, political as well as social significance. Inheritance and succession are of economic importance. This and other factors make the family an economic unit … Inheritance of wealth or rank is matrilineal, i.e. son from maternal uncle, rather than from his own father. Son inherits from father or paternal uncle in a patriarchal society. Most societies are patriarchal, women serving as agents of power. ("Social Work" 239)

In cultures where there is a ruling class, nobility and peasantry/working class (as Mphahlele indicates above), the idea of classlessness is extraneous. Mphahlele's

reference to blurring of social and economic status among the peasantry by a sense of community should be understood in conjunction with his explanations elsewhere of the concept of African humanism as comprising the kind of communal interdependence in which a rich man always shared with the poor:

> Care is taken to balance individual rights with communal rights. Collective labour is common: cultivating someone else's field or building his house. So is sharing of food in times of scarcity and where one is unable to fend for the family through no fault of one's own. ("Social Work" 240)

Commual interdependence characteristic of African humanism should be understood to be the external appearance of 'equality' that is actually underlain at the profound level by a valued and observed system of class in African cultures.

Achebe features among Africanist writers who rejuvenated theoretical debate until the early, mid- and late eighties by adding their opinion on the validity of Africanness as a distinctive existence. In his essay re-published in a 1988 collection, he proves to have synchronised his re-publication with the debate of the time, among others by means of reviving his earlier-published statement that "for a society to function smoothly and effectively its members must" assert that they "share certain basic tenets of belief and norms of behaviour" (*Hopes* 100). In his support of purpose-directed nativism, Achebe declares (in the following statement from the same collection):

> I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them. (30)

Achebe's Afrocentric passion for an affirming reconstruction of the African highlights his support for Africanists (including Mphahlele) invoking the past for ideological use in the present, as long as contingency demands this approach in present (*Hopes* 101). He also gives his opinion on the degree to which genres imported from Europe could be harnessed to further the Africanist mission of self-definition that *inter alia* employs the arts.

It is important to recognise that Africanist writers theorised within a global postcolonial context. This is because postcolonial writing on a world scale is faced with the same task, although not all postcolonial theorists contribute from an Africanist angle. To attest to Mphahlele's adjustment and readjustment of his concept of African humanism in reaction to issues tackled by contemporary postcolonial writers, all the characteristics of his African humanist model confirm the postcolonial attitude summarised in 1989 by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back,* as follows: "The idea of the center as permanent and unrefractory is endlessly deferred … There is no center of reality just as there is no pre-given unmediated reality" (90-91).

Matters pertaining to nationalism demonstrated above as having been addressed by Mphahlele and his fellow African writers are a symptom of the postcolonial hue of their intellectual engagement. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have written in *The Empire Writes Back* that nationalism has for Europeans been the force behind the colonising of third world countries (154), while Marxist-Leninist nationalism is preoccupied with the

attainment of classlessness (*Empire Writes Back* 156-157). For reasons associated with Mphahlele's concept of African humanism, this kind of nationalism, whose goal is to achieve classless societies, is also incompatible with African nationalism as the colonising kind, since African nationalism has to be informed by African values.

Nationalism in the postcolonial sense is, among other considerations, "based on shared collective values" (*Empire Writes Back* 151). As a way of combating colonisation, the anti-colonial movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced a resistant nationalism (*Empire Writes Back* 154) which gave rise to national liberation movements that were later to be instrumental in dismantling colonial rule. In this kind of nationalism, "ideas of self-determination and freedom, of identity and unity collide with ideas of suppression and force, of domination and exclusion" (*Empire Writes Back* 151). The conflicting positions of African humanist resistance and the cultural menace presented by apartheid in South Africa are best understood in the light of the preceding definition of nationalism. Unless one fails to see the driving force behind the forming of parties like the National Party as an expression of or aspiration towards specifically Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa, the ideology of apartheid should be interpreted as a localised version of colonialism in the same way as European nationalism inspired the colonisation of targeted countries. For Mphahlele to have reacted against apartheid prescriptions in his writings qualifies him quite early in his career as a postcolonial theorist. The critic Arthur Maimane's observation in 1989 thus rings true, that "[Mphahlele] pioneered exile" (37); by contemplating the qualities of a future postcolonial citizen, Mphahlele was ahead not only of the apartheid political climate within which he was theorising, but was ahead also of his fellow South African and continental African writers. The South African critic Mafika Gwala's remark in his 1989 essay that the themes of the short stories in *Renewal Time* "remind us of the inherent conflict in every culture, and of the fluidity in changing situations" ("Es'kia Mphahlele: a divided self?" 199) also highlights the postcolonial bent of Mphahlele's fiction. When one considers the challenging nature of conditions such as those created by apartheid in South Africa (pointed out above by Gwala), the task African writers like Mphahlele faced to offset environmental drawbacks associated with apartheid will be fully appreciated.

In 1990 Mphahlele expressed his preference for Christianity, Islam and other foreign religions to be reinterpreted and moulded by African religious nationalism, informed by African humanism ("From Dependence" 200-1). As an aspect of a culture informed by an African humanist outlook, a dialectical synthesis between western Christianity and traditional African religions is depicted in Mphahlele's novels and short stories. Such a fusion of apparently opposed consciousnesses in the religious arena, evidence of which is traceable in Mphahlele's artistic work, should be understood as an externalisation of the reconstitution of African humanist consciousness that informs the kinds of hybridised traditional religions practised today by Africans. Reshaping and redefinition, as already demonstrated elsewhere in this study, are in the nature of African humanism. In the kind of nationalism envisaged by Mphahlele as shaped by the non-static concept of African humanism, individual citizens should help to bring about this kind of reconstituted religious consciousness. Such a discussion of foreign religious modes is an

improvement from the way Mphahlele in earlier periods merely highlighted how intrusive these have been to traditional African religions (that inform the texture of his concept of African humanism). In this 1990 essay he suggests the remedy as the abrogation (by Africans) of newer religions in order to strengthen a religious nationalism that he projects as an effective instrument with which to gain material and spiritual liberation.

Revisiting ambient critical aspects with a fresh approach is typical of Mphahlele's practice during the period including 1990. He thus proceeds to his advanced critique of negritude in this period. While in earlier decades Mphahlele had stopped at analysing the pros and cons of negritude, in 1990 he accepts some of its aspects and transforms them dialectically into some of the crucial building blocks of his concept of African humanism. In his other 1990 essay (formatted as a tribute to the sculptor Gerhard Sekoto), Mphahlele extols negritude in the following terms: "Negritude's intention was to inspire Africans to return to their roots – largely an emotional and intellectual journey" ("My Friend" 195). In other words, the progressively nativist aspect of negritude converges with a similarly nativist departure point for African humanism. In the theoretical environment of the nineties, Mphahlele's earlier objection that negritude tried to "programme African art" is swept under the carpet and mentioned only obliquely. Another reason for this is that Mphahlele's essays of the 1990s were written in his intellectually mellowed years, after the anger and bitterness characterising his apartheid and earlier exile years had dissipated.

The article "Education as Community Development" (1990) displays consolidation of Mphahlele's alert and constantly adapting intellectual interaction with changing reality, a position which is saved from being amorphous by his distinctively Africanist outlook filtering experience and giving it his characteristic tint. Such flexibility achieves a harmonisation of the consciousness of African humanism, or extended Black Consciousness, with a changing world. This is indicative of Mphahlele's philosophical assumption that reality itself is not fixed but has to be recreated from time to time as a similarly dynamic personality interacts with the external world. Mphahlele formulates his ideas of Africanness not as a detached observer but as a participant-observer. Importantly, this also ties up with his conception of the role of the writer as a social actor involved with the people about whom and for whom the act of writing is performed. It is a further sign of alignment generally with postcolonial theory and criticism, that Mphahlele stated in another 1990 essay that African humanism accepts the role of ancestors, magic and faith even while it affirms the efficacy of reason as manifested in, for example, science and technology ("From Dependence" 199, 204). The African world-view symbolised by the images in "ancestors, magic" and that of the West represented by the term "science and technology" exist in balanced complementarity in this statement by Mphahlele. Such a handling of argument deepens the reader's understanding of what Mphahlele has been referring to as a synthesis of European and African consciousnesses within the psyche of the postcolonial African.

The deepened sophistication of definition that Mphahlele displays in 1990 continues in 1991 in his affirmation of Africans' capacity to prove their humanity by ably creating

imaginative artefacts. He outlines a conception of art as broad enough to encapsulate various media like painting, sculpting, oral storytelling, music and dance as understood differently in African humanism from the way it is in non-African communities. That is why Mphahlele's comments on sculpture (in the following quotation) bring in references to music, dance, and storytelling in a particular manner. Not only do they reveal his wide-ranging conception of art, but they also assert subtly that from the point of view of African humanism life is seen as an interconnected whole rather than as constisting of compartmentalised spheres. The same quotation demonstrates that, specifically for Africans, any art form is understood in terms of man's centrality to nature, inflected in a uniquely African humanist way. This has already been shown to be an aspect of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism. Such cosmological centrality of man is evident in Mphahlele's 1991 description of a collection of Southern African art as "Hard concrete materials" that "have been reshaped by skilled caring hands of disparate origins which nevertheless collectively tell Africa's story, and produce music *of their own*" ("Brenthurst Collection" 273, emphasis added). The expression "reshaped by skilled caring hands" once more reinforces the humanist position that recongnises individuals' and communities' ability to shape reality to their own spiritual satisfaction. By describing such skilful hands as having "disparate origins which nevertheless collectively tell Africa's story", the writer is acknowledging the heterogeneity of African cultures which nevertheless coalesce in a broad sense to reveal a distinctively African existential perspective.

In the 1991 essay (quoted above), thoughts on Pan Africanism and the relationship between art and political activism are revived in a methodologically refined way to invoke the density of the context within which the essay was devised. The essay reveals Mphahlele's approval of Pan Africanism as one of the alternative ways in which an African humanist consciousness and way of life have been expressed by different thinkers over the ages (as the phrase "tell Africa's story" signifies) ("Brenthurst Collection" 273). This is done without direct use of the term "Pan Africanism", as a stylistic indication that the idea is neither the central focus of the essay nor a new addition to the Africanist intellectual context. Mphahlele displays similar discursive dexterity (in a different essay of the same year) in his reaffirmation of the value of rigorous intellectual analysis versus spontaneous ideological activism. In the 1991 essay "The Art of the Writer and his Function", he remarks that "while an artist should not dismiss ideology, he should also avoid choking on it … [because] an ideology can either enrich a work of art or undermine it" ("The Art of" 400). Other African theorists of this period were also expressing their opinion on this issue. One example is Njabulo Ndebele, who pronounced in his 1991 collection of essays that a careful distinction needed to be made between paraded intellectualism and the positive attribute of applying intellectual rigour in social analysis. Njabulo Ndebele discourages sloganeering or "superficial thinking", which he castigates as "acting as a façade for what might appear to be an empty desperate intellectual centre lacking in firmly established traditions of intellectual rigour" ("Turkish Tales" 25). In the same breath, in the essay titled "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", Ndebele cautions against the self-defeating attempt to contribute to nation-building by favouring spectacular representation. His reference to "the immense challenging responsibility *to create a new society*" ("The Rediscovery" 57, emphasis added) reveals

his call for serious intellectual analysis rather than facile sloganeering. He exemplifies the type of engagement he canvasses for by a remark in which he cautions that all that is destructive should not be attributed to the oppressor European while all that is benevolent is associated with the oppressed African.

In 1992 Mphahlele continued with analyses of currents of thought that had been manifested in earlier decades in ways that elucidate aspects of his African humanism more effectively than had been possible earlier. In re-critiquing the ideology of Black Consciousness, Mphahlele explains that in his view African humanist sensibility conflicts with the intellectualism of Black Consciousness, the same reason why he also rejects "the humanism of Europe" which he perceives as having become "an intensely intellectual adventure" ("Notes Towards" 135). The tendency of European humanism towards intellectualism, as this quotation observes, means to him that it has veered away from the concrete terrain that remains the abode of African humanism. However, the intellectualism associated with members of European cultures differs in content with that practised by the followers of Black Consciousness. The tendency of the former to intellectualise contrasts with the Africanist outlook of embodying philosophy communally by living it in simple, practical ways.

In the 1992 essay analysed above, Mphahlele uses the terms "African" and "humanism" quite frequently, both in isolation and in combination – as their use in the title suggests. The essays touch on various aspects of the concept including the religious, cosmological and cultural, evident in expressions such as "African thought and belief" (136); "social concept", "The Supreme Being is a poetic conception" (all 137); and "at peace with the ancestors and other humans" (138). Weaving his reviewed explication into the complexities of Africanist thinking patterns pervading the years including 1992, Mphahlele describes the unique features of his concept of African humanism in an effectively comparative manner marking mellower, less strident style of argumentation that he displayed in this period. For example, he remarks that African humanism "could never be a godless way of life" and that "we cannot separate African humanism from African thought and belief, including religion" ("Notes Towards" 136). The divergences mentioned above between African and European humanisms manifest themselves in the differing forms of collective behaviour of those we can perceive as influenced by African humanist consciousness and those influenced by European humanist consciousness, he suggests. On the one hand, Mphahlele believes, African humanists display a morality that has survived in the communal African consciousness till now in conduct such as assuming the living presence "of the Supreme Being … as an all-pervading vital force in the mountains, rivers, valleys, and the plant and animal kingdoms" ("Notes Towards" 137). Mphahlele holds that "at the level at which [they] feel powerless because a violent rupture is threatening in [their] relationships or has occurred [those practising African humanism call] others in the extended and immediate family [to] talk and try to mend things" ("Notes Towards" 138); maintaining that "your character is determined or shaped by being morally upright and being at peace with the ancestors and other humans" (Notes Towards" 138). African humanists, he believes, display a "total reliance on individual and collective resilience", depending on the complex pattern of social relationships that enable life to survive as a collective or communal force (Notes Towards" 138).

Mphahlele sees it as a consciousness that is manifested in conduct informed by a sense of the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant, and inanimate environments and the cosmos, with human life at the centre, envisaging human life "merging with the environment even while deriving nourishment from it" ("Notes Towards" 137).

One of the strongest pillars on which such humanism rests is the complex pattern of social relationships ("Notes Towards" 138). This particular tenet of African humanism tends in its cosmological view towards emphasis on unity rather than diversity, synthesis rather than analysis. Simply put, African humanism recogonises diversity as natural and thus deserving of pious awe. This explains why this existential perspective sees harmony in difference, hence its insistence on its own distinctive nature. So that difference is to be hallowed, as it relates to the interconnection of varying components of reality by the Vital Force. From difference then, African humanists derive nourishment by way of spiritual growth, i.e. recognition of a higher, spiritual kind of harmony that demands more than just carnal or material filiation. That is why Mphahlele emphasises that reality for the African consists of the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant and inanimate environments and the cosmos, with human life at the centre, envisaging human life "merging with the environment even while deriving *nourishment* from it" ("Notes Towards" 137, emphasis added). In contrast with religions brought to the African continent from elsewhere (such as Islam and western Christianity), African humanism is not a proselytising faith ("Notes Towards" 139). This would contradict its mystical respect for difference or diversity. It has never sought to colonise anybody, a trait that has been common to Christianity and Islam ("Notes Towards" 139). Of course colonising anyone implies imposed removal of difference by denial of the value of "difference" or otherness of the colonised. In "Landmarks of Literary History: A Black Perspective", Mphahlele explains the distinctive quality of African humanist religious practice as manifesting itself among postcolonial Africans in forms such as the "Ethiopic-Zionist" Christianity. He appreciates the self-constituting function of such hybridised forms of western Christianity (championed by religious leaders such as Isaiah Shembe) as being inspired by religious nationalism ("Landmarks" 46).

There are African critics who continued in 1992 with the debate on how the mission of the writer artist relates with that of the political activist. Keorapetse Kgositsile as one of them interestingly made pronouncements differing from Mphahlele's stance on this matter. He writes (in "Culture as a Site of the Struggle") of South African literary figures like Alex la Guma, Wally Serote, Mandla Langa, Ronnie Kasrils, Barry Feinberg and himself as "cadres of the Movement who are writers – as distinct from writers who happen to be in the Movement" (50). Kgositsile stresses that in his view "there is a serious distinction" in respect of these two categories of social activists (50). Both categories are commonly acknowledged in this quotation as writers, but Kgositsile sees political activism as the more important role compared to that of being a writer. That is why, for Kgositsile, Sol Plaatje remains the major role model specifically for primarily being "an outstanding figure in the top leadership of the ANC" while his being a "leading artist and cultural worker with a keen sense of social responsibility" is seen as an occupation of secondary importance (48). Despite the disagreement explained above and the contrast between Mphahlele's and Kgositsile's perspectives, they share (for opposed

reasons) a common appreciation of the complex relationship between being an intellectual artist and being a political activist.

That Kgositsile and Mphahlele share this view is clear when one considers Kgositsile's observation on the need for the intellectual excercise of producing literature "never to be allowed to degenerate into being no more than a mirror reflection of life" ("Site of Struggle" 49). Kgositsile's argument, however, seems to disparage the intellectual engagement required in writing a poem – for he equates it with an excuse for direct political action. This is evident in his urging supposedly truant political activists to consult a "military instructor" about fighting for liberation without dilly-dallying ("Site of Struggle" 49) rather than writing a politically inclined peom. For theorists like Mphahlele, the theorist or "interpreter", counter-"spontaneity" position of the African or postcolonial writer should be given priority if the liberation atmosphere is not to remain stagnant or to degenerate. There is no doubt about Kgositsile's writing being postcolonial in orientation. That is why he writes in a tone similar to Mphahlele's and those of other African postcolonial writers, as when he asserts that: "When you write you oppose, propose or affirm certain values and thereby you define yourself and your national, group or class values, essential interests and allegiance … the writer must be informed; the writer must be knowledgeable" ("Site of Struggle" 48). For Kgositsile, the knowledge a writer needs in order to be relevant or to have impact is about his or her "national, group or class values" ("Site of Struggle" 48). Mphahlele has been shown to be referring to such communally shared values as an aspect of his concept of African humanism in the sense that such values are a constituent of African peoples' cultures. Kgositsile accedes to such a role of African cultures (without necessarily using Mphahlele's terminology or concept) in the following words: "The very existence of the SACP and COSATU is an act of culture; it is an opposition to the existence of the racist, exploitative culture which we have known and continue to suffer and resist. Their very existence proposes an alternative culture" ("Site of Struggle" 48).

The important point to recognise is that African writers cited so far as having developed in ways parallel to Mphahlele in his undertaking of delineating the crux of African identity and personality, tackle what are fundamentally the same concerns as Mphahlele does. The commonalities that stimulated these processes of intellectual development can best be summed up in Mphahlele's explanation that "a discussion of African humanism is a question of culture, of anthropology, by which I mean simply what we do, how and why" ("Notes Towards" 136). All of these Africanist writers (broadly speaking) describe the African conception of the individual more or less as Mphahlele does. That is why Mphahlele confesses to his enlistment into African humanist thinking of the Igbo and Hindu concepts of 'chi' and 'dharma' respectively. These terms point to acceptance of an individualism that has self-respect and an ability to be accommodative as hallmarks of African humanism in Mphahlele's conception of this cultural practice ("Notes Towards" 140).

Because of the difficulty of achieving a cogent and useful definition of the concept of African humanism within the complex context of postcolonial debates on matters his concept has to address, Mphahlele's life-long concern with the idea of African humanism

(as expressed in his own work), and his criticism of its inadequate representation by some African writers in their writing, provide ideal material for study in an attempt to clarify this idea. Mphahlele hints at the invaluable contributions of fellow African theorists who grappled with commonplace intellectual enquiry of the times during which he wrote. That is why he clarifies what African humanism entails by naming and defining it in a way that is consonant with his discernment of a myriad of terms being used to refer to it, including those occurring in the popular oral and literary media of radio, television, magazines and newspapers. For him these contemporary ideas circulating in the public domain refer to aspects of African humanism – without equating or being identical to it. It is for this reason that in a 1993 essay, Mphahlele notes the relevance of the newspaper editor Aggrey Klaaste's concept of "nation building" to his own notion of what constitutes an African humanist consciousness and way of life, as follows:

> Aggrey Klaaste … himself conceived of 'nation building' a few years ago as a rallying cry for reconstruction for unity and self-reliance and self-help. Through and around the *Sowetan*, he called for people with vision to devise programmes for social change. African Humanism – *Botho* (Sesotho) and *Ubuntu* (Nguni) lies at the base of the concept. ("In Search of" 220)

The words "self-reliance" and "self-help" foreground Mphahlele's recognition of the African humanist proclivity towards self-constituting acts rather than compromising reliance on (material or intellectual) handouts from those who are responsible for one's wretchedness. The African humanist basis of such acts is pointed out directly when Mphahlele states that "African Humanism … lies at the base of" Klaaste's concept of 'nation building'". Urging Africans to engage in "nation building" activities like this is typical of the postcolonialist move away from embracing prescriptions by the "centre". The "centre", according to postcolonial writers like Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), denotes dominant norms imposed on the disadvantaged peoples of the southern and eastern hemispheres of the world by privileged peoples occupying its northern and western hemispheres. By resisting harassment by the "centre", the oppressed peoples of the world will achieve postcolonial hybridity on their own terms rather than as colonised people. On the scale bigger than the individual plane, this reveals the postcolonial insistence (as articulated by theorists such as Edward Said) on a contrapuntal relationship between Africa and the West rather than a Manichean one in which the oppressor fabricates culture in exclusion of the oppressed and vice versa.

From what Mphahlele says in this excerpt, it is clear that Klaaste's concept of "nation building" is narrower than Mphahlele's notion of African humanism. That it is narrower is revealed by its focus on "reconstruction for unity and self-reliance and self-help" which results in the "devis[ing] of programmes for social change." Absent from it is the broad scope of African humanism as Mphahlele conceives of it, that includes emphasis also on spiritual rather than material resources. The kind of unity and self-reliance contained in "nation building" incline more towards coming together as a group of blacks for collective economic power that may release them from material dependence to achieve material self-reliance and "self-help." For Mphahlele to say that African humanism "lies at the base of" the concept of "nation building" means that the former is more profound and underlying, and thus more fundamentally effective. For this reason, writers like Klaaste make the meaning of African humanism more lucid by explaining

what its constituents mean, without necessarily using the broader term "African humanism" itself – as Mphahlele expresses the more adequate notion of the often loosely used term "*botho/ubuntu*" in English, consistently throughout his later expository writing. Concerns of African writers such as Mphahlele and Klaaste include putting the African in the centre of history rather than on its fringes.

The decision to put the African in the centre and interpret experiences from that localised perspective is an incarnation of Afrocentrism, as Mashegoane testified in an essay published a year later in 1994 ("Historical Anteriority Twisted" 79). European nationalism, which spawned colonisation and its South African variant known as apartheid, cannot be reconciled with any nationalism that is integral to African cultures within the context of Mphahlele's explication of the concept of African humanism. Mphahlele has stated that African humanist approach in interacting with other peoples is not that of colonisation, in the same way as its religion does not proselytise ("Notes Towards" 139). For this reason, the kind of nationalism espoused by practitioners of African humanism is not attained through colonisation. Similarly, egalitarianism or classnessness as a feature of nationalist polity is not congruous with the concept of African humanism, as shown in Mphahlele's statement that:

> In traditional times, African communities were loosely divided into the ruling family, with the nobility close to it, and the common citizenry. What social differences there might be in modern terms were blurred by the sense of community and moral interdependence that pervaded society … Still, one's age group was more important in the ordering of social relationships than the family's economic means. ("In Search of" 210)

Mphahlele details the structure of the populace traditionally constituting African societies in the spirit of insisting that African humanist communities in the postcolonial era should critically revive such practices as part of their self-constitution. Devices with which the Africanist creative writer can effect a creative perpetuation of such a traditional nationalism or social structuring (according to Mphahlele in one of his 1993 essays) are perspective, resonance and myth ("Educating the Imagination" 184), discussed in full in the next section of this chapter of the study.

Because of a concern with the nature of nationalism that postcolonial Africans should appropriate for themselves – characterising Africanist debate in years including 1993 – Okolo (1993) outlines the subservience of the single African individual to social roles and communal needs (*African Philosophy* 28). This accords with Mphahlele's emphasis in a 1993 discursive piece of the point that the individual finds fulfilment in what he or she does for the community and "[becomes] an elder in the ruler's court according to *age* and the *esteem* [he or she enjoys] among [his or her] own kin and clan" ("In Search of" 210, emphasis added). This means that achievement is the objective criterion that determines one's proper position on the social ladder, thus ensuring that hierarchy is maintained fairly and with equal respect for human dignity or for the sacredness of human life. The novel fibre re-envigorating the somewhat hackneyed theme of social roles and communal interdependence in Mphahlele's description of his concept of African humanism is the idea of social hierarchy that is seen as having a role in modern African existence. This notion of hierarchical promotion of the African individual within

African communities "according to age and the esteem [he or she] enjoys among [his or her] own kin and clan" emphasises experience in referring to those who have served the community for a long time (as the word "age" implies), as well as fulfilment of one's social role according to the expectations of the community. The individual serving the community over time and according to social roles determined by the community earns status within the community, as this quotation indicates. But it is important to note that the community served in this manner "[feels] increased by [such an individual's] elevated status" ("In Search of" 210). As such, the African individual and the African community benefit mutually from such proper interaction. This mutual benefit between the African individual and community highlighted by Mphahlele includes female individuals. As this study will continually demonstrate, Mphahlele bases his observations in a patriarchal society, and not a paternalistic one. References to a patriarchal society, consistently with the way Afrocentrists have avowedly had either to discard or modify Eurocentric terminology, are not used by Africanist writers (such as Mphahlele) to suggest disapproval associated with an embedded masculinist bent in a society, but simply means that in its hierarchical social organisation it places men, husbands, uncles or grandfathers (rather than women, wives, aunts or grandmothers) in topmost positions. These culturally sanctioned positions should not be regarded censoriously because they are held vicariously on behalf of all the strata of society as well as on behalf of ancestors who, before their depature into the spirit world, valued this very kind of social patterning. The same is the case with African societies that are historically matriarchal. A censorious tone could not suit any Africanist writer describing such a society as its difference from a patriarchal one is merely a matter of tradition having placed females (rather than males) in symbolically superior social-hierarchical positions. For Africanist theorists a word like "egalitarian" or "classless" would not mean what it means in European, Marxist thinking, because the notion of class in the African world-view does not *ipso facto* imply exploitation and status-related conflict. It is for this reason that, if at any stage Mphahlele portrays the paternalism of a character or group of characters, it is done to expose the errant behaviour of such a character or characters.

Another significant tenet of African humanism spelled out by Mphahlele in 1994 is that it is "a simple faith free of the tyranny of theology and intellectual argument" ("Educating the Imagination" 180). In a way, this statement cautions against the latent danger in intellectualising about rather than practically living out a view of life based in African humanist consciousness – in addition to referring to religion or theology more directly as a segment within various African cultures. African humanism, according to Mphahlele, is based on practice rather than conscious theory. The African humanist consciousness within Africans is thus an unconscious driving force behind African humanist conduct. Among the pragmatic things the article highlights is the fact that the African humanist concept of community provides a sound basis for team learning in the workplace, to keep in check the Eurocentric tendency towards placing detrimental emphasis on individual excellence only ("Humanism and Corporate World" 130-131). While teamwork is a value that is not alien to people who fall outside the category of Africans, the major point is that in contexts other than those constituted by African cultures it could be implemented as a means of pursuing individualistic interests rather than communal ones.

Mphahlele highlights this position as relevant to the corporate world of today – for instance – in the following words:

> (1) Managerial reality is socially and culturally determined. The community concept provides a sound basis for team learning to counter the Eurocentric habit of mind that is hung up on the demand of individual excellence. This spawns reckless individualism in South African corporations. (2) A community concept of management can help develop a greater sense of oneness in the corporation. This will counter the older view that sees only an adversarial relationship between managers and the managed in preference to consensus. ("Humanism and Corporate World" 131-132)

From the quotation above it can be seen that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is resilient at both individual and community levels. This enables it to pervade, for example, the modern day workplace and keep in check the Eurocentric tendency to promote detrimental emphasis on individual needs and excellence only, by using the concept of community as a sound basis for team learning and fulfilment in the group as a whole ("Humanism and Corporate World" 130-131).

Mphahlele's attempt to crystallise the concept of "African humanism" led him in 1994 to guide the audience of one of his many addresses on his vision of society towards a lucid understanding of the concept, in the following words:

> Let us, for the sake of convenience, consider African Humanism on two planes: (a) as a state of mind, a consciousness, a way of perceiving; and (b) as a social order, a possible option for a way of life based on (a), and a pursposeful act of knowing and of behaving in a human context. These are really two aspects of an indivisible concept of thought and belief. ("Humanism and Corporate World" 128)

The broader, more carefully circumscribed nature of African humanism compared to that which Mphahlele ascribes to underdeveloped concepts like Black Consciousness is evident in his describing African humanism in 1994 also as "a social order, a possible option for a way of life" ("Humanism and Corporate World" 128). In juxtaposing what Mphahlele conceptualises as African humanism with his understanding of Black Consciousness one can recognise the embroilment of his concept in debates constituting the intellectual milieu of that period. Mphahlele's mention of Black Consciousness at one stage of its history freezing into a political matrix (elsewhere in the essay quoted from above) is significant ("Humanism and Corporate World" 129). It betrays Mphahlele's guarding against African humanism diluting into a (merely) political programme while at the same time repulsing tendencies among his peers to try and impoverish the intellectual terrain by equating or confusing it with political activism. Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is put across as able to survive the encounter with western modes of living. Mphahlele describes African humanism as capable of functioning within and contributing to modern institutions such as the corporate word (described above) and of sifting through surrounding ideas in order to plumb qualities it can incorporate into its make-up – to highlight the adaptability and elasticity of the concept that has enabled it to survive across shifting, contingent conditions across history.

While ideologies described earlier as Black Consciousness and negritude prioritised a psychological strenghthening of demeaned blacks to see themselves as worthy humans, Afrocentrism describes conscious awareness of the dangers of Eurocentric distortion of knowledge about Africans as well as efforts to rectify the distortions. In a 1994 article entitled "Historical anteriority twisted, broken and denied: a general vindification for an Afrocentric method in the studies of Africa", Mashegoane stresses that Africans need to discard jaundiced Eurocentric approaches and attitudes and approach reality on their own terms: "within an Afrocentric … context [we combat] prejudices, stereotypes, myth and untruth … putting into perspective knowledge about Africa" (79). As explained earlier in this section, Afrocentrism as an analytical perspective cuts across Africanist theorists of all ages and nuclear persuasions. It is clear from Mphahlele's essays including those from 1994 that he and the other African writers discussed alongside him are linked by a shared Afrocentrism. Each interrogates existential challenges with an Afrocentric attitude, yet carries out the theorising assignment with his or her own points of view, orientations and priorities of purpose in mind. There are bound to be theoretical atmospheric factors that led to African writers like Mashegoane in 1994 to outline the important role played by Afrocentric points of departure in grappling with issues of the time. One likelihood could be the writer's awareness of a Eurocentric colouring in some of the publications of the time which did not settle well with him because of his Afrocentric preferences.

It is significant that the South African theologian B. J. van der Walt's perspective in handling the topics dealt with in his 1994 book *The Liberating Message* is crassly Eurocentric. Symptoms of Van der Walt's Eurocentric psyche include a misinterpretation of African humanism's communal aspect (236-237). His seeing what Mphahlele chooses to call African humanism as mere humanitarianism is inadequate in that it generalises only one aspect of caring for and loving fellow humans as if it is all that African humanism is about. Van der Walt's attempt to interpret these notions in line with the way Africanist writers implement them in their theories is evidently unsuccessful. Failure to see community from the same Afrocentric perspective as Mphahlele, for instance, leads Van der Walt to conclude wrongly that the sense of community prevalent among African societies gives rise to "a hunger for power" (*Liberating Message* 236). In this way, the 'tyranny' of "one societal relationship (e.g. family, tribe or state) over all the others" invariably leads (he claims) to the idea of the state being inseparable from excesses such as absolute control of economic resources or an oligarchy of political power (*Liberating Message* 236-37). In African communalism, however (as Mphahlele and other African humanists indicate), any social unit emanating from what Van der Walt describes as "societal relationship" (237) will be regulated by the cultural constraint of having eventually to direct all benefits to the entire community. Mphahlele's sense of African humanism is also harmonious with the non-chauvinistic aspect of a patriarchal/matriarchal hierarchy within African customs, in its non-sexism. It is for this reason that Mphahlele's fiction reveals African communal condemnation of male characters who misuse their hierarchically superior positions within society to abuse women, as conflicting with African humanist values.

Unlike writers such as Mphahlele who view the advent of postcolonialism mainly as capacitating formerly oppressed Africans to define themselves more soundly, Van der Walt sees the introduction of Christianity as well as of a western education and western political and economic institutions as having led to an "identity crisis" (9-10). What Van der Walt (as an example of a Eurocentric theorist) stops short of understanding is that this humanism has germinated from the traditional African concept of *botho* (in the Sesotho languages) or *ubuntu* (in the Nguni languages). The concept of *botho* is rooted in African tradition and is broader than humanitarianism. In Van der Walt's view, African theorists such as Mphahlele endowed the word "humanism" with a new content, "conveying thereby *simply* that he believes in the values and potential of man" (242, emphasis added). Already dimensions of "values" and "potential" of man adds to what the term "humanitarianism" entails in its sense of merely being compassionate. As such, the word "simply" is misplaced, since it inaccurately means that "values" and "potential of man" are as narrow in range of meaning as compassion (suggested by the choice of the term "humanitarianism") (*Liberating Message* 242). Van der Walt's own explanation of what he means by African humanist world-views believing "in the values and potential of man" (242) is that according to Africanists, African society reinforces human beings' belief in themselves without denying their dependence upon God (242, 243). Rather than the humanism of Africanists' analysis of society straddling two seemingly unliked and conflicting religious perceptions (as Van der Walt describes it above), the role of ancestors serves to harmonise this way of religious worship. Ancestors having once lived on earth, they are an extension of centralising man in the African's cosmology as much as they bridge the gap between the material and the spiritual. The reality is that in African religions ancestors are revered and continually communed with, while worship or prayer is culturally only the due of the Supreme Being. Africans recognise the manifestation of God in natural phenomena (as indicated by Mphahlele's description of African humanism cited elsewhere in this study), yet this should not be confused with the western idea of 'nature worship', as if Africans do not acknowledge a distinction between these phenomena and the Supreme Being itself. The exercise of juxtaposing any contrasting entities yields a deeper etching of their differences. The way contributions of Africanist writers such as Mashegoane and Eurocentric ones such as Van der Walt in 1994 highlighted divergences between Afrocentric and Eurocentric approaches to theory served, *inter alia*, to clarify both Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. They also delimited the true nature of theories conceived from Afrocentric vantage points (such as Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism) in high relief. For this reason, Mphahlele's concept gained a more thorough coherence from the atmosphere of 1994 in which writers from opposed poles wrote concurrently in Afrocentric and Eurocentric ways.

The tendency of Africanist writers of the preceding decade to characterise Africanness more pertinently in comparison or contrast with European hegemonic dispositions flows into the 1995 intellectual atmosphere. But in essays such as "For the Sowetan: We're Being Had!" (1995), Mphahlele almost always invokes African humanism without using the term, as in the statement:

> I'm constrained to ask: What are we Blacks doing to jack ourselves up in our own esteem, as we, rather than Whites, perceive ourselves? What are we doing to

> assert our own intellectual and moral being, so that it becomes less and less possible for the cultural establishment to assign us to the easy twilight zone of marginalized people? (351)

A similar confidence in the capacity of an African humanist psyche and way of life to mediate the complexity of all spheres of modern life is displayed by Mazrui in his 1995 book *Cultural Forces in World Politics*. He confirms that economically the Northern and Western hemispheres have always since colonisation been and will continue calling the shots (after *uhuru* in African states), unless an efficient Africanist intervention takes place.

Mphahlele similarly stresses the need for African agency as a means towards self-determination. That is why among the things that he finds impressive about black literary art is a quality he identifies as African authenticity in contemporary music (as he states in a 1995 *Drum Magazine* article): "There are skilful, soulful musicians who are adapting indigenous idioms to modern jazz, such as Malombo Jazz and a few other groups. We must commend these artists…" ("From My Notebook" 144). It is for pragmatic agency (as opposed to ineffective intellectualising agency) that Mphahlele feels these Africanist artists should be lauded. Lamenting the contemporary inclination of Black Consciousness proponents to evade pressing sociopolitical issues of the day by receding into impotent intellectualism, Mphahlele wrote in an essay originally presented in 1995 that:

> The present lull in the Black Consciousness exhortations towards self-reliance and the affirmation of a black selfhood may suggest to some that all of us have settled for political and economic advancement without any heed of the intellectual and spiritual alternatives we can evolve. But movements driven by a passionate intensity have a way of coming and going in cycles, as long as the historical conditions make it necessary. ("The Burden of History" 81)

What this means is that emphasis on "self-reliance and the affirmation of a black selfhood" that is not accompanied by a richer spiritual scaffold ("The Burden of History" 81) has come about because the intensity of as broad a mentality as that of (original) Pan Africanism is waning. The same Black Consciousness/Pan Africanist consciousness is still the impetus of Mphahlele's denunciations of impotent sophism rather than a more adequate form of agency that encompasses praxis. He is able to transcend the myopia of his fellow Africans limited to these cruder definitions of Africanness, due to the benefit of his more sophisticated and nuanced use of Black Consciousness/Pan Africanism in the form of African humanism. This is attested to by Mphahlele's remark (below) about the relative scope and depth of Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness on the one hand, and on the other hand African humanism:

> Black Consciousness, *before it became institutionalized into a political camp*, helped students, artists, writers and social activists to appreciate at least the dynamics of African Humanism. Black Consciousness endures, albeit in a truncated or dislocated form. ("Humanism and Corporate World" 129, emphasis added)

One of the benefits of exploring the Black Conscious/Pan Africanist milieu of Mphahlele's development of his own concept of African humanism is the unearthing of the roots of some of the stances for which African humanism is of present known.

Reconsidering the state of artistic production among Africans in 1995, Mphahlele manipulates deceptively pedestrian topics to excavate more profound, underlying distinctive features of his philosophy of African humanism. One way he does this is by highlighting a uniquely African attitude, which defers to communal needs in practising art, including ritual performance. Not all Africans may be artists, but they will at least have this particular sense of the function of art. There are those, Mphahlele states in his 1995 speech, who will emerge better than others as "artist[s] because [they] have the talent for it, the sensitivity to sustain it, revitalize it" ("Opening of Community Arts Come Together" 268). The remark reveals that Mphahlele's African humanism does not conform to positivism as secular (European) humanism does, in that it accepts conceptualisation of human action in intellectual or spiritual terms (signified by "talent"), as well as discipline of the body and its senses to give out their best in order to foreground human achievement across cultural clusters (represented by the terms "sensitivity", "sustain it" and "revitalize it"). For Africans, there is a religious duty to create art – an attitude that has to a certain extent been eroded by the colonial and imperial experience, hence Mphahlele's declaration that:

> We had greater appeal as artists when our creations were ritualistic, inspired by the gods and ancestral spirits as intercessors between us and the Supreme Being. To see, for instance, a West African wooden and bronze mask is to come face to face with an overpowering mystery that nails you to the spot where you're standing. ("Opening of Community Arts Come Together" 269)

What becomes immediately evident from this citation is the spiritual imperative towards creating works of art found commonly among Africans of varying cultures that are linked by an overriding African way of thinking and perceiving. It is natural that on the intellectual plane thinkers like Mphahlele, faced with the challenges of mapping societal progression from colonialism to postcolonialism, had to expand their understanding of concepts such as African humanism by reviewing what they had said earlier concerning certain features of African identity.

In this period, Mphahlele's handling of the theme of tribalism is revealed by the statement that "signs that tribalism is with us … [do] not augur well for nation building" ("Towards a Definition" 251). He continues in this year to denounce forces that militate against traditionally-founded communal cohesion in an unobtrusive, discursive style by which he foregrounds an overt topic while masking a deepening illumination of his concept of African humanism underneath such a relatively more superficial topic. That is why the quotation above from "Opening of Community Arts Come Together" conceals a concern with the need for creating works of art (found commonly among Africans of varying cultures) beneath a seemingly commonplace description of the mask as an art form. It is important that Mpahlele asserts the relevance of dinstinctively African ways of life (as he does in this article) in the postcolonial period around 1995, when feminism started to emerge more strongly as one perspective that could not be ignored within the intellectual critical debate of Africanists.

Mpahlele cannot validly be expected to express his views on issues from the same position as feminists, because a case can be made for defining feminism as a Western theoretical tool. Such an apparent contrast of two seemingly opposed world-views

should not be misconstrued as an indication that African humanism as a way of life is unconcerned with the genuine issues addressed by Western theory. What I am saying is simply that African humanism does not refract reality through such foreign perceptual tools or media. That is why Mphahlele stated in 1996 that he rejected negritude as a literary theory because he saw negritudinists like Senghor as attempting to fight western assimilation on the westener's terms ("The Function" 422). One of the reasons Mphahlele advances for adopting this position of eschewing terminology typical to Western concepts is that "Because art is a way of perceiving, literary demands must needs vary from country to country – one social situation to another" (The Function" 422). This aspect of Mphahlele's expository writing, especially as expressed in his later essays such as that of 1996 (quoted above) is necessary to note in order not to misjudge the surface-level difference of terminology as symptomatic of an underlying neglect of crucial ideas merely because they are expressed in Eurocentric terminology. It does, however, signal that African humanism and European ways of looking at reality co-exist within any modern-day African as two unidentical world-views.

Although the preoccupations of feminist postcolonial thinkers may appear to be discordant with Mphahlele's African humanist engagement with postcolonial reality, the truth is that he shares their concerns. For example, Mphahlele's attitude towards women cannot be said to go along with the thinking of sexist or chauvinistic thinkers described by the feminist theorist Minh-ha as assuming that "women's enemy is the intellect, that their apprehension of life can only wind and unwind around a cooking pot, a baby's diaper, or matters of the heart" ("Not You/Like You" 1997). But Mphahlele's fight for the recognition of women's rights is not expressed in terms that feminists normally use. Mphahlele's censure of practices that violate the sacredness and dignity of women (as a valued part of humankind) coincides with postcolonial views on the same issue expressed by feminists. This is more straightforwardly discernible when his expository writing is scrutinised by using theoretical devices attributable to feminists who also published in 1997, such as Gayatri Spivak. When this is done in the next sections of this chapter, it should serve to clarify Mphahlele's convergence with the views of feminists, although he does not normally use such unAfrican terms as "feminism", "egalitarianism"or "Marxism" in referring to the phenomena which the European words denote. He uses his own African equivalents of such terms – without making them into labels.

The critic Thomas Pavel's 1997 examination of literary genres helps to explain why the literary works of a writer like Mphahlele display permeation by his and his fellow Africans' biographical material. Pavel remarked that:

> Literary fictions … differ from history (but not from myth) insofar as they emphasize the problematic nature of the links between observable (imitable) action and the invisible norms and values that inform it … like many myths, fiction lingers on exemplary conformity and nonconformity to norms… ("Fiction and Imitation" 532).

In the same article Pavel asserts that literary fiction typically represents human beings in their relationship with norms and values, which norms and values cannot be reduced to a set of observable facts or copied directly, but can only be highlighted indirectly through examples of human action (521). It comes as no surprise therefore that what Mphahlele

sees as the effect of literature on his reader is the same benefit he himself gets from his practice of creative writing. He has declared that the target audience of his fiction consists of his fellow Africans (rather than foreigners), whose conduct is stimulated by the African humanist consciousness that he, too, confesses to be his world-view. This could also explain why Mphahlele frequently chooses autobiography as the way to express himself in literature. This genre empowers him to perform the function of literature most effectively, enriching a people's experience by transforming mundane experience into a self-constituting existential tool – according to Pavel's explanation (above) of the problematics inherent in fiction writing and social analysis.

The need for conscious and active efforts that mediate assimilation and transform it into hegemonic discourse that does not deny Africans their true identity continues to be the concern of African theorists during 1997. Kwame Gyekye stresses the need to adapt what has been inherited from the dialectical marriage of tradition and colonisation in order successfully to manage modern day society that he describes as having the pattern of large, complex, heterogeneous day to day living (*Tradition and Modernity* x). His sensitiviy towards the dangers that neocolonialism might pose against African nationalism in the postcolonial period impels him to assert that: "what may be true is that in many instances the different cultural forms or practices can be said to be essentially variations on the same theme [as] a number of scholars recognize the existence of common features or commonalities among the cultures of Africa" (*Tradition and Modernity* xii). He identifies the problematic relation between ethnicity and nationalism as the bane of nation-building and projects as a solution the elimination of "communocultural conflicts" and the transfer of ethnic or local loyalties to the new central government (*Tradition and Modernity* viii). While the questions of ethnicity and tribalism had already entered the Africanist debate by 1997, Gyekye's that is an indication that their current handling had advanced beyond considering African nationalism and was focused more on neocolonialism – probably a bigger and more urgent menace to the survival of Africanism at this later time. It is in recognition of this need to tackle issues in keeping with changing challenges that Mphahlele's essays of the nineties develop the concept of African humanism with notable sensitivity to the theoretical context in which complexity of current daily spheres had to be addressed with commensurately complex theories (in the way Gyekye proposes above). There is no doubt that African theorists of the period including 1997 acknowledged the complexity of modern life that any philosophy on the condition of being African in the modern context had to address. When Teffo wrote in 1997 about the dynamic religious pluralism characterising the African's life at the time, he was highlighting the same complexity of modern day living which increased the challenges facing African theorists. Teffo (1997) illustrated that for the African of the northern part of South Africa, for example, communion with ancestors, offerings to traditional deitities like Kgobe, and original ideas of being spiritually elevated co-exist in a dialectical relationship with Christian ideas informed by western thinking.

With the scrupulous approach Mphahlele acquired during this period (described above), the African humanist alignment with postcolonial attitudes of demanding self-definition rather than definition by the "centre" becomes evident in his writing, as well as

banishment in day to day living of objective self-absencing. In “Knowledge, Its Nature and Role in the Process of Change” (1997), African humanism informs the whole paper, yet it is referred to in an applied way rather than starkly – including the point that African and European humanism parted ways in an earlier period (167). Expressions that – without direct use of the word “African humanism” – yet assert the concept as an idea are a significant symptom of Mphahlele’s discursive style evident from the late nineties onward. The postcolonial writer Bart Moore-Gilbert’s essays of 1997 dwelling primarily on instances of “absence” in the life of the “other” (*Postcolonial Theory* 114 – 115), can be seen as a theoretical formulation of observations and vantage points similar to those of Mphahlele and other African postcolonial writers of this period. The critic Gaurav Desai referred in 1998 to “the choice between an area studies focus such as African studies or Asian studies and a spatiotemporal one such as postcolonial studies” increasingly becoming a “redundant one” (“Postcolonial Criticism in an African(ist) Frame” 217). This is acknowledgement on her part that issues handled in this period by African intellectuals were as demanding as those challenging the attention of globally acknowledged postcolonialists to such an extent that the distintion between Africanist and postcolonial writing was blurred.

In a 1998 essay Mphahlele demonstrates his alignment with the way Black Consciousness thinking turns historical memory effectively into a self-defining tool. Typical to his polemical maturity of this period, Mphahlele in the 1998 essay uses his sustained critique of Black Consciousness as a lever towards spelling out yet another significant feature of his concept of African humanism: “a heightened consciousness of history … [as] a concrete experience” which Black Consciousness and African humanism commonly “seek to comprehend … as cause, effect, aftermath and sets of resonance” (“Your History” 158). Mphahlele’s mention of “resonance” is an indication that he does not incorporate threads of the intellectual debates of his time without dialectically adapting them to the plane of his concept of African humanism. This is made clear by the fact that the notion of “resonance” is not an integral part of Black Consciousness theory, yet he describes one of the aspects of this discursive formation by using a term that is inherent in his own philosophy of African humanism. After broadly pointing in preceing decades to the need among Africans to theorise towards a crystallised idea of their own brand of postcolonial nationalism, in the 1998 essay he spells out the distinctive features of the kind of African nationalism he envisages as a future part of African humanist lifestyles that would successfully preserve the identity of Africans. Remarks such as the following testify that is is a nationalism shorn of its European, capitalist or Marxist-Leninist hue, whose distinctness needs to be recognised:

> Black nationalism, otherwise called African nationalism, or Black Consciousness, are not dead issues in South Africa … riddled though they are with massive ambivalence among us … [and complicated by] concepts such as ‘reconciliation’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘non-racialism’ and ‘socialism’, which are being bandied about … [and serve as] comforting terms that postpone indefinitely issues concerned with identity – being African beyond geographic location, reconciliation between nationalism, socialism and non-racialism, integration and so on”. (“Your History” 175-176)

To refer as in this quotation to "concepts such as 'reconciliation', 'forgiveness', 'non-racialism' and 'socialism'" as "comforting terms" within the context of the struggle of South African blacks to free themselves from colonial oppression is to allude suspiciously to subtle operations of the goals of a nationalism that is European and could neo-colonially thwart the intentions of African nationalism to achieve liberation from colonialism ("Your History" 176). That this is so is confirmed when Mphahlele mentions what he regards as genuine intermediate goals of African nationalism intending victory in the struggle for liberation as "issues concerned with identity – being African beyond geographic location, reconciliation between nationalism, socialism and non-racialism, integration and so on" ("Your History" 176). For Mphahlele to pronounce as urgent the need to reconcile nationalism, socialism and nonracialism is an indication that these have been the focus of theoretical analysis among African nationalist intellectuals and that failure to refine and harmonise them could hamper the cause of full liberation.

The many-sided nature of Mphahlele's concern with issues drawing the attention of postcolonial theorists on a world scale includes his constant description of the way self-constitution can be achieved – using the postcolonial lives of people he desribes as belonging to the African humanist category as his vantage point. Perhaps as a reminder that African theories of all varieties throughout the stages of history enter contemporary debates with an Afrocentric theoretical attitude, in an interview with Samin (published in *Research in African Literatures)* Mphahlele emphasises that the discourse of African humanism is "opposed to European influence" (182). In keeping with his sanguine sense of the future of those he describes as belonging to cultures that broadly constitute peoples practising African humanist lifestyles, Mphahlele proceeds to pinpoint that his African brand of humanism responds to and is threatened by modernism, but that some aspects of it stubbornly survive and seem unlikely ever to be eroded (*Research in African Literatures* 186). In responding to the theoretical environment of 1998, Mphahle advanced his more recent evaluation of negritude. That negritude was still topical in 1998 is discernible in other intellectual contributions of the same year such as expository essays by Ashcroft et al. These writers concern themselves with negritude in their 1998 text, although they state that it was a dominant ideology just before and after the Second World War (*Key Concepts* 161).

Mphahlele's sensitivity concerning ignorance of the complex ways in which intellectual writing and political activism relate is revealed in the following words:

> The general correspondences suggested here between the two black worlds [of America and South Africa] revolve around black consciousness (lower case 'c'). We in South Africa lost our ability to deal with our reality beyond white avagery, protest and the mounting institutional violence that resulted … Understandably, preoccupations with mass rallies and guerilla activism sapped our energies and left us little which could elevate our arts above the 'freedom agenda', a programme that would seek to send our bleeding words into the battlefield several times over. ("Your History" 176)

Mphahlele's emphasis in this quotation on the "c" in "black consciousness" being in lower case testifies to what he set out to define as African humanism having been (through the history of black thought the world over) free of political narrowing and

oversimplification. More importantly, Mphahlele's brand of humanism is tied to his claiming a distinctive identity that includes Africans on the continent and in the diaspora, differing from "other cultural clusters" and counteracting westernisation in a way that enables this philosophy nevertheless efficiently and creatively to cope with the ever-changing challenges of modernity ("Notes Towards" 135).

Mphahlele's accent on history as "a concrete experience" ("Your History" 158) highlights one other area in which African humanism differs from Black Consciousness. The latter is generally criticized for emphasising mainly the psychological state of Africanness as opposed to the former's commensurate inclination to tackle matters of praxis. In the religious sphere Mphahlele reiterated his conviction in another 1998 essay about the bent of African philosophical views towards practicality rather than abstract contemplation, describing the modern African humanist as practising "a duality of belief: the Christian and hard-core traditional that resists exorcism" ("Colonial Conquest" 255). Improved analyses of the apparently perennial idea of Black Consciousness as well as of the exact nature of abrogated western Christianity in later years including 1998 – highlighting "concrete experience" as a keystone to what he sees as a sound theory circumscribing the identity of Africans – show that Mphahlele was continuing to grapple with the challenge of achieving a better grasp of negritude. Because history as a source of nativist memory is considered a motivating factor in negritude (as explained when this theory was discussed earlier in this chapter), African humanism and negritude commonly conform to nativism, but to differing extents and for different reasons. This is in addition to other subtle affinities between the two that have been made evident in earlier paragraphs of this section. For the reason that African and global postcolonial theorists were commonly faced with the task of interrogating the complex context of the late nineties to the advantage of humankind, both Mphahlele ("Your History" 167) and Ashcroft et al. (*Key Concepts* 161) in their 1998 essays pay homage to the positive contributions of negritude – in a manner confirming how each sees their relation to views of others regarding the common task of describing what challenges society is facing and what it should do about them.

Gikandi (1999) records Mphahlele's appropriation of the aesthetic in such a way that it no longer perpetuates hegemonic discourse. By doing this (as Gikandi observes), Mphahlele re-aligns the aesthetic towards relevance in as far as current existential African realities are concerned, for example the role of art in replacing traces and symbols of colonial influence in the cultures of Africans. On this issue, Gikandi remarks that Mphahlele uniquely enunciates and practices an affirmation that the relationship between art and the politics of everyday life is a complex one (*Africa and the Idea of the Aesthetic* 3). Hence Gikandi's observation on Mphahlele's aesthetics: that Mphahlele holds a work of art to be "implicitly bound up with political practices but … not … reduc[able] to them" (3).

Positive results of such a seizure of agency are highlighted by Gikandi's observation (in 1999) that Mphahlele's idiosyncratic handling of the politics of the aesthetic led to American and European views of the aesthetic being compelled to acknowledge the soundness of African thought and practice in a progressively more objective manner, as

race-related thought evolved from the Enlightenment to the present (3). Gikandi illustrates that Mphahlele's handling of the politics of the aesthetic differs from that of Europe not only due to his private idiosyncracies, but more importantly also due to his acceptance and transcendence of the Afrocentric trend of his times. If active Africanisation of aesthetics is accepted as a cultural act and as learned (according to Mphahlele), such learning could not exclude learning from contemporary Afrocentric writers like Ngugi and Achebe. That he sees this as a cultural and thus dynamic act that escapes entrapment in the static traditional past reveals his able circumvention of problems that the narrower Afrocentric interpretation of reality might otherwise invite. The non-homogenising nature of Mphahlele's construct has already been shown by his use of the term "African" to group together a wide spectrum of African cultures in the same cluster, or (in Ruth Obee's 1999 formulation) his illustration of African humanism as "[an] ethos that binds African cultures regardless of locale or ethnicity" ("The Unbroken Song" 189). The terms "Pan African" and "Black Consciousness" are thus used interchangeably by Mphahlele and other African thinkers such as Gikandi. While they focus more on strengthening black brotherhood and sisterhood across the African continent up to the realm of the African American and other diasporic dispersions, Afrocentrism clarifies itself as concerned more with correcting conceptual and theoretical misperceptions of Africanness by hegemonic discourse. However, there are differences in the degree to which hard-core Afrocentrists on the one hand and on the other the accommodative ones such as Gikandi and Mphahlele with his broader concept of African humanism embrace Pan Africanism or Black Consciousness.

In the expository writing of the 1990s, assertion of African humanism as a distinctive consciousness that deserves recognition in its own right is most intense. Interestingly, however, there is an intensification discernible from the 1980s onwards in the frequency with which the term "African humanism" occurs in Mphahlele's essays. The essays "Notes Towards an Introduction to African Humanism: A Personal Inquiry" (1992), "African Humanism and the Corporate World" (1994), and "Your History Demands Your Heartbeat: Historical Survey of the Encounter Between Africans and African Americans" (1998) assert both the distinct and immanent nature of African humanism among those the environment has shaped to possess this consciousness and way of life, while exhibiting the highest frequency in direct use of the term "African humanism".

But beyond the 1990s, Mphahlele's *modus operandi* in referring at one time explicitly and at another implicitly to aspects of African humanism tilts more towards subtler assertions of African humanism instead of more overt articulation. This he achieves by either invoking its informing presence in what is depicted or analysed, or by hinting at its imposing presence in applied terms. It comes as no surprise, considering the progressive shift of tone, when Mphahlele declares in the year 2000 that "African literature of French expression has not always lived at the philosophical level" ("A Dreamer" 264). By this Mphahlele means that negritude has been broad enough to impact on all aspects of the African's life to such an extent that it led to works of art that articulated counterdiscourse and exercised the agency to project their own praxis and world-view. This resembles an aspect of Mphahlele's thinking which the critic Reingard Nethersole emphasised in 2000: "cultural memory for Mphahlele", she says, is in him "a clarion call for self-affirmation

… [that aids] the recognition of a plurality of cultures of equal worth, something which cultural as opposed to economic globalisation seeks to foster in the idea of multiculturism" ("Places of the Past" 509, 513). What this critic means is that Mphahlele perceives recognition of the distinctive qualities of any cultural cluster (such as the identity he calls African humanism) as a *sine qua non* for reaching a strong multicultural globalism. This does not differ from Mphahlele's sense of an organic harmony within African societies. His demonstrated view is that the stronger the individual building blocks of the overarching social structure, the more perfect will be the bigger formation.

Indeed, the substantive form in which Africans can contribute to global solidarity on various contemporary fronts is the general concern of African theorists of this period. Ekwe-Ekwe (writing in his 2001 book *African Literature in Defence of History*) comments on Africa's participation in multinational formations such as the Commonwealth. He defines Africans in non-essentialist terms that emphasise moulding by the environment. That is why he envisages participation of Africans in global formations against the backdrop of their having been united within the historical context of colonisation, enslavement and displacement as well as pillage and plunder of their continent by a common, cataclysmic, historical phenomenon which he has called "the African holocaust" – greater in size than the Jewish holocaust, yet deliberately obliterated in the chronicling of the history of mankind (*African Literature* 134). Ekwe-Ekwe firmly discourages the submerging of African interests, with countries historically known to have been involved in colonialism and imperialism continuing to deny the dignity of Africans through economic domination. He prefers the involvement of Africans in contesting of conditions which multinational hegemonic formations lay down for Africa – with the façade of sympathy for Africans while in fact perpetuating exploitation by means of neocolonialism. In this 2001 book, Ekwe-Ekwe argues for the preservation of Africans' distinctive world-view by insisting that as they join the global society, Africans must remain themselves culturally. He asserts that "the full operation of the ethos and institutions of dual-sex complementarity has always defined the central tenets of African social existence" (136). Mphahlele has been shown (earlier on in this chapter of the study) to regard the notion of women as revered and valued pillars of the family unit as one of the core aspects of his concept of African humanism. Ekwe-Ekwe's observation of the "treasured position of the family in African community affairs" (136) focuses on the notion of family as much as Mphahlele has been shown to do, albeit in his own way (as shown).

Ignorance of the distinctive vantage point of African humanist existence may lead to inadvertent self-contradictions by some well-meaning Afrocentric writers in their attempts to analyse Afrocentric fiction, including that of Mphahlele, by using, for example, feminist criticism. An example is Maqagi (2001). Maqagi accurately observes that the women portrayed by Mphahlele in *Down Second Avenue* and "Mrs Plum" display an agency which enables them dynamically to articulate their own mode of presence within urban African communities in transition (215). Maqagi premises such an observation on the assumption that African traditional society is inherently paternalistic. That this is Maqagi's assumption is indicated by her declarations such as "the inadequacy of past patriarchal significations" (206); "past patriarchal maxims which become

'disjunct and displaced'" (207); and "transform the culturally sanctioned [chauvinistic] power relations" (208).

Maqagi's description of the agency of the female characters as a self-defining reaction to the "inadequacy of past patriarchal significations" can be reconciled with Mphahlele's statement in the above quotation that describes women in patriarchal societies as "agents of power" or culturally-held preservers of communal self-sufficiency. But such a reconciliation of Mphahlele and Magaqi's view of women is possible only when it is borne in mind that the latter's use of the idea of a patriarchal society is conventional – hence, at odds with Mphahlele's pruning of the term of reprehensible male chauvinism. Maqagi's reference to "past patriarchal maxims" as becoming "disjunct" and "displaced" alongside the female character's self-assertive subjectivity predicates the positive agency of the character against a suppossedly flawed traditional African mindset. Although paternalism is not among the evils Mphahlele lists as marring African humanism, Maqagi equates the patriarchy of some African societies with oppression of women, as the above quote illustrates. A close scrutiny of Maqagi's essay also reveals that she homogenises traditional African cultures as having invariably been patriarchal, thus extending the unfortunate denigration of traditional African cultures to indict the entire African world. Mphahlele's female characters' appropriate agency can alternatively be seen as a transformation of society *by way of* African humanism expanding towards a greater welcoming of individuality, perhaps as a way of appropriating to its own advantage the inevitably hybrid life in the urban settings of Pretoria and Johannesburg. Individuality that contributes to the welfare of community has never been taboo in African humanist societies as conceptualised by Mphahlele. Maqagi's feminist analysis of the behaviour of the character Karabo in "Mrs Plum" (discussed above) should be understood as concurring with Mphahlele that women are powerful members of African communities, without concentrating overly on the differing angles from which Mphahlele and she appreciate the central role of women in such a society.

It is interesting how African theoretical developments in 2002 make references to the way Africans have abrogated western Christianity. This is an aspect of African cultural clusters which drew Mphahlele's attention since earlier decades to such an extent that he described the precise way in which it merges with other features of his concept of African humanism. According to extreme Afrocentrists discussing African religious practices in 2002, Christianity, like humanity as a whole, originated in Africa long before the birth of Jesus. Hence statements like this one made in 2002 in Dumisane Hlophe's newspaper article: "The truth is that Africa gave the world religion. The truth is that Africa gave the world Christianity itself. The truth is that Christianity in Africa is not an imported religion, but has its roots in this African motherland" (9). Such writers and their disciples up to this day maintain that Christianity in its unadulterated form has always formed the crux of religious variants in the unified diversity of African cultures. Mphahlele, without being outspoken about it, does not seem to see the need to comment on his concept of African humanism as it survived during the periods covered by the theses of the extremist Afrocentric writers such as the ones cited above.

That the documentation of Africanist modes of adapting western Christianity constituted part of the 2002 Africanist debate is revealed by the statement in 2002 in a *City Press* newspaper article, “Moria: a journey of hope, salvation”. In this article, a young black journalist by the name of Lucas Ledwaba details why he comes to the philosophical conclusion that the Easter pilgrimage to the ZCC headquarters of Moria “is a journey of prayer, of praise and healing” (17). Ledwaba’s article is a crucial index of discussions of African religious practice around 2002. In “The ZCC – where Africa meets God” Ledwaba relates that according to the Zion Christian Church or ZCC, the waters of Kwenane river are understood to be sacred; prayer sessions are interpreted into seven major African languages including Herero and Shona; the church recognises the African cultural beliefs of ancestor worship and the church supports peace in the land. Ledwaba confirms the Africanness of these denominational modifications of western Christianity when he writes that “the ZCC founder Engenas Lekganyane was one of the first Africans to break away from the mainstream ecumenical movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s” (17). It should be borne in mind that by 2002 Mphahlele had acknowledged the positive role of an appropriation of religious worship that is consistent with the character of his concept of African humanism, as practised by African Initiated Churches such as Lekganyane’s ZCC, in the following words:

> Barring the psychological aberration that sometimes reveals itself in the Zionist and messianic sects, I have a sneaking admiration for the latter. They have tried to carve a corner for themselves where they could indepently create a simple kind of worship, free of the tyranny of theology and other intellectual trappings. (“From Dependence” 201).

What coincides with Mphahlele’s statement that African Initiated Churches like the ZCC have their origins in an African religious nationalism bound (by implication) to be informed by dialectical mixes of western Christianity and traditional African religions is illustrated in the same article when Ledwaba proceeds to state that “the rest of the night on Good Friday and Saturday is spent singing while congregations from different areas and districts take turns performing heroics with the famous *mokhukhu* dance” (17). Such dancing, as both art and prayer (which in Mphahlele’s view of African humanism are inseparable), can only be interpreted as the uniquely Africanist tendency (associated with Mphahlele’s concept of African humanism) of practising a celebration of life. It will be interesting to screen Mphahlele’s narrative writings for representations of such a religious nationalism as the study sketches above, and to investigate whether they represent the consciousness Mphahlele associates with an African humanist agency – of abrogating social norms propagated by the “centre”, as well as accommodating an appropriate ambivalence.

Among the most recent Africanist writings Mphahlele responds to is a newspaper article by Mazrui (2002). In the article “Global Africa requires our focus”, Mazrui calls for a shift from Afrocentrism to Multiculturalism. He does this without denying the need for and importance of an Afrocentric attitude among African intellectuals. That Mazrui is among the Africanists sharing a common understanding of and belief in Afrocentrism with Mphahlele, is indicated in statements such as the following: “What negritude is to the black poet, afro-centricity is to the black scholar. They are a celebration of africanity” (“Global Africa” 17). To Mazrui, negritude and Afrocentrism are, generally,

both broad and effective enough to be equated with what Mphahlele has conceptualised as African humanism. Mphahlele is known for being wary of equating the content and scope of negritude and African humanism in the way Mazrui implicitly does with his statement above. Moreover, Mazrui (unlike Mphahlele) separates the creative writer and theorist's roles in shaping society.

Mazrui confirms (above) that his vision of Afrocentricity takes into account the geographical distribution of Africans beyond the continent of Africa, without explicitly recognising the non-racist aspect as Mphahlele does. The similarity between Mazrui and Mphahlele's conceptions of the geographical parameters of peoples who are included in the notion of "Africans" is made clear in Mphahlele's description of Africans as various societies (signified by the term "cultural clusters") occupying space on the African continent and beyond, in the following words: "we are that part of Africa … that displays features suggesting a unity of its cultures [which] confers upon us the right to claim an identity that distinguishes us and the African diaspora from other cultural clusters" ("Notes towards" 135). Mphahlele's outright characterisation of African humanism as nonracist is brought out in his remark that the African humanist "stands right at the crossroads of African Humanism and Western culture, but is fully in charge of the synthesis" ("Notes towards" 141).

It should thus be worthwhile (in order for this study to clarify Mphahlele's concept of African humanism by means of juxtaposing him with other African theorists) to trace the representations of African humanism in his narrative writings in a way that probes the extent to which he departs from solutions such as Multiculturalism – suggested by Mazrui as being the proper goal in the further evolution of Pan Africanist thinking. Mazrui describes Multiculturalism as "pluralistic, seeking to represent diverse cultures: latino (including chicano of course), Asian, African, native American and women [sic], so multiculturalism is pluralistic in that sense" ("Global Africa" 17). In the 2004 article, Mazrui goes on to urge Africans and other subalterns to form an affiliative front in their struggle for self-definition, one that encompasses other marginalised peoples of the world, including women of all cultures ("Global Africa" 17).

After clarifying what he means by "Multiculturalism", Mazrui hastens to promote it as a better solution to the challenges faced by the African of today than Afrocentrism, in the following words: "Emphasising afro-centricism [sic] alone cannot challenge western cultural hegemony. It must be tackled by an alliance of all other cultures threatened by Western hegemony" ("Global Africa" 17). Mazrui here summarily regards women of all cultures as one cluster of peoples discriminated against on the basis of sex, similarly to the way some feminists see women as one social group that is marginalised by sexist practices irrespective of variations between cultures, thus needing to form solidarity with whoever is combating any kind of hegemonic subversion. It does seem to be Mphahlele's view that the adoption of African humanism would change social behaviour among Africans to ensure women being treated with the dignity they deserve. Any multiculturism that blurs distinctive African identity in order to lump women or other sections of society together in a transcultural category of a section of the globally oppressed is not commensurate with Mphahlele's view that distinctive identities such as

African humanism should not be immolated at the altar of globalisation. The nuanced manner in which Mphahlele defines his concept of African humanism will be shown (as in the present comparison with Mazrui) as *ipso facto* justifying his criticism of other theorists' views on Africanness, Afrocentrism and other related ideas. There is no doubt that (in the same way as Mazrui is shown to do with his concept of Multiculturalism) Mphahlele's African humanism is concerned not only with what happens at the present, but with its adaptation to future demands as well.

As a way of clarifying the concept more intensively, it will be probed how compatible Mphahlele's African humanism is in its current shape, with the proposed shift from polarised Afrocentrism as put forward (above) by Mazrui. Mazrui's and Mphahlele's notions of Afrocentrism can be seen as largely similar – although the Afrocentrism accepted by Mphahlele is more conservative with regard to the appropriateness of abandoning it as a strategy bound up with historical circumstances, while Mazrui's is more radical in advocating such a shift as a means of countering a distortion of African identity by dominant discourse. It is also possible that the textual analysis of Mphahlele's narrative writings may reveal an affinity with evolutionary views expressed by some African writers – views discordant with that of Mazrui on Afrocentrism which accord better with the relatively more cautious yet self-confident bent of Mphahlele's position. An example from the popular press expressing views similar to Mphahlele's on multiculturism, published in *City Press*, is an opinion piece on whether Africans should discard distinctly African cultural practices or should cling to them as they evolve amidst current existential challenges, by the journalist Khathu Mamaila. Mamaila's 2004 *City Press* article ("Gacaca: where grass is green and justice is seen to be done") explains that the modes of consciousness and motives underlying the genocide in Rwanda have led the Africans inhabiting that part of the continent to realise that the current form of the (colonial) legal system cannot cope with an atrocity such as occurred in Rwanda (19). This has led Rwandese Africans to rethink the direction their 'modernisation' should take in relation to African humanist consciousness.

They resuscitated long-lost traditional custom called "Gacaca" in order to deal with the crisis – while multiculturally-inclined western legal methods have failed under these circumstances, as Mamaila reports (19). "Gacaca" is described by Mamaila as a pre-colonial cultural practice of the Rwandans in which participants gathered under a tree in their village to resolve disputes between members of the community. Due to the written form of evidence in the revived and evolved form of Gacaca, the judge in this practice is now required to be a person with secondary education, Mamaila notes (19). This is in addition to the pre-colonial criteria by which judges are appointed by the community and should display leadership qualities. "Lawyers are not allowed to represent suspects", who have to defend themselves and are allowed to call witnesses to testify in support of their version of the story (19). The hybrid nature of the practice of Gacaca in which a traditionally constituted structure takes advantage of literacy and qualifications obtained through western modes of educational practice is in tune with Mphahlele's view of African humanism as an accommodative consciousness and practice. That this is the case is thrown in sharp relief by Mamaila's lauding of this adapted traditional practice in modern Rwanda as not only successful in resolving the social crisis of a genocide, but

also (as by implication constrasting properly and improperly managed hybridity) of the continuing need for African humanist vision. Mamaila depicts the practice as succeeding in resolving problems where a western institution not carefully balanced by hybridisation fusing it with Africanism has proven ineffectual. Mamaila's conclusion is in support of the appreciative or conservative Afrocentrism writings such as Mphahlele's posit as an appropriate tool with which Africans can defy cultural extinction.

What this means is that internationalism/global solidarity should not come before the consolidation of a national consciousness. This near-quote is meant to invoke Fanon conceiving of Afrocentrism as an indispensable building block or stage on the journey towards globalisation. According to views such as these by Mamaila, efforts by writers like Mphahlele to define and assert a distinctively African way of thinking and living are worthwhile in their own right and should not be characterised as ignoring the global terrain.

An essay of Mphahlele's that appeared in 2004 seems to be a more soundly etched recapitulation of certain aspects of his concept of African humanism. In "Different Times Demand, and Bring, Different Answers: Random Thoughts on Intellectuals", Mphahlele addresses confederality with African and world intellectuals differently from fellow African writers such as Ekwe-Ekwe, by highlighting global approaches while affirming the inclusivity of his concept of African humanism (340). He confirms in the same essay that he is first a philosopher informed by the distinctive African humanist way of interrogating reality before he is a fiction writer (339), much as he confirms the non-elitism of African humanism (344). He re-affirms the adaptablity of his philosophy of African humanism in the following words: "Indeed different times will always demand, and bring, different answers: a chastening lesson to those who continually strive to live outside of history, heedless of the human drama" ("Different Times" 345). Questions worth addressing include considerations whether or not African humanism is at present ready (as it reshapes itself according to contingent demands) to converge with the future envisaged by the "Multiculturalism" referred to by Mazrui above, and whether it will ever be necessary to abandon its strictly Afrocentric perspective (borne out by Mphahlele's words "in its own right" in the quotation above), *or* whether it will eventually coincide in outlook with what Mazrui defines as "Multiculturalism".

Gaylard's 2004 essay contributes to the clarification of ideas that I demonstrate in this study to be closely linked with Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism, as when he states that *ubuntu* (in Nguni languages like isiZulu and isiXhosa) or *botho* (in Sesotho, Setswana or Sesotho sa Leboa) "is used to characterise the norms and values which suppossedly inhere in traditional African society" ("Welcome" 76). From Mphahlele's characterisation of the concept of African humanism quoted so far, it is clear that norms and values within the framework of traditional African cultures are building blocks of the concept of "African humanism". For this reason, writers like Gaylard make the meaning of African humanism more lucid by explaining what its constituents mean, without necessarily using the broader term "African humanism" itself – as Mphahlele has decided to define the more adequate notion of the often loosely used term "*botho/ubuntu*" in English consistently throughout his later expository writing. However, it is a feature of

Mphahlele’s post-nineties essays (as this 2004 one) to make no direct reference to “African humanism” or forthright characterisation of what it is, despite an assertion of its aspects permeating the text underneath the surface of such expository essays.

The crux of what Mphahlele designates by his concept of African humanism has now been outlined as its development since 1949 (when he published “The Unfinished Story”) up to the present has been traced. Such cumulative clarification of what Mphahlele’s philosophy of African humanism entails recognised the context of the range of ‘problems’ or challenges its definition faced. The approach adopted was that of probing how Mphahlele’s concept of African humanism became more lucid and nuanced as it was tested historically by Mphahlele himself against the shifting settings and positions of fellow theorists. What links African writers cited in this section to Mphahlele is a common concern with what distinguishes Africans from other human groupings. This is irrespective of whether or not these African writers discern the veiled contradiction in adhering to western terms and concepts while attempting to characterise African experience – which may defy such foreign tools of definition. In my view, analysing Mphahlele’s concept of African humanism within the theoretical context within which it was conceived, asserted and defended is particularly suited to examining the validity of his concept of African humanism as a substantive theory, because Mphahlele sees this construct as a tool with which African humanist cultural clusters are equipped to resolve existential challenges in their day to day living.

1.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND APPARATUS

Mphahlele's concept of African humanism was since its inception (when he wrote his earliest theoretical expressions of his idea) developed within a context where other writers were expressing and had addressed related, contemporary issues – to some of which he responded explicitly or implicitly in his own writings. For this reason, I do not only use Mphahlele's own theoretical terms in my analyses of his literary works in tracing the development of his representations of his concept of African humanism, but also employ concepts invented and perspectives adopted by other theorists, who interpreted reality within the same historical context.

The theoretical apparatus in respect of which Mphahlele's fictional articulation of his concept of African humanism will be analysed in this thesis includes the overarching concept of "postcolonial writing". According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, postcolonial writing is the collective noun used to refer to whatever national literatures have emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and have asserted themselves by "foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising their difference from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (*Empire Writes Back* 2). The three writers go on to explain that "implications for theory in postcolonial writing are that theories of style and genre, assumptions about the universal features of language, epistemologies and value systems are all radically questioned by the practices of post-colonial writing" (11). Some of the salient effects of postcolonialism have been the emergence of noticeable indigenous theories which emerged as a result of the demise of imperialism from a new ("post-colonial") view of all experience as "uncentred, pluralistic, and multifarious" (*Empire Writes Back* 12). As Mphahlele wrote all his fiction before the advent of a democratic order in South Africa, he was impelled to struggle intellectually with matters of psychological, material and spiritual freedom that came to expression internationally under the literary and theoretical rubric of postcolonialism.

Notions of culture expressed by various theorists are used in this thesis as primary tools by means of which to trace Mphahlele's concept of African humanism in his literary compositions. This is so because culture, seen as repeated patterns of social conduct, is central to Mphahlele's concept of African humanism, which he has described (in terms that invoke culture) as a consciousness and way of life (Mphahlele, "Humanism and Corporate World" 128). When two or more cultures meet, the interaction among the differing social groups naturally leads to those cultures being re-shaped in certain directions that favour certain groups and disadvantages others because of the balance or imbalance in power between or among them. Concepts used in such discussions inevitably include dominant attitudes or dominant discourses that have their origin in the aftermath of the historical phenomena of imperialism and colonisation. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that "discourse" is a term traceable to the philosopher Foucault, used in postolonial criticism to refer to "a system of statements within which the world can be known" or "the complex of signs and practices which organizes social existence and social reproduction" (Ashcroft, Griffiths an Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 70, 71). So great is the impact of discourse that "it is through discourse itself that the world is brought into

being" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 71). It is in this Foucauldian sense that I use the term "discourse" throughout my dissertation. But it is to hegemonic "discourse" that I most frequently revert. The term "hegemony" was invented and asserted "in the 1930s by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 116) and refers to a process whereby

> Domination is … exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media, by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. (*Key Concepts* 116)

Hegemonic discourse thus means domination of discourse by subtle means that give the false impression of the dominant way of thinking as taking care of the interests of the oppressed while actually not caring for them to the same extent that it looks after the interests of those in the ranks of the ones in control (or who have the monopoly of power). It is to hegemonic discourse Mphahlele reacts in positing his concept of African humanism.

It is the hybridity of the colonised that may render them vulnerable to manipulations of hegemonic discourse. The concept of hybridity is attributed, among others, to the theorist Homi K. Bhabha and refers to "colonizer/colonized relations [that] stress their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 118). Subjectivity means "peoples' perceptions of their identities and their capacities to resist the conditions of their domination, their 'subjection'" (Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 219). I refer throughout this study to 'management of hybridity', by which I mean the way postcolonial Africans – in pursuit of whose empowerment Mphahlele devised his concept of African humanism – succeed or fail (exercising their inevitably hybrid postcolonial psyche) to attain subjectivity. It is in this potentially empowering sense of hybridity ascribed to Bhabha (and developed later by writers such as Young) that I use the terms "hybridity" and 'managing hybridity' in this thesis. I understand manifestations of hybridity, *inter alia*, as "assertions of national culture and of pre-colonial traditions [that] have played an important role in creating **anti-colonial** discourse" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Conncepts* 121). The affirming effects of hybridity result in a situation in which

> the hybrid nature of post-colonial culture assert[s] a different model for resistance, locating this in the subversive **counter-discursive** practices implicit in the colonial ambivalence itself and so undermining the very basis on which imperialist and colonialist discourse raises its claims of superiority. (*Key Concepts* 119)

Counterdiscursive practices are actions that constitute a "symbolic resistance" to the threats of dominant discourse (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 56). Ambivalence (referred to in the quotation above) is behaviour resulting from the colonised's hybridisation by virtue of their combining indigenous cultural values with those imbibed from the cultures of colonisers. Ambivalence implies mimicry. Mimicry refers to the "threatening" nature of ambivalence acquired by the colonised after decolonisation, in that it threatens hegemony or colonial dominance by its "never being

very far from mockery" of the culture of the coloniser (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 139).

One of the many ways in which anticolonial discourse was reinforced was by means of abrogation. In abrogating some cultural implements of the coloniser, the colonised "subvert[s] and adapt[s] dominant languages and signifying practices", in the process of which he or she "reverses the orientation for power in the relationship" governing the co-existence of the two groups of people (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 57, 229). But in postcolonial theory it is significantly acknowledged that those whose cultural embodiments are abrogated counterdiscursively by the colonised also gain in such reclamations of subjectivity by those they colonised. They benefit because their affected cultural instruments are also broadened in their content after they have appropriated some cultural wealth from colonised cultures. A careful reading of what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain (in *Key Concepts* 57, 229) as the double-edged impact of hybridisation reveals that both the coloniser and colonised gain through ambivalence resulting from their cultural interaction – on the part of the coloniser by means of appropriation and for the colonised by means of abrogation. Because of the abundance of concepts defining differences and modes of interaction emanating from different cultural perspectives, describing these necessitates the use of the overarching ideas of Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism. Eurocentrism and Afrocentrism are terms used in postcolonial theory to describe approaches that emanate from particular cultural vantage points in the interpretation of reality. Eurocentrism is the "conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the normal, the natural or the universal" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 90-91). With Eurocentrism referring to the attitude of looking at life from the angle of European cultures and tastes and Afrocentrism being its obverse, Afrocentrism means (as explained elsewhere in this study) contemplating reality from an Africanist cultural point of view.

I use terms and perspectives by means of which the theorist Frantz Fanon expressed himself on issues of culture and the effects of cultural interaction, including the cultural intercourse of the broad cultural group known as the coloniser and another broad cultural group known as the colonised. Fanon focuses on the cultural perspective in detailing the weapons with which the oppressed can overcome their oppression. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) Fanon highlights the centrality of culture and cultural expression in the emotional and physical redemption of the colonised, in the following words: "… this passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era finds its legitimate reason in the anxiety shared by native intellectuals to shrink away from that Western culture in which they all risk being swamped" (Fanon, "On National Culture" 169). This, as Fanon observes, results (on the literary scene) in "the poets of Negro-ism [opposing] the idea of an old Europe to a young Africa" (171).

Mphahlele recognises culture as central to the self-emancipation of oppressed Africans. Differences between Fanon and Mphahlele's view of culture as an aspect of their respective theories do not negate the fact that both these writers see culture as a constituent and focus of their theories for analysing society. For Mphahlele to have

proposed African humanism as an appropriate weapon against apartheid's physical and spiritual degradation of South Africans indicates that he does not believe (like Fanon) that "in the colonial situation, culture … falls away and dies" ("On National Culture" 197). While Fanon admits only rather grudgingly that culture may transform dormant or passive customs and traditions to grapple actively with the present circumstances of society, Mphahlele's conception of culture in its adaptive fluidity perceives it as central to the survival and the recovery of Africans from colonial loss. He does not concur with a view like Fanon's that "you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but … in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation" ("On National Culture" 179, 180). Unlike Mphahlele, who emphasises cultural consciousness as one of the central ingredients of African humanism and as an efficacious weapon against some effects of apartheid dehumanisation, Fanon sees only armed struggle as primarily necessary to counter the destructive blows of colonisation – rather than cultural consciousness, despite the beneficial restoration of historical pride and the restoration of hope among the oppressed that a national culture can provide in the face of despair (Fanon, "On National Culture" 169, 179). A people's distinctive culture, as Fanon sees it, gives clear meaning to social phenomena. He detests facile analyses of social phenomena that may result in situations where "The art of politics is simply transformed into the art of war; the political militant is the rebel. To fight the war and to take part in politics: the two things become one and the same" ("Spontaneity" 105). Fanon's emphasis on the detailed, circumscribed distinctiveness of a people's culture points to his preference for thoroughness in social analysis as opposed to glossing over aspects of society hurriedly in order to arrive at ill-conceived proposals for its emancipation. It is such simplistic observations of society that may regrettably lead to the confounding of as distinctly different an activity as "fight[ing] the war" with "tak[ing] part in politics" ("Spontaneity" 105). It is such a blurring of distincitions in the analysis of culture in all its dynamism that Fanon abhors.

Fellow Africanist theorists share Fanon's perception of the need to counter the harm of simplifying complex phenomena by means of lax analysis – as they set out to engage in their own definitions of Africanness by considering its subtler features. Fanon remains more useful than most of the theorists I discuss below as far as my need for terminology that primarily asserts the cultural perspective in the social analysis practised by its inventors is concerned. He consistently emphasies comprehensive culture rather than particular details as the actual point of departure. Focussing on the epistemological aspect of the cultural perspective rather than on the main theme itself, Edward Said laments simplistic responses to phenomena within the framework of imperialism and colonialism as follows: "people's analytical powers are dulled and anaesthetized. And the result is that you get an immediate acceptance of what is easy. You forget about all the complexities and difficulties" (Said, "Rendezvous" 191). Similar concerns emerge when in "Spontaneity: Its Strength and Weaknesses" Fanon pinpoints the drawbacks in the spontaneous intellectual state of the oppressed masses in the following words: "Tactics are mistaken for strategy" ("Spontaneity" 105). Mphahlele's clarification of what his concept of African humanism entails includes using a perspective such as this one of Said's – of contrasting intellectually engaged social analyses with superficially thought-out strategies. As this view can be effectively used to examine Mphahlele's

well-documented insistence on the need to strive towards discerning shades of difference between various concepts or between aspects within the same concept, Said is one of the theorists whose approaches to social analysis are adopted in this study in tracing the tenets of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism.

One of the benefits of thorough interrogation of social conditions is the ability to detect cultural bias underlying concepts that may superficially appear to be culturally neutral. Edward Said has argued in *Orientalism* (1978) that all western systems of cultural description are deeply contaminated with "the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power" (see Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory* 34). This point of view of being constantly conscious of imperial and colonial motives in western discourse finds its antithesis in consciously ensuring that Afrocentric discourse should be infused with Africanist assertions. That is why I make use of the essays of the Africanist theorist Wole Soyinka. He significantly articulates views in his discursive writings from the point of view of assuming that African art is necessarily intertwined with the distinctive African philosophical outlook. Soyinka in his 1976 text demonstrates how African literature is invariably embedded in African myth and ritual as well as metonymically representing modes of thinking that are uniquely in African myth and ritual (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 127). Soyinka's terminology of "African myth", "ritual" and "[metonymic] represent[ation]" reveals a perspective that is applicable to the analysis of Mphahlele's literary works. This is so because Mphahlele's concept of African humanism not only regards African cultures as its core component, but proceeds to represent African cultures metonymically through the dialogue of his characters and the imagery he employs to form the texture of his fictional compositions – as the next chapters of this thesis will show.

Consistent with scrupulous attention to finer differences in literary and social analysis is the nuanced use of terminology in order to identify culture-specific African societal features – terms that are otherwise used to transmit Eurocentric conceptions of social phenomena. The Zambian social commentator Timothy Kandeke illustrates in his 1977 essay that while in African societies on the one hand "individuality was not allowed to violate or militate against the accepted [African] customs … [on the other hand the individual] worked for the good of society generally … [because] the task for Zambian Humanism is to make the Zambian not only a good HUMANIST but also a GOOD HUMANITARIAN" (Kandeke, *Fundamentals of Zambian Humanism* 62). If humanism and humanitarianism were identical in meaning, Kandeke would not mention humanitarianism as just one of the many constituents of African (or Zambian) humanism. The distinction between the meanings of words like "human", "humanist" and "humanitarian" is the resonant theme in dispelling misconceptions that interpreters from unAfricanist or non-postcolonial perspectives would transmit in attempting to examine whether any other alternative forms of humanism other than European do exist. I use this perspective in explicit or implied ways throughout this study in the course of demonstrating how Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is as much human, humanist and humanitarian as it is not European.

It is not only terms that inevitably require domestication within the cultural milieu in which they occur. In terms of Said's "travelling theory", the failure of critics outside Afrocentrism to comprehend the aesthetics in African works (like those of Mphahlele) can be equated to judging works outside one's cultural framework as misappropriations or "misreadings" when they are actually "part of a historical transfer of ideas and theories from one setting to another" ("Travelling Theory" 205). This will be better appreciated when one remembers that the novel/autobiography in its normative form originated in the west. Because its original manifestations occur outside African cultures, the novel's transplantation from western cultures to African cultures can be seen either as a "misreading" of its European cultural-aesthetic imperatives, or as illustrating the practice of "abrogation" to tally with African cultural values – depending on the perspective from which one looks at the "travelling" process. For Said, the solution of the problem of "the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient, themselves reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness" ("Orientalism" 73) – such as a facile dismissal of the culturally transformed form of the novel/autobiography exemplified in such a text as Mphahlele's *The Wanderers* – lies in the critic or reader's preparedness to

> distinguish theory from critical consciousness by saying that the latter is a sort of spatial sense, a sort of measuring faculty for locating or situating theory, and this means that theory has to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges as part of that time, working in and for it. ("Travelling Theory" 210-11)

A reader of Mphahlele's fiction should be sensitive to the way western genres or forms are bound to be adapted to local African cultures within which they are crafted – as self-defining cultural endeavours. Mphahlele's practice of transforming non-African conceptions of art forms like the novel or autobiography to respond meaningfully to the condition of being black under apartheid South Africa and in exile as in *The Wanderers*, can best be explained in terms of Said's concept of "critical consciousness". This concept, as Said sees it, accommodates local historico-cultural exigencies, whereas mere "theory" pertaining to the employment of particular genres may (or intends to) resist forms of local adaptation. On a broader scale, using Said's terms best explains how Mphahlele (in keeping with his theory of African humanism) transforms Eurocentric meaning to enable non-African terminology to convey Africanist concepts.

Such an appropriation of the aesthetic is neccessary when one considers what writers like Ashcroft *et al.* stated in 1998 (in *Key Concepts* 84–85): that the expectations of the coloniser towards literature on Africa written by Africans are those of a continuation of the function of the western writer writing on Africa (who has been described as no more than an ethnographer doing field work, followed by reportage on Africa) (*Key Concepts* 84-85). One more aspect of Mphahlele's theoretical position (related to his appropriation of the aesthetic) is his intention of mentoring younger Africanist practitioners in the art of creative writing with the intention of making them recognise the true place of the writer in society – as distinct from that of a political activist. Separation of political statements from rigorous intellectual analyses is parallel to distinguishing theory from "critical consciousness", with "critical consciousness" better suited to equip the social analyst in resolving existential challenges.

Mphahlele's way of mapping out his concept of African humanism, including general abrogation of Eurocentric ideas (described above), qualifies his theoretical enterprise as a "beginning". According to Said, a "beginning" is a wide-ranging, lasting, purpose-directed undertaking that repeats what it is built on even while demarcating a clear break with its origins. Seen from the perspective of Said as represented by the description above, Mphahlele's sustained, enduring and progressive clarification of his concept of African humanism qualifies to be a beginning in that it is a "process that has duration and meaning" (quoted from Said's 1975 essay "Beginning Ideas" 5). Mphahlele's approach in characterising and refining his concept of African humanism in an accommodative way that yet does not blur its contours displays "strength" that (according to Said in another 1975 essay), is a function of "wider incorporation" ("Beginning with a Text" 193). The latter feature reinforces the former, lending an overall force and elegance to the philosophy of African humanism. Regarding this specific aspect of African humanism – as expansive in its demarcation – it is thus important, in the study of Mphahlele's texts, to explore *how* peoples scattered over such a huge terrain, with varying histories of emancipation, can be convincingly demonstrated to share a common "African humanist" culture (in Mphahlele's thought and perception). The obverse could be that this feature does not mark the theory of African humanism as distinctive within Africanist and postcolonial theory in general – thus not making the grade when one considers it as a "beginning" in terms of Said's theory of "beginnings".

Mphahlele's literary writings will be scrutinised for illustration of his endorsement of the normative conception of literary genres as amenable to cultural adaptation, for the reason that literature reacts to the physical and intellectual-cultural context within and on which it is written. Said's theoretical concepts are indispensable in explaining this feature of Mphahlele's writing because he (Said) displays this contextual perspective in his theory. That is why he rejects a "religious criticism" that detaches itself from rational realities and escapes to emotionally conceived connotations of concepts like communist, Arab and European. Instead, Said accepts "secular criticism", which rigorously analyses society and events in such a way that they are not romanticised or homogenised, but are based in their concrete context – that is in its turn profoundly interrogated ("Introduction: Secular Criticism" 4, 28).

Tied to Said's idea of "religious criticism" is the risk theorists may easily run into, of homogenising the oppressor or the oppressed (including Africans). As an antidote to potentially homogenising praxis, Said has commented on the need for the literary critic to be secular (as opposed to metaphysical or religious) in the following words:

> Texts are a system of forces intitutionalized by the reigning culture at some human cost to its various components. For texts after all are not an ideal cosmos of ideally equal monuments …The critic's attitude to some extent is sensitive [to this fact but] it should in addition and more often be frankly inventive … which means finding and exposing things that otherwise lie hidden beneath piety, heedlessness, or routine. Most of all, criticism is worldly and in the world so long as it opposes monocentrism, a concept I understand as working in conjunction with ethnocentrism, which licenses a culture to cloak itself in the particular authority of certain values over others. ("The World" 53)

Monocentrism in the sense in which Said uses it here refers to a self-centred imposition of authoritarian orthodoxy which negates any dissenting point of view. Such a monocentrism manifests itself (for example) in bigoted religious orientation by which a religion (such as western Christianity) is imposed on Africans, as if they are on their own devoid of religious consciousness. Those imposing religion like this would expect the subjugated to embrace it without resistance for the reason that it is seen by the "centre" as a normative religion – thereby leading to the expectation that the subaltern should capitulate to its unquestioned authority. It is known that African humanism (according to Mphahlele) rejects any kind of authority imposed from outside; so that religious practice is something that is negotiated and agreed upon by consensus on matters of cosmology, sociology and eschatology in African communities. In terms of Mphahlele's theory of African humanism, expectations of the European (stemming from monocentrism) would call for the Africans to constitute themselves in a manner that rejects biased views of African culture and religion. The correlation between Mphahlele and Said in their opposition to "monocentrism" is elucidated throughout this study by illustrations of Mphahlele's non-essentialist, non-ethnocentric and non-racialist perspective in exemplifications of what his concept of African humanism entails. Mphahlele's theory of African humanism spans a broad and chequered cultural and geo-political space for the reason that it arises from his opposition to homogenisation. He acknowledges that the various cultural, geographical and political territories inhabited by practitioners of African humanist lifestyles contribute to their localised differences. This is one way in which he displays a clear stance in relation to the idea of homogenisation. Mphahlele is known for his vigilance against homogenisation and its corollary hazards such as essentialism, enthnocentrism and racism.

Perspectives such as those revealed in Said's theory by means of ideas that he either supports or opposes embedded in concepts such as "travelling theory", "religious criticism", "secular criticism" and "monocentrism" – are those in terms of which I investigate the representation of Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism in his narrative writings. Moreover, Said's perspective of considering a worthwhile intellectual enterprise as a "beginning" will be used to test whether Mphahlele can be judged to have been a "beginner" in defining his concept of African humanism. Mphahlele's way of taking into consideration observations of fellow theorists with an astute selectiveness and adaptive reinvention of his core concept may be considered within the theory of beginnings in general, and specifically as it is interpreted by Said in such a publication as his *Beginnings: Intention & Method* (1975). Indeed, the radically discontinuous way in which Mphahlele characterises the concept of African humanism (differently from other writers) marks his project as a beginning. On the strength of the inclusiveness of Mphahlele's approach – in isolating a beginning in the form of theorising rigorously on the concept of African humanism – I here cite Said's remark that "Structure develops from mere specificity to impressive, over-mastering scope and generality … [with] another meaning for *strength* [being] wider incorporation …" ("Beginning with a Text" 193). Said explains that the concept of beginning

> is associated … with an idea of precedence and/or priority … In short, the designation of a beginning generally involves also the designation of a consequent *intention* …We might not actually say as much every time, but … [it remains true

> that] the beginning is the first point (in time, space, or action) of an accomplishment or process that has duration and meaning. The beginning, then, is the first step in the intentional production of meaning. ("Beginning Ideas" 4-5)

The protracted, purpose-directed and nuanced manner in which Mphahlele has defined his philosophy of African humanism qualifies him as an originator of an unprecedented, enduring idea.

Said has remarked on the link between the traditional past and his concept of "repetition" in the following words:

> Take history as a reported dramatic sequence of dialectical stages, enacted and fabricated by an inconsistent but persitent humanity … and you will equally avoid the despair of seeing history as gratuitious occurrence as well as the boredom of seeing history as realizing a foreordained blueprint … Indeed [this dialectical repetition of history or past memory] connects reason with raw experience. ("On Repetition" 113)

What Said is articulating in this quotation is the notion that recollection of communal or personal memory of the cultural past is acceptable in fiction writing or in the formulation of any theory or concept as "beginning", as long as such valuing of memory is recognised as being a "compromise" between the past and the present – because it has to be used to interrogate issues of the immediate present with imaginative inventiveness. The result will be distinctive cultural features that are dynamic and thus continue to benefit the people identified by these features throughout various historical periods. Said's notion of "repetition" is applicable to my study of Mphahlele's literary texts in that the latter views the place of Africans' past in the present as relevant only in as far as it is harnessed to recur or maintain itself in a transformed form that represents a rupture with what would be its anachronistic form (of the past).

Theorists such as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin have addressed the issue of whether the strong sense of distinctive cultural identity (forged in such ways as are described in the preceding paragraph) should be accommodative or exlusivist, in relation to other cultural indentities. By doing this they introduced considerations of cultural identity vis-à-vis essentialism. Essentialism "is the assumption that groups, categories or classes of objects have one or several defining features exclusive to all members of that category" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Key Concepts* 77). Significantly, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note that the term "essentialism" is used in postcolonial "analyses of culture" as "a (generally implicit) assumption that individuals share an essential cultural identity" (*Key Concepts* 77). Within the framework of postcolonial theory, Mphahlele and other postcolonial writers (who include Afrocentric theorists) advocate a countering of socio-cultural erosion and political threats with functional, as opposed to absolute, essentialism. As Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin note, postcolonial theorists like Spivak hold, in their acceptance of "a strategic essentialism", that:

> In different periods the employment of essentialist ideas may be a necessary part of the process by which the colonized achieve a renewed sense of the value and dignity of their pre-colonial cultures, and through which the newly emergent post-colonial nation asserts itself. (*Key Concepts* 79-80)

These remarks by Aschcroft et al. also reveal a concern with the notion of difference in relation to essentialism. It makes sense that as essentialism implies difference by highlighting distinctive features that distinguish one social entity from others, theorists should apply their minds on whether difference contributes positively or not to social interaction.

Spivak advocates strategic essentialism by highlighting the need for a "monumentalized national-cultural history of origin combined with ideas of a miraculated resistant hybridity" ("Teaching for the Times" 471) in the struggle of the oppressed sections of society for self-definition. The connotations of idealism inherent in the words "monumentalized" and "miraculated" point to the need for idealistic or strategic essentialism that is supported by the oppressed who should (according to this theorist) define and re-constitute their past in order to reclaim "[their] disavowed articulation within the history of the present of [their] chosen new nation-state" ("Teaching for the Times" 471). Emphasis (in the latter part of the quotation) on integrating such an essentialist self-definition regarding the past history of the oppressed with contingent challenges that accompany unfolding history, is proof that the kind of self-definition implied in meanings of the terms "monumentalized national-cultural history" and "miraculated resistant hybridity" is tied to the environment, and not to biological filiation. To try and coalesce the defining features of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism by using Spivak's idea of "a miraculated resistant hybridity" should facilitate a detection of the former concept's profound qualities. Since Mphahlele uses the theme of Africans failing to attain an adequately balanced hybridity beyond colonisation in most of his short stories, autobiographies and novels, a concept like Spivak's that characterises a specific way of managing hybridity properly is helpful as an instrument with which to analyse his (Mphahlele's) work. Mphahlele's consistent consideration of how hybridity can be managed properly by the colonised beyond colonisation has resulted in successful portrayal of some of his most memorable characters failing in this regard – such as Chimba Chirundu (in the novel *Chirundu*). Analysing these works of fiction by using ideas like Spivak's tallies with Mphahlele's own emphasis on the problematics of managing hybridity. Spivak's highlighting of the link between symbolic personification of the core lifestyles of society and hybridity combine theoretical positions on essentialism, culture and hybridity in as interesting a manner as Mphahlele does when he describes his concept of African humanism in relation to these ideas.

Due to his circumspect analysis of difference, Mphahlele is nuanced enough in his notion of African humanism not to hurl himself into the snare of some Africanists who, in attempting a self-definition, have fallen into the quagmire of absolute essentialism. He is no less conscious of the dangers of essentialism that acquire the guise of loyalty to geographical habitat, than fellow African theorist Achille Mbembe is when the latter impugns such romanticisation of essentialism: "Racial and territorial authenticity are conflated, and Africa becomes the land of black people" (256). This leads to a deplorable situation in which "imaginations of the self and the world remain trapped within a conception of identity as geography – in other words of time as space" (271). At worst essentialism, according to Mbembe, may lead to a canonising of difference and an elimination of plurality and ambivalence of custom (*African Modes of Self-Writing* 247).

Mbembe is no less conscious of the dangers of essentialism that acquire the guise of loyalty to geographical habitat, than he cautions against a homogenising brand of essentialism in which “Racial and territorial authenticity are conflated, and Africa becomes the land of black people” (256).

The social theorist Conversi views cultural cohesion as a healthy display of the objective symbols of a social group, as opposed to subjective ethnicity with its potentially perilous self-defining approach. Indeed, ethnic identity can be used negatively to foster absolute essentialist sentiments. Conversi (2002) observes that (absolute) essentialism is often identifiable by the sustained and totalising description of entire groups in “a hypostatising manner” as cohesive entities that appear to be trapped in their historical legacy (“Resisting Primordialism” 271). Conversi goes on to link essentialism with historical and cultural determinism (272-273). To him, the problem arises when the distinction between subjective ethnicity and objective culture is blurred, which could lead to unfortunate essentialising of the (imaginary) enemy and could end in blanket attribution of individual misdeeds to whole groups (274). Historical determinism also leads dangerously to absolute essentialism due to its view that “the past has got a hold on the present, and that we cannot escape its grasp”, as Conversi goes on to remark (275). The interesting point Conversi makes is that, despite the potential dangers of essentialist orientation (as he points out in the quotation above), it should not be denied that cultural groups or any groups joined by common anteriority and goals “share some myths of common descent to maintain social cohesion” (271).

If Mphahlele were not wary of such an invidious manifestation of essentialism (as noted by Mbembe), his concept of African humanism would not have been formulated in such a way that it cuts across racial and geographical demarcations. His modification of essentialist approaches to social analysis, in the form of a strategic, mediated essentialism, reveals his awareness of the potential dangers of essentialism as observed by Conversi and Mbembe (above). It is within the complex of theoretical perspectives and apparatus sketched above that Mphahlele reviewed and redefined his theory of African humanism until it attained a state of coherence, recognised today by those interested in his career as a theorist. Whether implicitly or explicitly, I analyse Mphahlele’s works from the theoretical perspective of his accepting strategic (as opposed to absolute) essentialism – in the way the concepts of Mbembe and Conversi (above) contrast the two kinds of essentialism.

The issue of the extent to which distinctive features of people practising an African humanist lifestyle (including the memory or maintenance of traditional customs) can be used positively for their spiritual strengthening was addressed by a number of other African writers. Specifically in the case of Mphahlele (as section 1.1 of this study has partly demonstrated and section 1.3 will explain fully), he clearly asserts a strategically or usefully essentialist rallying point for fellow Africans in the face of alienation that requires their concerted resistance as a group. The term “alienation” is used in this context to mean estrangement that is larger than a forging of disharmony between the individual and the environment that he or she needs to exist in harmony with in order to interrogate and use it to his or her maximum benefit. Within the context of discussing

Mphahlele's literary works, I use the term "alienation" to refer to a more intense form of estrangement that renders a people's cultural identity ineffectual in its supposed role of giving meaning to reality through the distinctive cultural bias of such a people. In other words, Mphahlele finds it necessary for Africans to rationalise their existence as a distinctively identifiable and culturally capable cluster in order gainfully to counter threatening attitudes by other identifiable groups that seek to distort the Africans' identity as incapacitating – as far as judging it capable of making meaning out of reality is concerned. Eurocentric attitudes have driven Europeans to view only European cultures as capacitating the people practising them to forge a meaningful existence which is in harmony with the environment (as opposed to being alienated from it). It is for this reason that Achebe, for instance, justifies Africans' use of strategic essentialism on the basis that "equality is the one thing which Europeans are conspicuously incapable of extending to others, especially Africans" (*Hopes* 15). Achebe defends the right of Africans to use cultural memory to as extreme an extent as they may deem fit when he states that "for a society to function smoothly and effectively its members must share certain basic tenets of belief and norms of behaviour" (*Hopes* 100). To counterbalance any potential recklessness that may arise from cultural chauvinism, Chinua Achebe cautions against the concomitant snare of absolute essentialism in the following words:

> [It is wrong to hold the] belief that some people who live across our frontiers or speak a different language from ourselves are the cause of all the trouble in the world, or that our own particular group or class or caste has a right to certain things denied to others … (*Hopes* 101)

Achebe states Africans' need of theories adopting a strategic essentialism in one of his *Hopes and Impediments* essays when he writes that "theories are no more than fictions which help us to make sense of experience and which are subject to disconfirmation when their explanations are no longer adequate" (*Hopes* 98). To testify to the wariness of several Africanist writers (including Mphahlele) of absolute essentialism, Achebe himself has warned in the same text (quoted above) that "all white people cannot be exactly of one mind or equally guilty of the fault of too much transmission and too little reception" (*Hopes* 16). This point is similar to his caution against proponents of the distinctness of Africans – as a confederal cluster of peoples – falling into the trap of seeing the differences betweeen the West and Africa as absolute, rather than as merely relative (*Hopes* 40). It is therefore appropriate to demonstrate (as above) that Mphahlele conceptualises African humanism as flexible as far as people of other group identities are concerned, and in so far as reorganising itself from time to time and from one complex of circumstances to another is concerned. Social analytical criteria such as strategic essentialism are some of those I use in this thesis to illustrate ways in which Mphahlele resolves the complicated nature of what the individual terms "African" and "humanism" entail as substantive notions, before they are even considered in combination with each other. Considerations of whether social behaviour is the result of biological endowment or nurturing by the empirical world are fundamental to the idea of strategic essentialism. Looking at society from this perspective, Achebe (*Hopes* 30) and others see concepts such as African humanism as products of nurture rather than nature – an idea expressed by Achebe in the following quotation:

> You have all heard of the 'African Personality'; of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shan't need any of them any more. But for the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better. (*Hopes* 30)

Achebe thus sees difference as positive, even empowering.

The cultural peculiarity of Africans stressed by Achebe in the citations (above) extends in his view to the unique relationship between an African writer and the society about and for which he or she writes. The entanglement of personal living, fiction writing, autobiographical writing and philosophical writing should be acknowledged as a distinctive feature of the relationship between literature and society in Africa because of the place of the writer in African society that differs from the way European writers have generally been observed to relate to their readers and societies. Implying the individualist practice of personal lifestyle as well as creative and other writing that typifies the West, Achebe confirmed this distinction in 1988 when he stated that an "adversary relationship [between the writer and his community is] generally assumed and promoted in the west" (*Hopes* 40). By this Achebe means that, among others, the level of living and thinking of the western writer and philosopher is normally expected to be at variance with that of the society he writes for and lives in without society being expected to label him as elitist. This may lead to the life of the writer and his/her community never merging or even to the two competing in terms of the values the writer asserts and practises, as a result of individualism being the norm in western societies. The writer as a philosopher can in this way also be separated from the writer as a creative writer of fiction. On the contrary, "the non-Westerner does not as a rule have those obligations because in his traditional scheme and hierarchy the human hero does not loom so large" (*Hopes* 38). The relational mode of the African writer thus blurs the dividing line between fiction and philosophical writing. This leads to there being no clear partition separating postcolonial theory focusing on literature and postcolonial theory focusing on social issues.

In an attempt to illustrate that difference may be seen as legitimate rather than hostile self-assertion, the feminist postcolonial theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha supports "strategic essentialism" (from the point of view of difference) as follows: "Difference, in other words, does not necessarily give rise to separatism" ("Not You/Like You" 416). In this quotation Minh-ha clarifies that the essentialist descriptions of the debased self (which she calls "closures") are ever-changing, react to present challenges within the lived environment and do not conform to pre-cast ideas whether emanating from the oppressive "centre" or from an enslaving traditional past (as the words "unfinished", "contingent" and "arbitrary" respectively signify). The opening part of the quotation expresses Minh-ha's perspective of interrogating social conditions from a position that uses the idea of strategic essentialism. She regards strategic essentialism as a crucial tool in the self-description of the oppressed whose past and present identities have been disfigured by the oppressor. Mphahlele's definition of the consciousness and way of life of Africans as an alternative to the "otherness" that the "centre" assigns to them, by reclaiming instead a

self-affirming and self-constituting position, is postcolonial in terminology and attitude. His theory and practice concur with what a postcolonial theorist like Minh-ha sees as requisite for the claiming of subjective position by the subaltern in which "Otherness becomes empowerment, critical difference, when it is not given but re-created" (417). Minh-ha's approach values a stance on essentialism closely resembling Spivak's views on appropriation of experience to the advantage of both the abrogating oppressed and the imposing oppressor.

It is appropriate to sum up Mphahlele's postcolonial mission of defining the distinctive identity of African humanists as constituting an analysis of Minha's conception of "difference". The view of collective cultural identity as mutable and diffuse has been vindicated by Minh-ha, as when she writes that

> a particular virtue of literature … is instruction in otherness: vivid, compelling evidence of differences in cultures, mores, assumptions, values … [it makes] otherness palpable and … comprehensible without reducing it to an inferior version of the same, as a universalizing humanism threatens to do. ("Not You/Like You" 472)

The African humanist point of view enables Mphahlele to justify a strategic essentialism similarly to the way postcolonial writers like Minh-ha do. In "Woman, Native, Other", Minh-ha highlights the usefulness of strategic essentialism that is meant to assert the agency of the oppressed by means of a self-constitution, which defines the oppressed as embodying a constantly changing consciousness rather than seeing their culture as an anachronistic relic trapped in an enslaving past, in the statement that:

> if it is a point of redeparture for those of us whose ethnicity and gender were historically debased, then identity remains necessary as a political/personal strategy of survival and resistance … Here the notion of displacement is also a place of identity: there is no real me to return to, no whole self that synthesizes the woman, the woman of colour and the writer; there are instead, diverse recognitions of self through difference, and unfinished, contingent, arbitrary closures that make possible both politics and identity. (72-73)

Trinh T. Minh-ha's major contribution to social analysis (taking difference among varying social groups and the role of the environment in shaping the identity of a social group as points of departure) is with regard to recalling Eurocentric stereotypes in order to explode them with her own statements, relating to the capacity of a person's agency to turn the "centre's" absencing into a self-constituted presencing of the "other". It is in this spirit that Minh-ha analyses Levy-Bruhl's statements implying that 'an African' is emotional and affective, and that 'he' is incapable of thinking and reasoning (in Minh-ha's article – 417). This, as Minh-ha accurately interprets it, is in keeping with the Eurocentric attitude maintained over centuries that "Primitive man [merely] feels and participates" (417). Although written in more technical terminology associated with postcolonial theory than is the case with African theorists, Minh-ha's contribution is indeed continuation of the approach of discrediting normative descriptions of the subaltern by those in the "centre". The important point not to be missed is that Mphahlele's dissatisfaction with such Eurocentric views is not motivated by their being articulated by people of a different race from his – in keeping with the non-essentialist,

nonracial orientation of postcolonial and Africanist theory. Instead, Mphahlele disagrees with the romanticised or distorted nature of such views which tend not to look at the subject of scrutiny in a rounded manner, but rather in a manner that is more or less reductionist.

Terms such as the "centre", "otherness", "absencing", "agency", and "strategic essentialism" are generally used in postcolonial theory and have been clearly defined, for example in Aschcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies.* These terms and others operate in proximity with and constitute perspectives that I adopt throughout this thesis in my critical analysis of Mphahlele's texts – in order to follow the development of both the polemical articulation and fictional representation of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism because Mphahlele is appropriately seen as a postcolonial writer. This includes my assessment of the theoretical coherence of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism and whether he uses the idea of essentialism in the way it is applied by commentators such as Achebe and Minh-ha (described above) in their consideration of what it is to be dinstinctively African. This view of the writer from an Africanist perspective has been demonstrated in this study to have influenced the way Mphahlele perceives his role as a writer. As I analyse Mphahlele's narratives to identify ways in which he reflects the African humanist world-view, I assess his relationship with his writing and audience by bearing statements by Achebe (above) in mind. Mphahlele is shown throughout this dissertation to align himself with the scenario described by critics such as Achebe (above) as the uniquely African relationship between the author, his or her creation and the material conditions from which he or she draws inspiration.

Sociolinguistic concepts proposed by theorists like Matsumoto (1988) and Fraser (1990) are used in this thesis to analyse Mphahlele's dialogue and imagery, because they effectively explain how communication of ideas or messages should be carried out. According to Frazer, "face" is the idea used to describe the speaker's psychological satisfaction or dissatisfaction after he or she has taken care to be polite in communing or communicating with others (Frazer, "Perspectives on Politeness" 229). Matsumoto points out the nature of "politeness" that considers the appropriateness of speech forms or modes of communication, as determined differently from one culture to another (Matsumoto, "Re-examination of Face" 405). What is "positive face" (or the effect of communication whereby the speaker's message or communication is acceptable to at least some others) in one cultural setting can effectively become "negative face" (or an impediment of the speaker's desire that his or her words should communicate whatever he or she wants to express) in a different cultural environment. What this means is that for a communicant from a largely individualistic society like that of the West, to speak in an acceptable manner among a group of Africans may lead to what he or she perceives as impingement on his or her freedom to express an individual opinion. This is because acceptability of dialogue in African cultures is measured against its alignment with the opinion of the entire community on a specific issue. In terms of the hierarchic structure of African society (demonstrated in section 1.1 of this thesis as an aspect of Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism), whether the speaker has proven himself or herself an outstanding hunter, warrior or traditional healer would determine the extent to which his

or her individual communication can be sanctioned as sagacious/prophetic and thus as tantamount to the communal voice in its authority or acceptability. But for the nonAfrican interlocutor these criteria may be interpreted, not as contributing positively to acceptability by the listeners, since the criteria may instead be evaluated as interfering with the individual's freedom. Mphahlele's Africanist position as a writer makes some views on the relationship between culture and communication more relevant to an analysis of his literature than others.

Several of the ideas of the South African theorist and writer Njabulo Ndebele are used in this thesis specifically because they help conceptualise *how* communication is to be executed. In Ndebele's theory, "pamphleteering" is a writing style that obliterates real meaning – that is, knowledge that needs to be searched for rather than making itself immediately clear. Because of his formulation and application of the idea of "pamphleteering", Ndebele's essays constantly reveal his dislike of stories which simplify reality at the expense of analytical scrupulousness – as when he protests against the kind of writing that would get "out of us more indignation, and less understanding" ("Against Pamphleteering the Future" 137). The act of pamphleteering is viewed by Ndebele as regrettably leading to spectacular representation. Ndebele summarises what he means by the "spectacular" in the following words:

> The spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; in confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. It is the literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness. Nothing beyond this can be expected of it. ("The Rediscovery" 46)

The words just quoted characterise spectacular representation as a mode of writing which appeals to emotion rather than reason, reacts to the comprehensive picture without analysing its constituents, expresses despair rather than hope or resilience (as the phrase "literature of the powerless identifying the key factor responsible for their powerlessness" indicates) ("The Rediscovery" 46). Ndebele, for instance, urges a return in South African black English literature to the richness and depth of localised cultural existence and a shift away from reflections of experience preoccupied and regulated by the larger-than-life race problem:

> …for the human tragedy to be confronted, together with the immense challenging responsibility to create a new society, demands an uncompromisingly tough-minded creative will to build a new civilization … no civilization worth the name will emerge without the payment of disciplined and rigorous attention to detail. ("The Rediscovery" 57)

On the literary scene Ndebele cautions the African writer-critic facing the turbulent apartheid era against sacrificing sound critical practice at the time it is most needed – to counter a threatening disorientation regarding the direction of the liberation struggle. In the essay titled "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary", Ndebele puts in relief the crassness of

spectacular representation of the life of Africans under apartheid, which, *inter alia*, "keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details" (*"The Rediscovery"* 46*)*. In the essay quoted above, Ndebele denounces the depiction in protest literature of political oppression and brutality as an implacable motif. Ndebele urges a return (in South African black literature written in English) to "an uncompromisingly toughminded creative will to build a new civilisation… [which will not] emerge whithout the payment of disciplined and rigorous attention to detail" ("The Rediscovery" 56-57). In this way, Ndebele posits a move away from the "spectacular" as an antidote to reflections of experience preoccupied with and regulated by the larger-than-life race problem (associated with protest literature) – to a literature that recreates the richness, complexity and depth of localised cultural existence.

Ndebele pinpoints spectacular representation of reality as a major weakness permeating the black intellectual circles during the struggle for self-determination. According to him, this weakness leads to confusion of expository language with creative language: "[protest literature] reinforces the expository intention without establishing its own evaluative literary grounds" (46). Ndebele's aim in inventing and employing these terms is that of highlighting the primacy of distinguishing concepts clearly so that the role of the social analyst may serve its proper purpose of interpreting social phenomena accurately in order for him or her to arrive at the most efficacious remedies for identified social ills. I analyse Mphahlele's works by using ideas expressed in these terms (devised by Ndebele) because Mphahlele approaches the exemplification of his own concept (of African humanism) in his narrative writings in a manner that seeks to analyse society to the maximum, using the most rigorous analytical method that would not stand in the way of a thorough grasp of the nature of his theory – which he advances as his own remedy for what he perceives as psychological and material frailties of African communities. Mphahlele's emphasis on the need to recognise the unpredictable nature of societal needs (that constantly demand versatile adjustment of the social function) is proof of his sensitivity to the flexible relation between public and individual voices. It is yet another way of advocating proper attention to shades of difference in analysing society.

Ndebele's theory seems to be the most suitable in respect of which to analyse or assess Mphahlele's commitment to the theoretical position he (Mphahlele) professes. I judge Mphahlele's handling of literature and refinement of his concept of African humanism against Ndebele's ideas that take the issues of essentialism and difference (discussed above) further – those of "the spectacular", "protest literature", "rediscovery of the ordinary" which are central to Ndebele's theory. These concepts are particularly helpful in enabling me to anchor my critical analysis of Mphahlele's narratives in the concrete, specifically South African human condition rather than ending my critiques in abstract and broad foundations like the ideas of essentialism and the placing of Mphahlele's works on the global postcolonial terrain. It is helpful (in my analysis of Mphahlele's narratives) to converge from contextualising it in a very broad framework to discussing it in relation to theoretical apparatus closer to Mphahlele's particular characteristics as an individual writer.

Apart from my adoption of Ndebele's concepts (outlined above), Homi Babha's concept of a "metonymic gap" is another tool enabling me to explain the way Mphahlele narrows down postcolonial concepts to suit his specific South African locale. Homi Bhabha advances the idea of analysing society from the point of view of difference by use of this concept of a "metonymic gap". The concept as Bhabha defines it entails that effacement of the colonised individual's personal or private subjectivity in postcolonial social life is equivalent to the epic effacement of the individual's cultural representations (*Postcolonial Theory* 114). Using a theoretical framework that includes Bhabha's ideas (in examining the representation of African humanism in Mphahlele's narrative writings) is relevant in that Mphahlele employs each and every literary formula he has devised specifically to suggest the presence of African humanist lifestyles in his narratives as a symbolic representation of the cultures of Africans on which he writes. With each carrying this out in his own unique way, Mphahlele and Bhabha commonly highlight the implications of a "metonymic gap" in the way the coloniser and colonised interact, which include its manifestation in the kind of transformed behaviour referred to as mimicry. Bhabha's thoughts on the effects of paranoia inflicted by mimicry on those from the "centre" and on the need for what I refer to as "strategic essentialism" will prove handy in fully exposing the conflict between African humanist consciousness embodied in the actions of characters like Moruti "KK" and Karabo (in "Mrs Plum") on the one hand, and on the other hand European lifestyles like those of Kate and Mrs Plum. In discussing the ideas of a "metonymic gap" and of strategic essentialism, Bhabha takes the analysis of sociocultural difference a step further by moving beyond its analysis and focusing on its consequences – exemplified in the idea of mimicry. Mphahlele seems (from his reactions to the idea of multiculturalism described in section 1.1 of this thesis) to identify with the approach of satirising mimicry or poor management of hybridity in his postulation of the concept of African humanism, because he advocates the conservation of the identity of individual cultural clusters rather than bending or blurring it into a type of global multiculturalism.

I also use some of Mphahlele's own theoretical terms to discuss his literary works. Mphahlele considers "perspective" as one important constituent of the difference between people of broadly differing cultural orientations. In terms of Mphahlele's notion of perspective, details of a locally set literary composition are expected to include the characters' distinctive cultural symbols for the readers' benefit. The cumulative effect of such details or images that invoke Africanness should be the reader's recognition of his or her own existential challenges, tied to his or her unique cultural identity. The work of art containing "perspective" should utilise this feature to enable such a reader to resolve everyday problems, using his or her cultural resourcefulness that lies at the core of his or her African humanist consciousness. So, to Mphahlele, the competent writer today in a context like his own will be the one who artistically represents African humanism in his/her work. It is evident also that written literature for the African should necessarily revive the dynamics of orature, if "resonance" is to be attained. In the way Mphahlele employs it, the term "resonance" refers to repetition in literature of "certain things that *must never change* ... [like the] metaphor [that] keeps re-echoing what [you] said before … like a prophecy that sets up vibrations in one response mechanism … [because of] the things that keep vibrating when you've left the novel behind" ("African Literature" 275,

276). Traditional literary forms such as folktales (and narrative devices associated with them) are among the items which “must never change” (African Literature” 276) if the resonating music of African humanism is to result in what Mphahlele calls the “unbroken song”.

The traditional oral artist whose social function is implied in the proper use of devices outlined above is in Mphahlele’s view a precursor of the modern African artist, because the resonances of his or her art must “[set] up vibrations in [the] response mechanism” (“African Literature” 276) of the modern African writer. This legacy from earlier oral artists can be assumed as being transmitted with ease through Mphahlele’s writing through the successful fabrication of perspective, using resonances that capture the daily rhythm of African lives. From such observations it follows that African writing as Mphahlele conceives of it cannot be divorced from social function. Indeed, there is a recognisable and culturally-informed general tendency among African(ist) writers to tackle concerns of the community, deploying individual strategies displaying their own varying priorities. The distinctively African relationship between the individual and the community ensures that the aims of fiction production by African writers invariably include the spiritual and material advancement of the community.

Because of the multidimensional entanglement of the writer and his community Mphahlele (like his fellow African writers) aims to interrogate the postcolonial experience integratively without dividing literature from social issues. The school of postcolonialist African writers such as Mphahlele is best accommodated in Bart Moore-Gilbert’s description of a body of theory that began to be built up during the colonial era and was further consolidated after the colonised had reached political freedom, known presently as postcolonial modes of cultural analysis (*Postcolonial Theory* 5). Reference to the interrogation of postcolonial experience as “cultural analysis” circumvents the problem of compartmentalising experience, which would conflict with what Mphahlele describes as the African humanist view of reality as integrated experience. This is so because the word “cultural” avoids a splintering of experience into the literary, philosophical or autobiographical, by transforming the meaning of “analysis” into a unified, nuanced interpretation of social life.

The concepts described above constitute the core of my theoretical apparatus in analysing Mphahlele’s literary works. Together they form the theoretical framework by means of which I trace the nature of Mphahlele’s philosophy of African humanism, as well as the manner of its literary representations.

1.3 CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, ANALYTICAL METHOD AND DESIGN

As illustrated in section 1.1 of this chapter, the concept of African humanism and related notions have been part of Africanist discourse for a long time before Mphahlele began refining and articulating the idea. The term "representation" in the sense in which it is used in the title of this thesis refers to the way Mphahlele reflects or exemplifies the concept of African humanism in his imaginative writing, rather than to his direct elaboration of it as he does when explaining the concept in discursive essays. There are, however, few African writers or theorists in whose work it forms as central a focus as it does for Mphahlele. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that it is in his later years only, and then with explicit reference to the term only in his public speeches and discursive essays (rather than his narrative writing or poetry), that Mphahlele expressly discusses and promotes his concept of African humanism. The point of departure here is the notion that works of literature like Mphahlele's, in the vividness with which they depict the texture of everyday life (in ways that are accessible through a process of textual scrutiny and analysis), both conceptualise and embody sociological, philosophical and political concepts such as (in his case) "African humanism".

I shall be analysing Mphahlele's fiction using the approach advocated by Said in his use of the term "secular criticism", because I share Said's belief that fictional texts are based in social conditions forming the context in which the issues the texts tackle originate. By doing this, Mphahlele consistently attributes imaginative, self-defining action to the deeds of humans rather than to a reified idea or to some metaphysical power. Edward Said wrote in 1983 in support of the secular appproach to literature – by which he means "criticism [or writing that] deals with local and worldly situations" ("Secular Criticism" 26). Secular criticism differs from "textuality" in the sense in which Said uses the latter term ("textuality") to refer to the hermetic treatment of a literary text as if its content have no relation to issues in the real world of experience. Said laments the fact that "literary theory has for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and rendered it intelligible as the result of human work" ("Secular Criticism" 4). By using the term to highlight the central position of human beings (as this quotation shows), Said reveals his humanist approach to theory. As explained in section 1.1 of this study, it is the view of humanists universally to credit humans with all action that makes meaning out of contingent conditions. An exclusive focus on the "textuality" of the text (as understood by Said) deviates from the centralisation of human action in interpreting phenomena in much the same way as religious criticism "reveals itself as neither fully human nor fully apprehensible in human terms" ("Religious Criticism" 291). A theorist purporting to be secular may ironically degenerate into a religious critic if he or she falls victim to the "dramatic increase in the number of appeals to the extrahuman, the vague abstraction, the divine, the esoteric and secret" ("Religious Criticism" 291). My critical approach in examining Mphahlele's narrative writings for representations of his concept of African humanism "deals with local and worldly situations", in Said's terms ("Secular Criticism" 26). The dialogue of characters and imagery are the primary focus of this study for the reason that dialogue links the action within fictional works with the bigger world in relation to which it (dialogue) makes sense. In Mphahlele's narrative writings, imagery derives meaning

from the concrete world consisting of African lifestyles and interpreted in African humanist terms that place carnal human beings at the centre of reality. In this way, my criticism of Mphahlele's works is not based on meaning based on some metaphysical or abstract entity; it is secular.

My analysis will examine the ways in which dialogue and imagery in Mphahlele's narrative texts exhibit aspects of an ethos (or practice) and a world-view (or philosophy) which are identifiably both African and humanist in orientation. Dialogue and imagery as building blocks of the 'hermetic' text assist in linking the text with the sociological conditions within which context it is written, as well as the theoretical context to which it implicitly responds. It is in the nature of dialogue (in the way Mphahlele uses it in his literary work) to bridge the gap between a text's internal organisation and its alignment with the larger reality forming the empirical order in which contents of the text is based. It is possible for Mphahlele's dialogue to achieve this because the ideas expressed in it add to the text itself, making sense within the smaller world of its plot, while at the same time escaping enthralment to hermetic signification by meaning what it means in accordance with the cultural biases these ideas acquire from the world outside the text – which include the ideological atmosphere that gave birth to the idea, the distinctly African cultural vantage point of the ideas, the multicultural theoretical matrix of the ideas, and so forth.

In theoretical or methodological terms, the analysis of dialogue in the chosen texts rests on the notion that to speak is to perform speech acts (Hymes 1972; Schmidt and Richards 1980). The performance of speech acts, as Candlin noted in 1978 (as quoted by Schmidt & Richards), depends on "culturally-specific appropriateness criteria" ("Speech Acts and Second Language Learning" 141). This entails, as Matsumoto has established, that that which is sociolinguistically appropriate is established as such in terms of a specific culture ("Reexamination of the Universality of Face" 403). In addition to revealing individual character, therefore, dialogue necessarily reveals societal character. Such an interpretation of dialogue in relation to cultural norms that underlie it is appropriate in analysing Mphahlele's writings – in which expressions have a double layer of universal and of culture-specific meanings in simultaneously referring to universal identities of entities while also evoking culture-specific connotative meanings. My study will test whether the determinant of what is socioculturally appropriate in the dialogue contained in Mphahlele's prose writing is an African humanist *modus vivendi*.

The conceptual approach I adopt (outlined above) in examining the form and content of Mphahlele's narrative writing explained in preceding paragraphs should justify why one of the features of my approach is to articulate, through close literary analysis, the issue to which Mphahlele was implicitly responding in his texts: whether it would be possible to indicate that Africans qualify as a distinct cultural entity equal to other such entitities in their human attributes within a philosophical, theological and sociopolitical context which sought to deny this. Because the implied contention of Mphahlele's reflection of African humanist consciousness and temperament explained in preceding sections of this thesis is anchored in questions of sociological bearing, I found a sociolinguistic approach most suitable in that it links text ans social context more directly than other methods

would. Some approaches may regard the form of the text and specific ways in which diction is deployed in attaining the writer's intended message and effect meaningful within the insular world of the text. These approaches would not unlock the wealth of sociolinguistic meaning with which Mphahlele's narratives are imbued.

The way Mphahlele constructs and uses imagery in his poetry and narrative writings is closely linked to his use of dialogue. While the referential meaning of an image can safely be said to be the same across sociological contexts, the same cannot be said of its connotative meaning. Analogically, while the image of a snake referentially designates the same creature to an African living in South Africa (say) and a Chinese in any part of China, for the African the image evokes a spontaneous feeling of fear and connotations of death that might result from a venomous bite. For the Chinese, living within a culture that sanctions the slaughtering and cooking of snakes for a meal, what the image immediately unlocks are appetising ideas of a delicious dish. For people in those parts of the world where a snake is treated mystically as a god, the image would instill immediate awe, prompting introspection with a moral focus.

The metonymic ability of both dialogue and imagery to reflect in a text the culture and consciousness of the people about whom and for whom it is written makes a focus on these two vehicles of meaning most suitable in analysing the fiction of a writer such as Mphahlele. This is so because Mphahlele adopts a literary approach that could be described as assuming a "secular" interpretation of literature (as his approach to writing was described in earlier sections of this dissertation). That is why he has, for example, indicated that in his view education cannot but "fit into the cultural, political and economic goals of the community" ("Education as Community Development" 14). The secular world in which his texts are anchored is one conceived from African humanist perspective. Despite his intimate linking of text and the secular world, Mphahlele's concept of African humanism has a strong religious dimension. This leads to the coexistence in Mphahlele's literary practice of secular and religious approaches. He writes according to what may be called secular inclinations of criticism, while succeeding in precluding an escapist use of religious authority that simplistically ignores the empirical conditions of human action.

The investigation in Chapter 2 of this study attempts to illustrate extensive evidence of African humanist consciousness and conduct in Mphahlele's early stories. I shall trace Mphahlele's representations of his concept of African humanism in these stories in relation to his views on the role of autobiographical information in fiction as well as on the relationship of an African writer with his audience (indicated in section 1.1). It is to be expected that as soon as articulation of an idea evolves, the contours of that idea *ipso facto* refine themselves, thus making the articulator's own conscious understanding of the concept clearer. It is for this reason that in Mphahlele's (selected) poems and entire corpus of short stories (discussed in Chapter 2), I shall test whether the representation of the concept of African humanism advances from the earlier stories to the later stories and poetry. (Mphahlele wrote poetry later in his career in between writing maturer stories, autobiographies and novels – "My Experience as a Writer" 119). The second chapter starts by examining a select number of Mphahlele's poems and concludes with a

consideration of all his short stories. The rationale was to show that Mphahlele's representations of the concept of African humanism are not confined to his prose. But as the thrust of this study hinges on the narrative writings, it is the latter category of Mphahlele's writings which received fuller attention in the main body of the work. The selection of the poems was guided by how they appeared to represent African humanist tenets more prominently than the rest of Mphahlele's poetry.

In Chapter 3 I sketch the representation of African humanism in Mphahlele's autobiographies. In keeping with Mphahlele's theoretical position of abrogating the normative structure of autobiography (detailed in section 1.2 of this study), I shall investigate how differently African humanist conduct is exemplified here from the way it is traceable in genres considered earlier. The aim of this chapter is to show that Mphahlele is in his autobiographies able to delineate on a bigger canvas and in more graphic detail the African humanist reaction to the alienating and self-alienating effects of apartheid – forming the contents of *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music*. This is because autobiography can more directly draw on everyday experiences of those Africans Mphahlele portrays as African humanist in consciousness and conduct. Based on what Mphahlele has said about the need to redefine genre, it is arguably appropriate to trace evidence of the technique by means of which Mphahlele conjoins the pain of the conflict rankling in his mind as writer-protagonist (because he shares the experiences of his characters and target audience) with the portrayal of the impact of the alienation caused by apartheid on Africans in his autobiographies.

In attempting to probe whether and how conceptualisation, articulation and representation of African humanism becomes more coherent and lucid through the stages of Mphahlele's career and in probing how successfully African humanism is represented in the novels discussed in Chapter 4, I search for further crystallisation of this concept. Chapter 5 is analysed in order to search for progressively more radical abrogation of the novel form in ways that one would have thought incompatible with modern forms of African literature in postcolonial times, in which the oral form has been overtaken by the written medium and traditional life dislocated by modern ways. This is predicated on Mphahlele's well-known announcement (in a number of published interviews) that he designed *Father Come Home* to explore the possibilities of using a rural setting in asserting and portraying more coherent African humanist ways of thinking and living. In Chapter 6 (as the conclusion) I try to consolidate evidence of Mphahlele's ways of representing his philosophy of African humanism. The intention is to enable the reader to have a comprehensive map of how the many detailed demonstrations in the body of the dissertation spanning Chapters 2 to 5 justify the conclusions of the study.

One of the intentions of this study is to show how Mphahlele's repeats some of his unique literary devices in representing his concept of African humanism throughout the different texts under consideration. For this reason the body of the work is divided into subheadings. Each subheading is designed to highlight to the reader that a specific feature of the devices Mphahlele implements to demonstrate the presence of African humanist consciousness and lifestyles in his fictional creations is repeated in the different genres he employs. It will be demonstrated that the way Mphahlele's distinctive stylistic

devices – signifying his weaving of various aspects of his concept of African humanism into the fabric of his texts – recur in his different texts is not plain repetition. As the study will elucidate, each stylistic implement or fictional feature unique to Mphahlele's writing that embodies or illustrates his philosophy of African humanism recurs in various contexts to render its use more sophisticated or nuanced. To hint at this effect achieved by Mphahlele's repeated use of the devices and literary formulae he invented for himself in order to articulate African humanism vividly and powerfully, I take pains to ensure that (delineations of) this aspect of Mphahlele's style is accommodated by repeating some of the words used in previous subheadings, while no subheading as a whole is merely a repetition of anything earlier in the thesis.

The present chapter is organised differently from Chapters 2 to 5. While the first chapter (as shown above) links the development of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism with the historical periods during which it was refined, in the next four chapters its development is linked to different genres. This is because certain constraints associated with generic requirements give latitude to specific modes of representation, while being limiting to others. It thus seemed appropriate in writing the succeeding chapters to focus on the way various fictional representations of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism merge with structural demands of the various genres. For the same reason of reliance on the characteristics of each genre in order to probe how Mphahlele's representation of African humanism varies, the subject of each chapter is a single genre rather than different genres published in a specific period. Mphahlele's literary orientations that may have a link with the historical period in which a work was published are addressed within each chapter, without determining the sequence of the different chapters themselves.

2. THE SHORT STORIES AND POETRY

2.1 INSTANCES OF AFRICAN HUMANISM IN MPHAHLELE'S POETRY

An understanding of Mphahlele's presentation of African humanist ideas in his fiction necessitates study of the way he (differently *and* similarly) articulates these ideas or features of social analysis in his poems. It is my conviction that an illustration of continuities and discontinuities in the way Mphahlele exemplifies his concept of African humanism in his poetry and in his prose fiction ultimately serves better to clarify the concept of African humanism itself; and this is partly the goal of this study. The goal of this thesis is also partly to demonstrate both how Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism coalesces in his formative years as a theorist and writer, and how he develops it in expository and fictional writing in his maturing years. Despite my implicit argument that evidence of this is found most abundantly and perfectly in dialogue that is looked at sociolinguistically, it is a defensible assumption that dialogue in literature is manifest in many other genres in subtler ways like monologues and clipped dialogues attributed to the persona in poetry. Even more significantly, for an autobiographical writer like Mphahlele, a more profound kind of dialogue obtains between him and his subject matter and between him and the theory of African humanism that he continually interrogates in order to extract from such interrogation a progressively more lucid and more nuanced, coherent and comprehensive understanding of this concept. Vehicles of the latter sort of dialogue are (as I argue in this study) imagery. For the reason that imagery straddles both prose and poetry, I had to acknowledge that leaving out Mphahlele's poetry would create an unfortunate hiatus in a comprehensive consideration of the evolution of his concept of African humanism. This should not be misconstrued as a shrinking back from the hypothesis that the concept of African humanism is best represented in Mphahlele's narrative writings when one uses the entry points I have decided on – those of dialogue and imagery. An acknowledgement of this is the fact that only a few of Mphahlele's poems are analysed while the entire body of his short stories, novels and autobiographies is scrutinised exhaustively.

A reading of Mphahlele's published poetry collected in *The Unbroken Song* (1981), starting from the poem of 1960 named "Exile in Nigeria" right through to "Fathers and Sons" of March 1977, testifies to a continued concern with a distinct black identity *globally*. Writing in itself being an intellectual activity, Mphahlele the intellectual should be understood to operate at two levels in the writing of this poetry. The first level is that of depicting social experience. Clearly a line like "now my enemies are out of sight" portrays the experience of anyone (not necessarily an intellectual) who sighs with relief at the physical disappearance of apartheid South Africa which he or she has fled. The second level is that of articulating a sensible theory about such common experience of exile. Mphahlele's way of fulfilling this intellectual task at the second level of his composition is that of positing the theory of African humanism. Ndebele aims to distinguish these two levels that (according to him) should characterise any attempt at social analysis such as the writing of fiction about society in a statement like the following:

> In other words, in any society, there are actors and interpreters; there is popular culture on the one hand, and on the other, the formal culture which attempts to explain and to give ideological credence to popular culture at the highest conceptual level. (“Actors” 82-83)

In this sense, a description of fleeing apartheid and entering exile can pass for popular culture in that a person undergoing this enterprise need not necessarily theorise about being African and going into exile. But to go further and theorise about the condition is to be an interpreter in Ndebele’s terms.

Edward Said points out this need to participate in an experience by theorising about it, when he writes of the Israel-Palestine situation in the following words:

> I think it’s one of the consequences of 1948 … that we can begin to talk about Palestine and Israeli history together. Separate histories that can be seen as intertwined and counterpointed with each other. Without that the Other is always going to be dehumanized, demonized, invisible. We must find a way. That’s where *the role of the mind, the role of the intellectual,* the moral consciousness is crucial. (“One-State” 22, emphasis added)

Here the social experience in which ordinary Palestinians are oppressed not only finds representation but also benefits from a workable, well-thought-out theory, which a writer like Abraham would call “participation in the theory [of a culture], as distinct from the practice” (*Mind of Africa* 12) – which is parallel to Ndebele’s distinction between being an interpreter and being an actor in the experiences of society.

As for Fanon, on this very concern by Ndebele and Said as demonstrated in the quotations above, he formulates his viewpoint in the following words:

> That spectacular volunteer movement which meant to lead the colonized people to supreme sovereignty … all [its actions] now are seen in the light of experience to be symptoms of a very great weakness. While the native thought that he could pass without transition from the status of a colonized person to that of a self-governing citizen of an independent nation, *he made no real progress along the road to knowledge*. His consciousness remained rudimentary. (“Spontaneity” 110, emphasis added)

Fanon is clearly exhibiting a similar concern which Ndebele formulates (according to the quotation above) as the need to consciously inculcate a distinction between the lived culture of the “actors” and formal culture that “interpreters” have to distill from the culture of the masses.

It should be seen as Mphahlele’s way of addressing such concerns as those of Ndebele, Said and Fanon highlighted above that in his poetry he interprets the lived cultures of blacks exiled from apartheid South Africa as well as of those still trapped physically in the South African situation. To address this challenge to interpret the actions of his fellow black South Africans in the face of apartheid, Mphahlele has conceptualised the theory of African humanism. It is for this reason that the resilient crystallisation of African consciousness is expressed directly in Mphahlele’s poetry set in South Africa as an antidote against “the tyranny of time” within the context of apartheid South Africa. The same consciousness acts as a survival kit against “the tryranny of place” when the

black South African is in exile where he or she has fled apartheid. Yet the dream to escape "the tyranny of time" completely is dashed as the memory of apartheid South Africa continues to cling to the consciousness of the exile. This haunting obsession with the brutality of apartheid is expressed by these lines from "Exile in Nigeria": "now my enemies are out of sight;/only distant sound of long-tongued hounds/I hear/across the Congo and Zambesi and Limpopo --" (*Unbroken Song* 264). We know from biographical information as contained, inter alia, in Woeber and Read's *Es'kia Mphahlele. A Bibliography* that Mphahlele has had to endure the flustering tribulations associated with "the tyranny of place" as he exiled himself to Nigeria, Paris, Kenya, Denver, Zambia, Denver again, then Pennsylvania, up to his permanent return to South Africa in 1977 after the brief visit in 1976 (the order of places of exile given here as in various publications including the chronicle in Woeber and Read, 1989) (*A Bibliography* 5-8). Desperation with "the tyranny of place" that one grapples with in exile conditions is expressed in such lines as "new dawn tells me/that void can never last" (*Unbroken Song* 270). Here the "new dawn" which symbolises excitement that should accompany Mphahlele's novel experience of exile in America gives way to a sense of alienation upon his realising that the estrangement of apartheid that he has run away from pursues him in America in a way that does not fundamentally differ from conditions back home.

In his essay written in the year 2000, "Africa in Exile", Mphahlele reconfirms the ubiquity in exile of the situation he has called "the tyranny of place" (125). This is when "the local setting can make impossible demands on one's commitment" ("Africa in Exile" 125). There is, in the above statement by Mphahlele, an undertone of resenting the failure by host countries to acknowledge in a non-totalising manner that they know the exiles only skewly, in even homogenising terms (that blur differences among cultural groups coming from different parts of Africa), due to the monocentric nature of reality that is defined from the point of view of host countries as the "centre". This unfortunate presumptuousness about exiles in their host countries results in the agony of "always [being] humbly aware that [one knows] volumes more about [oneself] – the limits of what [one] can achieve and what is within [one's] capacity" ("Africa in Exile" 125) than those of the host country can. Ndebele has remarked about the danger of the centre imposing its interpretation of social experience on the other as "[committing] the fallacy of universalising [the Centre's] interests" ("Actors" 77).

Mphahlele remarks in the poem quoted above that "new dawn" tells him that "void can never last" (*Unbroken Song* 270). The pun on "dawn" means that, due to the condition of exile it is dawning on Mphahlele that the void formerly associated with the tyranny of time in apartheid South Africa cannot remain for any length of time as it is bound to be filled by the equally unpalatable tyranny of place which exile is all about. The void proves to be only a temporary reprieve from the pain of oppression by the colonising side of society. It is probably with this 'void' in mind that Mphahlele acceded in a 1971 interview with Lindfors to "both situations [of apartheid South Africa and exile bearing] crippling factors, but those in exile [being] still less excruciating than those inside the country" ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 171). From this statement it can be safely deduced that for Mphahlele moving out of apartheid South Africa into exile is marked by shortlived atonement which is only substituted with the "spiritual, mental ghetto" of exile ("Es'kia

Mphahlele" 171). Mphahlele's documented vocation of turning the bitter memory of apartheid that dogs him in exile into a tool with which to make meaning of the challenges of exiled life is akin to Said's theoretical position regarding beginning, difference and discontinuity, as exposed in the following words:

> … knowledge is conceived of, first of all, as radical discontinuity – not that the relationships between finite instances of knowledge are necessarily nondialectical, but rather that the unit of knowledge is an articulation, or an instance, of difference from another unit… [and] underlying all this discontinuity is a supposition that rational knowledge is possible, regardless of how very complex – and even unattractive – the conditions of its production and acquisition. ("Abecedarium" 283)

The similarity between Mphahlele's and Said's positions on beginning, difference and discontinuity becomes clearer as soon as Mphahlele's enterprise to define his concept of African humanism is seen as a beginning. This is the case because Mphahlele's distinctive intellectual contribution in creating his own definitions of ideas such as Africanism, humanism, liberalism, racism and essentialism are in "radical discontinuity" (in Said's terms) with what obtained before ("Abecedarium" 283). The status of Mphahlele's theory of African humanism as "radical discontinuity" is attained as he endows these ideas with his own mantle, which differs from the way other theorists have conceived of them. That the ideas are inflected within the framework of his concept of African humanism should isolate this concept as a beginning even more graphically.

As critics like Thuynsma have indicated, Mphahlele "[explores] the meaning of raw experience in fiction" ("Whirlwind" 236). In other words, Mphahlele's quest in personal life is the same as that expressed in his writings. In the 1971 interview with Lindfors (published in 2002) Mphahlele himself testifies to this in the remark that "one could say something is more autobiography than fiction and something is more fiction than autobiograpy, but the two are never completely separate" ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 169). As such, the quest of Mphahlele the observer-participant having been a self-defining one in order to establish the meaning of being African in the historico-cultural framework of colonisation and exile, this quest is explored in the poems. This point is what Ruth Obee is talking about in remarking of "[Mphahlele's] African humanist aesthetic and its expression in art [beginning] by finding its inspiration in the community while at the same time serving that community … [as] can be seen … in [his] poetry" ("The Unbroken Song" 195). The link between Mphahlele the person-in-the world and Mphahlele the writer and critic as observed by Thuynsma in the quotation above serves to explain why this study places the study of Mphahlele's poetry, short stories, novels and autobiographies within the broader context of Said's theory. One of the reasons for such an approach is that Mphahlele's relation with his work fits into Said's model of what he theorises as the relationship of the writer's life to his literary output, as when he observes that "there is a real, unavoidable coincidence between an author's egocentricity and the kind of eccentricity found exclusively in his text" ("Beginning with" 228). The constant that carries Mphahlele through variants that are successive historical shifts (from real-life alienation from his abusive father, to psychological exile within the alienating apartheid atomosphere of the South Africa in which he grew up, to egregious exile in African states and America) is an identity he terms African humanism. In other words, the meanings of the poems are couched within an African humanist perspective. Eccentric as the content

and style of these poems are due to their being informed by an African humanist consciousness, they are no less "egocentric" (in Said's terms) in that they reveal Mphahlele's *personal* intention of designating his African humanist interpretation of experience. It should be realised that (personal) intention is as crucial to the beginning of any intellectual assignment as (subjectivised) authority, according to Said's general theory on beginnings. That is why Said has written that "the beginning … is the first step in the *intentional* production of meaning"; that "authority is… [either] a property of discourse and not of writing … or authority is an analytic concept and not an actual, available object … [but in either case] authority is nomadic" ("Beginning Ideas" 5, 23; emphasis added). Authority in the sense in which Said describes it in this quotation is invariably the subjective property of the writer or theorist as a constituent of the soundness of beginning. As such, authority in the instance of Mphahlele's 'beginning' the concept of African humanism embodies the strongly discontinuous mode of his conceptualisation as infused with the existential challenges he combats in real life as subject, a struggle which ends up reflected in his writings.

While experiences represented in this way in the poetry are instances of social practice, Mphahlele's interpretation of these examples of social practice from the perspective of African humanism should be understood to be his devotion (as an "interpreter" in Ndebele's terms) to the task of conceptualising the experiences within an African humanist discourse. His conceptualisation of African humanism is what Ndebele sees as the interpreter's "task of designing theory out of social practice" ("Actors" 83). Edward Said has remarked about such a need for writers – whom he associates with "[the] era of liberationist anti-imperialist resistance" ("Yeats and" 76) – to theorise about cultural traits of their peoples which affirm their existence, defying any predicating on colonialist hegemonic discourse, in the following words:

> It has been the substantial achievement of all of the intellectuals … by their historical, interpretive, and analytic efforts to have identified the culture of resistance as a cultural enterprise possessing a long tradition of integrity and power in its own right, one not simply grasped as a belated reactive response to Western imperialism. ("Yeats and" 73)

The conception expressed in this quotation is also found in "Freedom from Domination in the Future" where Said advocates the perception of "the intellectual as first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity" (403). This affirms the very conception of the role of the writer/critic/theorist as not just an actor but also and more importantly as an interpreter (to use Ndebele's terms). These close views of the social position of the writer-critic held by Said and Ndebele are similar to Mphahlele's own on the same issue, as analysis of his works will show.

This conception of the writer as an "interpreter" as well as oneness of Mphahlele's quest in personal life and that of his writings as I indicate above by citing Thuynsma, circumscribe and permeate all of Mphahlele's poetry. That this is the case has to do with Mphahlele's practical delineation of his concept of African humanism and the composition of this concept of African cultures – neither of which separates the craft of the writer/storyteller from his personal life and the way he or she shares communal life with fellow humans. In this way he broadly shares his orientations with other African

writers, illustrated in a theorist like Soyinka's perception that "African writing is … rooted in the concept of literature as part of the normal social activity of man" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 67). Mphahlele's poetry (which characteristically merges his personal experience and the life of fellow Africans with whom he shares existential challenges) can be put into the two categories of those that oppose apartheid more openly and those that do so in a subtle manner. The merging of his interpretive roles as a living African and and as a writer is a feature of Mphahlele's poetry irrespective of whether it is the category of Mphahlele's poetry that foregrounds apartheid or refers to those of his poems that put it in the background. In "Dedication to Voices in the Whirlwind" (*Unbroken Song* 302), Mphahlele merges his hope for Africans' victorious survival of apartheid's cultural and spiritual onslaught on them with the typically Africanist viewing of the writer's work as a group activity among compatriots joined together by a communalist ethos: "FOR DENNIS BRUTUS:/ You stopped a fascist bullet./ FOR KGOSITSILE:/ Your 'borrowed fears'/ are also mine--/ and so your questionings". The solidarity expressed above with Brutus and Kgositsile is followed (in the next lines) by a celebration of Gwendolyn Brooks's "incisive image" that is credited with the incantatory mystical power of the word in its portrayed feat of overcoming self-consuming and self-defeating emotions induced by the colonising experience. Reference to Kgositsile's challenges in the quoted poem as "borrowed" and "also mine" is an allusion respectively to the alienating nature of exile conditions and to the fact that Mphahlele shares such unsatisfactory conditions with fellow exiles from South Africa. The unfortunate conditions in which Mphahlele and exiled compatriots like Kgositsile find themselves are the result of host countries contributing to the "tyranny of place" which the victims find themselves facing. Mphahlele continues the poem with lines that exhort his younger sons Chabi and Puso to learn to emulate the aforementioned heroes and better learn sooner (rather than later) to withstand the annihilating nature of either exile or apartheid experience (depending on whether they stay behind in exile for ever or return to home soil one day).

The theme of African humanist resilience in the face of colonial adversity is taken up again in "Vignettes" (290). Here Mphahlele enumerates the collective culture of Africans as one aspect of African humanism with which to shape reality to one's comfort (as the words "beauty" and "order" indicate). The three-score geese that Mphahlele sees while jogging one morning in Wayne, greater Philadelphia, profoundly attract his attention due to their "breasting the wind". In this poem of 1976 Mphahlele in his characteristic thematisation of the sustaining black myth of steadfast, selfconstituting struggle, joins the action of the geese that he depicts here to the historically distant words of the African-American activist W E B du Bois, who referred in October 1926 to Africans all over the world as those who "have all the years been breasting hills and winds/the size of a whole black universe" (300). The observation that the "whole black universe" has been negotiating existential obstacles successfully "all these years" (as indicated by the image in "breasting hills") should properly be understood to be referring to Mphahlele himself as one of the "whole black universe" – and not only to the blacks he is writing about. Mphahle's achievement in "breasting hills" is consonant with the task to "begin" as characterised by Said when he writes that "underlying all [the discontinuity in beginnings] is a supposition that rational knowledge is possible,

regardless of how very complex – and even unattractive – the conditions of its production and acquisition" ("Abecedarium" 283). The conditions under which Mphahlele has been "breasting hills" by way of positing the concept of African humanism to sustain himself and others in a similar situation spiritually are symptomatic of the "supposition that rational knowledge is possible" in the way Said explicates aspects of "beginning" ("Abecedarium" 283).

In America particularly, Mphahlele indicates, blacks have been "breasting hills" victoriously on the path to self-emancipation. The reader is then transported to apartheid South Africa by the lines "as if ahead/were bearers of a coffin/or they were pickets/bent on raising hell for/ bureaucrats/… a purpose much bigger/than the crumbs of bread/these numskulls/come and throw to them/over the fence" (291). When apartheid agents in this connecting image are depicted as coming out in tanks to blow the geese to pieces, this is counterpoised against the agency of the geese that are "bent on raising hell for/bureaucrats" (*Unbroken Song* 291). Fanon's theory on violence interprets action such as this as testimony that "the agents of [oppression] speak the language of pure force" ("Concerning Violence" 29). Contrary to the critic Percy More's general description of Mphahlele's African humanist stance as "[excluding] violence" ("Hegel, the Black Atlantic and Mphahlele" 13), at least in the poem "Vignettes" (quoted above), the described Africans actively protesting against apartheid brutality are violently "bent on raising hell for/bureaucrats" (*Unbroken Song* 291). In fact, Mphahlele's African humanism does not exclude justifiable violence as a means towards self-realisation. That is why he is known to object *inter alia* to "the theology of the Christian world [for being] against any kind of political overthrow … [and for being] the gospel of … nonviolence" as his interview with Lindfors records ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 169). Statements such as this are significant not only as factors within Mphahlele's African humanism as a theoretical matrix. They are useful, too, in as far as they map the overlap between the concept of African humanism and Mphahlele's postcolonialist views on the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Theorising more broadly on the interaction between the oppressor and the oppressed in the colonial environment, Fanon makes a remark that is pertinent to the clash between the oppressed and the oppressor in the poem quoted above, in the following manner:

> The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity. This reign of violence will be the more terrible in proportion to the size of the implantation from the mother country. ("Concerning Violence" 69)

That Mphahlele imagines the necessarily violent nature of the liberation struggle along Fanonian lines is indicated when apartheid agents in the connecting image of blacks "breasting hills" against apartheid back home on South African soil are depicted as coming out in tanks to blow the geese to pieces and the oppressed blacks react with counter-violence by "raising hell for/bureaucrats" (*Unbroken Song* 291).

Consistently with Mphahlele's position that Africans as the oppressed of the world suffer the same humiliation whether by apartheid on home soil or by exile on foreign soil, it does not matter whether in "Vignettes" the Africans rise up against apartheid or American oppression. This is why "Vignettes" bridges time and defies geographical

distance by conjoining images that signify the alienation of African humanist consciousness on American soil with those of alienation that springs from apartheid's master-slave attitudes.

In this way the sustained image of blacks "breasting hills" weaves through stanzas depicting black survival situations that are distant in place and time. This happens till the motif leads us to specific images of black intellectuals keeping their wise distance in white-dominated institutions, to exiled blacks bravely preserving their identity in alienating exile scenes, until we arrive back home in Johannesburg where black survivors in an apartheid context are impelled to resort to unorthodox methods including that of practising crime with the motive of 'normalising' society from the perspective of a "centre" that is Africanist ("*for ta-night is ta-night Missus Rosenbaum, ta-night your jewels are mine*"). Significantly, such a placeless and timeless survival of blacks globally is depicted as heroic, in true Black Consciousness spirit. For this reason one must agree with Ruth Obee's observation that Mphahlele's poems including "Fathers and Sons" "memorably [serve] to exemplify Mphahlele's Black Consciousness thought and his African humanist stance" ("The Unbroken Song" 199).

This sustained image of "breasting hills" significantly traverses time and place. This is in keeping with the notion of unbroken cultural identity interrupted now and again by time-bound reshapings of outward behaviourial patterns that remain informed by the timeless myth of a self-respecting people as conceived of by Mphahlele (for example in the essay "Renewal Time", in the introduction of the collection of stories *Renewal Time* viii - xii) and by other postcolonial writers such as Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Kahlil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore who are quoted in "Renewal Time." What qualifies these writers as postcolonial is not necessarily the time during which they wrote but the self-constituting aspect of their writing.

Despite Mphahlele's well-known denouncement of overt anti-apartheid creative writing, poems like "Death" (274 – 277) do not seem to fall outside the category of protest literature. The opening lines of the poem announce with deep indignation that the social and economic conditions in apartheid South Africa probably led to the poet's mother and brother dying at the early ages of 45 and 42 respectively. Even the grandmother's death at 80 is no consolation, as (no differently from the poet's mother) "she also washed her years away/and saw them flow/into the drain/with the white man's scum" (276). The poem is inspired by the assassination in 1967 of apartheid prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd while the poet was in exile in Colorado, hence the refrain constituting the gory images of a Verwoerd "butchered", "like a buffalo", and falling "like a colossus". Tsafendas (the court messenger who stabbed Verwoerd to death) is described as having sunk the knife into the tyrant's neck "while the honourable men/who rode his tanks of fire/looked on". Tsafendas is stylistically elevated by Mphahlele, in the above quotation, to the level of the politically astute assassins (the Roman who stabbed Caesar to death was no spineless villain but one of the intellectuals who plotted Caesar's murder within a political context that demanded immense understanding of social issues). The intertextuality is testified to by references to Verwoerd in terms that Shakespeare used to describe Caesar's successful assassination through the mouths of his characters; words

such as “like a collosus.” There is also significance in Mphahlele’s employment of the term “honourable men” in that it invokes Mark Antony’s famous satirical speech in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, which epithet served in Shakespeare ironically to connect (in the atmosphere of Caesar’s murder) both the victim Caesar and conspirators including Brutus (revealed by Caesar’s imprecation “*et tu Brute*”). Mphahlele’s intention of using such heightened expression, as well as his likening of Tsafendas to treacherous Brutus, is that of making the reader aware that people who may (from some perspectives) be seen as ‘ill-behaved’ or ‘lowly’ such as the writer’s mother, brother and grandmother, should be valued equally with social giants like members of the Afrikaner intelligentsia. Tsafendas and the poet’s next of kin are levelled up as mischievous although they belong to opposite sides of the colour line – which is again a subtle assertion that people are equal irrespective of their pigmentation.

Mphahlele is suggesting by these parallelisms that failure to recognise the African humanist value which holds human life sacred irrespective of social status leads to self-destruction (as Verwoerd and the regime he represents symbolise). In this way the fall of Verwoerd by Tsafendas’s knife predicts the self-destructive fall of the apartheid government through the self-assertive efforts of ‘villainous’ blacks. At a more profound level this ironically shows that even whites may be or feel ‘oppressed’ by a white government, leading to the violence of the oppressor being met with the counter-violence of the oppressed. This poetic moral of Mphahlele’s is especially true when appreciated within the framework of the Africanist *modus vivendi* that holds human life as sacred regardless of social rank. The punctuation of the dirge on departed family members with a refrain that creates a sustained image of Verwoerd’s death should also be understood as announcing yet another different kind of equality – this time the fact that both Mphahlele’s relatives and Verwoerd have equally been killed by the apartheid system. In thus asserting equality in its varied manifestations Mphahlele succeeds in illustrating a judgement informed by a consciousness he has chosen to call African humanism whose central precept is regard for human life as sacred and inviolable. In symbolic terms, the verbally and intellectually complex manner in which Mphahlele considers ideas of equality, the riff-raff, oppressor and the oppressed, is indicative of the intricacy of his concept of African humanism as well as its capacity to contain life in its entire multifariousness. Mphahlele, confirming such a description of African humanism as equal to life’s challenges of whatever immensity and uncanniness, has stated that:

> Now I am older, I can contain that [protesting] sense of urgency, that anger and bitterness and deal with them [in such a way that] I am now conscious of the moral deprivations on both sides of the colour line and across the ethnic boundaries defining those of us who are not white. (“Versus the Political Morality” 375)

All the same, the immoderate tone of the poem as described in the preceding paragraph is in the mould of overt protest literature, albeit not without justification. The starkness with which the ravages of apartheid are debunked is commensurate with the profound and passionate sense of moral indignation against apartheid and specifically Verwoerd as its “architect” which sweeps through the poem. Despite this, it still strikes one that the juxtaposition of the earlier deaths of the poet’s kinsfolk with the death of the apartheid

leader evokes a feeling of morbid gratification – morbid because it is unAfrican to rejoice in a death or disrespect the sacredness of life. With the non-racial attitude inherent in Mphahlele's concept of African humanism in mind, the unsympathetic painting of Verwoerd's death remains in contravention of the principle of regarding human life with awe. This is one poem in which the "bitterness" Mphahlele (like so many black South Africans) had to struggle with, makes itself clearly felt. Mphahlele does not always allow this to happen in his creative writing, probably due to his view that the function of the writer should not descend to that of the activist bent on instigating political action. At the same time it is important to remember that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is functional as opposed to absolute. In keeping with this view of African humanism, a poem such as this one could be a statement by Mphahlele that at one time it would have been appropriate overtly to protest while this does not imply that protest poetry has been appropriate at all times irrespective of the contemporary setting. One other possible explanation could be that the poem was written during the formative years of Mphahlele's aesthetic theory, before, by his own admission, it became his chosen philosophy of life. He once wrote: "before I left South Africa in September 1957 I was not consciously burrowing into my racial community [because] anger propelled one. Writing was a way of dealing with one's anger" ("Versus the Political Morality" 374-5). Such a statement by Mphahlele immediately nullifies the possibility that overt protest in "Death" could have been caused by the inchoate nature of his African humanist consciousness and practice at the time he wrote it. It is known that "Death" was written after Mphahlele had already departed South Africa as a bitter, angry young man and had already had the advantage of intellectual maturity resulting from his sojourn in some African states and France, and that the poem was actually written during his mature years as an exile working within academia in America. What remains the probable cause of such acrid protest in the poem against apartheid is Mphahlele's position regarding protest literature. In his expository writing Mphahlele does acknowledge the validity of protest literature provided that such a protest is done with the purpose of asserting the persistent presence among the oppressed of perspective and resonances, as he writes in the following quotation:

> I am never allowed to forget the high-voltage fences, so I have to create my own myth about survival, about the collective memory that orchestrates the human drama here. This is not a fantasy because ghetto life, urban and rural, does *move* as if it were independent of the fences, of the booby traps, of the brooding fate. The myth I endeavour to establish is that this part of our South African humanity will yet outlast at least some of the malicious gods, even when these have been replaced by another pantheon. ("Versus the Political Morality" 374)

And in "Death" Mphahlele leads by example. The technique used in "Death" elegantly employing the 'resonated' refrain borne of the images of violence and counter-violence from a perspective that is evidently partisan while subtly unifying reality on both sides of the colour line – these exemplify what Mphahlele is known to have professed: that to craft literature in the protest mould should not be mistaken for an excuse to lack technical profundity and vigour. In "Death" Mphahlele achieves literary sublimity through his deft use of intertextuality as demonstrated by ironies reached by effectively juxtaposing the images of Verwoerd's death with those of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. On the matter of

not using protest literature as a subterfuge for lack of artistry Mphahlele wrote in a 1983 essay that:

> The subversion of the political morality is not necessarily a literary confrontation, in which [subversion of political morality] the imagination, prophecy, revelation and impact of message explicitly tries to diminish the workings of such morality in the hope of laughing or cursing it out of town. ("Versus the Political Morality" 375)

What Mphahlele advocates in this quotation is tied to his stance that the reader should not be simplistically confronted by direct messages about how he or she should resolve day to day challenges, but should instead be stimulated by literature that implements culturally appealing resonances to arrive at African humanist solution to or circumvention of existential challenges.

African humanist resonance is evoked when the poem conjures up images associated with African oral tales – images of giants dying as they have lived and of the frog in a well that bursts attempting to inflate its body to the size of a drinking cow. When the gory image of the dying Verwoerd is introduced in the poem, the refrain of "giants" and "frogs" reminiscent of folktales ceases to weave through the poem. The place of earlier exemplifications of orature is taken by the image of a gory lifeless Verwoerd in a manner that sensuously links Verwoerd with the mythical creatures. In this way the images of the giants dying as they have lived and the frog with the oversize ego are sustained through the shift to images of Verwoerd's corpse by means of a simile. The simile is one in which a character flaw epitomised by Verwoerd's corpse is likened to the flawed traits of the mythical characters of the earlier lines – folktales usually end when cannibals are supplanted by means of boomerang results sparked by their earlier selfish acts; the fate of the megalomaniac frog in a known African fable is that it bursts into smithereens before it can reach the size of the cow that was drinking in the well from which it was sighted by the frog. The intended effect on the reader is thus that of repulsion rather than humanist commiseration. While images derived from the oral tradition introduce an African humanist perspective to the poem, the emotive effect is that of gloating about the death of the detestable 'giant' and/or 'frog' instead of an exhortation to self-constituting action. This contrasts with the way another *Drum* writer, Bloke Modisane (who shared the same culture and environment with Mphahlele), rationalises in traditional cultural terms why he restrained himself from avenging his father's murder in Sophiatown in the following words:

> In the communal culture of my ancestors which still governs our lives, we all share the same blood, and the taking of it, even in the execution of justice, is condemned as an uncivilised ritual…Moshoeshoe, the paramount chief of Basutoland, instead of raining his vengeance on the derelict army which had eaten his father, sent down from his mountain fortress a herd of cattle to the cannibal army with the message that he could not desecrate the graves of his father. (*Blame Me* 54)

While apartheid references in the poetry quoted earlier are not as conspicuous as in "Death", the consistent contextualisation of the the poetry's content within 'resonances' of traditional cultures that produce an African perspective remains constant. The effect is

consistently the highlighting of victorious selfconstitution, as seen in the poem "Death" when the powerful figure of mighty Verwoerd is supplanted by the actions of ordinary men and women who (like the geese in "Vignettes") "breast hills". Such victorious self-definition is foregrounded despite Mphahlele's graphic portrayal of the immanence of apartheid in the lives of Africans. As the poem "Death" testifies through its use of the images of giants and frogs, the starkness of apartheid is depicted side by side with the weaving of mythical resonances into the fabric of the poem. This consistent production of a distinctly African humanist perspective through poems that do not depict the apartheid experience in unrelenting, lingering fashion is an intensification in practice of the idea of Africanist survival that Mphahlele refers to as an "unbroken song". The irony of overt protest literature is the fact that while purporting to reveal how weak apartheid is, what it actually achieves is an elevation of apartheid as defining the life of a black man or woman to such an extent that it gives the impression that black life is constituted by apartheid. Mphahlele's continued creation of perspective by means of myth consistently serves to debunk apartheid as ephemeral, in contrast with the heroic endurance of the life of blacks in South Africa that is ascribed to their varied lifestyles collectively defined as African humanist.

The way Mphahlele has created the poem "Death" is congruous with the point he has expressed in *The African Image - Revised Edition* (revised, 1974) and elsewhere, that he disapproves of a writer hoping to survive on anger for the reason that such an approach inevitably detracts from the profundity of a work of art. According to Mphahlele a work of art is adequately intellectual if it does not just criticise apartheid in a racist manner but considers social directions such as "multiracialism [rising] to non-racialism, which goes concurrently with the intercultural enterprise, before the latter totally refines and supercedes it" ("The Burden of History" 82). What he means is that it is proper within the interaction of various races if blacks and whites bring on board their distinctive identities, but such racial self-confidence should not lead to racist bias towards differing groups. This position characterises Mphahlele as non-partisan in that he is against even blacks equating whiteness with evil without isolating apartheid as the specific feature they revolt against. This is what he means by non-racialism "totally [refining and superceding] multiracialism" ("The Burden of History" 82). It is probably the non-partisan poise in Mphahlele's poems including "Death" which prompted the writer Ruth Obee to describe Mphahlele as "inclusive in spirit" ("The Unbrokeng Song" 199). She links this to the "dialogue of two selves" within Mphahlele, which (as this study indicates in numerous places) simply means the mutually abrogating African and western consciousnesses that are the legacy of one's historical anteriority having straddled cultures of both worlds ("Conclusion" 224). As Obee rightly observes, "African humanism serves not only as an effective and illuminating thematic counterpoint to themes of alienation… but it also serves an an affirmation and bridging point, a meeting place between Africa and the West" ("Conclusion" 224). For Mphahlele's concept of African humanism to "serve as an affirmation and bridging point" between the identities of blacks on the one hand and whites on the other implies that it advocates an accommodative, impartial view of the other by each side of the colour line – similarly to the way "Death" seeks to highlight the equality of black and and white plights in the way it puts oppressed blacks and whites

who are unhappy with the apartheid government of which Verwoerd is a symbol in the same position to mete out counter-violence to the violence of the state.

The features of the poem "Death" having been explained to employ consistent African humanist devices in a dexterously meaningful manner, it is worthwhile to examine how this technique continues to be used in other poems. One such noteworthy feature exhibited by Mphahlele's poetry and short stories is the representation of one aspect of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism which he has described as "religious nationalism", "Zionist-Ethiopian" or "messianic sects" ("Your History" 158, 163; "Prodigals" 336). This phenomenon refers to the way Africans reconstruct western Christianity to reconcile it with African humanism. In "Exile in Nigeria" for instance, Mphahlele cautions that his exile is a temporary sojourn, a mere stop at the roadhouse for a beer, as he is going to "tunnel through/back again" (269). Brooding in this poem on how his home continent was plundered by the coloniser, he muses: "Over centuries/they scrambled/for my mother/…sold her shrines/planted/brass and wooden crosses/…gaming for the land/while hungry eyes transfixed on a miracle/high on Calvary" (270). This powerfully signifies that the poet sees foolishness in Africans who simplistically believe in the coloniser's faith (western Christianity).

Western Christianity is again satirised in "Fathers and Sons". Here the poet negates the precepts of Western Christianity by anchoring his interpretation of the youth uprising in Soweto in 1976 within the matrix of the cultures of Africa that believe in reincarnation. The poet maneuvres the reader to conceive of the youths' revolution as a mystical reincarnation of their fathers earlier persecuted and killed by the apartheid system. In a mocking tone the writer indicates through the voice of the speaker that his waking from the dead is not like that of the biblical Lazarus. Lazarus's death and resurrection (as Mphahlele portrays these) were comfortable, unearned and followed by an inactive, dishonourable waiting on "the edge of the cliff/for a second going" (310). After stating that he comes with fury braving another dawn of police killings, the speaker shows that the teachings of the bible and the brutality of the coloniser are intertwined, in these terms: "Tell me not of second comings/or love of your god:/I cannot feel it/never have in all my terror-sticken years" (310). The poet's voice seems to warn his people not to embrace western Christianity uncritically and attempts to alert the reader to the truth that this brand of faith is but one of the many stratagems by the coloniser to secure hegemony and subjugation. Mphahlele's direct rebuff of western Christianity is well documented throughout his expository writing as well. This can be seen *inter alia* when he remarks in the 1971 interview with Lindfors about it in terms that are amenable to the counterhegemonic theory on beginnings as expatiated by writers such as Edward Said – that "It instills a sense of authority to the extreme extent that you do nothing about it" ("Es'kia Mpahlele" 169).

In the latter lines of the poem the poet advances the poem's argument from a mere negation of the Christian religion that he dismisses as devoid of the African humanist values which he mentions in an essay as "[being] not a proselytising way of life" and as "[having] never sought to colonize anybody" ("Notes Towards" 139). Typically of a subjective self-definition that Mphahlele has shown to be an aspect of African humanist

consciousness, the poet this time symbolically conjures up the existence of an Africanist religion as a result of which the rebellious youth refuse to accept the western Christianity that is paraded to them as a justification of the order they are actively contesting. This the poet achieves by sustaining the image of soil through descriptions of three different scenes that have links with his life as a young boy of 15 in rural Maupaneng, in Soweto (which symbolises the state's extravagant display of military power against the subaltern) and in Marabastad where he was first exposed to urban ghetto life. It could be said that the connective symbol of soil is an allegorical signification of African religion, an aspect of which is a ritualistically perfected attachment to home soil that includes nature as a whole. A mention in the poem of police also evokes an idea of prison where people are kept after being arrested. Use of words such as "police" and "Soweto" in the same poem is no more than an indication by Mphahlele that by engaging state power on the soil of Soweto (which could be seen as a huge prison in itself due to a permanent presence of police patrols and raids), the boy knows the experience of prison though he has never been to prison. The poem depicts the recalcitrant boy as repeatedly making references to his father who is not shown as being physically present on the scene as he is probably dead. This indicates that the boy's fighting of the system together with his mates is a continuation of the fights of their fathers and forefathers, a re-incarnation of them in a way.

This is a significant representation of traditional religion. It is a symptom of the boy's outlook and that of the African people he symbolises being African humanist in the way Mphahlele understands the concept. The implied reference in the poem to the land as an invigorating point of contact with the ancestors supports Mbiti's observation that the ontology of Africans is such that "space and time are closely linked … [because] what matters most to the [African] people is what is geographically near" (*African Religions and Philosophy* 26). Mbiti gives as a reason for this view the fact that "The land provides them with the roots of existence, as well as binding them mystically to their departed" (26). As the departed or ancestors can only be connected with in this way (on home soil in which they are buried), Mphahlele links the devastating impact of the assault by apartheid agents to the youths' mystical attachment to the land which is not foreign, but previously occupied by the ancestors before they could join the spirit world. The lexicon of the poem consists of language signs that collectively represent an assertion of a religion alternative to that paraded by the state which the youth are fighting (words such as "soil" and "god"). This is in keeping with the sarcasm towards western Christianity elicited by a comparison of the resurrection of the youths' ancestors with that of the biblical Lazarus in "Fathers and Sons".

This positing of an alternative Africanist religion against any form of foreign religion including western Christianity features consistently in the short stories and novels of Mphahlele. That this should be a consistent stylistic feature supports what Mphahlele has written about Christianity in his non-fictional texts, as when he remarks in his interview with Lindfors:

> The theology of the Christian world is against any kind of political overthrow or political agitation. It is the gospel of kindness, of humility, of nonviolence. It instills a sense of authority to the extreme extent that you do nothing about it.

> LeRoi Jones would argue that Islam is the other preference. I don't see that there is any choice between the two. When we have pushed all these foreign relations into the background or flushed them out of our minds, do you know what we are left with? We are left with ourselves to depend on – no props, no visions of the world to come, no guardian angels – only our naked selves with our ancestors to think of. Who are our ancestors? They are those who fell by the white man's gun. Those are the ones we think of, and those are our moral props if we need any at all. When we have eventually divested ourselves completely of the Christian myth we will know we have won a battle. ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 169)

The linking of ancestors in their current spiritual existence with their past empirical existence as victims of the coloniser's brutality bears striking relevance for the juxtaposition in the poem "Death" above of Lazarus as a Christian ancestor with his foreign brand of resurrection, the socioculturally inflected resurrection of Africans as embodied by the rebellious youth of Soweto, and the violence of the apartheid state that seeks to blot Africans out of existence.

Evidence of Mphahlele's informed stand against western Christianity is not confined to examples we have just quoted. Mphahlele demonstrates throughout the kind of religious selfdefinition that challenges what prove to be colonialist religions (exemplified in the above poems by the variety of western Christianity evident within apartheid discourse) as testimony of African humanist engagement. This, as an analysis of the poems above demonstrates, is tied to a spiritual reconnection with the ancestors. It is carried forward in other poems such as "A Prayer". In "A Prayer", the poem that recalls the tempest of thoughts in the poet's head as he stood in a Soweto open area during his temporary return to South Africa in 1976 — one reason advanced by the speaker to explain his resolution to terminate his exile for ever is that he is responding to a beckoning by the ancestors: "I have returned /to this killing ground/because I heard my ancestors calling" (305). In a later stanza Soweto is referred to as follows: "here on the killing ground/here where the ancestors forever/keep their vigil" (307).

The poet informs his poems with the ethos and vision he has called African humanism, brought to the surface by means of such words as "vigil" in "A Prayer" when he describes the visit to Soweto, inter alia, by reference to the African custom of attending a wake when death has occurred (307). For a reader unaware of this allusion, reference to the magnitude of the 1976 Soweto massacre will slip past unnoticed. For ancestors *forever* to keep vigil means that there is continuous dying, something frightfully unusual as death, under normal circumstances, is known to visit the living – not stay forever. For the ancestors, and not humans, to keep vigil is a powerful hyperbole that implies a crisis approaching annihilation of the present generation, as the spirits of the ancestors would descend to attend a wake only under extreme conditions where all their descendants have been wiped out.

Another reference to the role of the ancestors is found in "Death II" where the poet fears that he may die in exile before artistically telling the story (to later black generations) of the brutality of the agents of apartheid during their reign. Mphahlele expresses the desire to recount the past of the blacks under apartheid in South Africa to younger generations

in terms that equate the cultural tradition of oral storytelling to a frenzied invocation of the ancestors: "so you want to howl/howl/howl into the night/from hill to hill/where ancestors commune/for all who care to hear their beat" (284). This pious view of the cultural role of the oral storyteller testifies to Mphahlele's aesthetic view that art is a *compulsive* cultural act, a ritual with cultural-religious significance. The line "for all who care to hear their beat" is a reaffirmation of the non-homogenising definition of the concept of African humanism. The agonised "howling" is meant for the audience of only those (both black and white) whose consciousness is sufficiently African humanist to respond empathetically due to identification with the cause of the howling and in a commensurate manner. The repetitive reference to the near-religious act of teaching the young about their past as "[howling] into the night" is indicative of an awareness on the part of the storytelling African sage that people on the other side of the social chasm would in their naivety misread the serious act as some sort of unwarranted noise-making or even outright insanity (284).

The diction achieves more than an exposition of the piety involved in oral storytelling, though. The term "ancestors commune" expresses Mphahlele's validation of the belief of Africans in their communal existence, which would be the behaviour also of ancestors leading a communal existence in the afterlife. The ancestors in African culture perform the duty of linking the living and those who have died, as well as linking the past to the present, and Mphahlele recognises both roles here. The term "hear their beat" refers to the fact that those with the correct cultural code would, even while the speaker is crying the teachings on hilltops, decode the mystical presence of their African ancestors' past tribulations in the very voice of the crier over and above understanding the plain message of the traditionally oral teachings. Such a dramatic representation of the resonances of the words of the 'howler' is important to give meaning to a belief in an enduring or timeless life – a belief that is needed in the face of the brutalised existence of blacks during periods such as the apartheid era in South Africa. This aspect of Mphahlele's aesthetic is demonstrated continually in the short stories and novels.

Another way in which Mphahlele contributes to the understanding of African Humanism in the life depicted in his poetry is by means of images deriving from Northern Sotho proverbs. In "Death II", a poem in which the poet expresses the fear of dying in exile (Africans ideally always return home to die, they do not just die anywhere), the poet likens the stifling sensation of living in exile to something dripping from the heart without finding any external outlet or course: "something trickles from/the ego center/sinister/like water/dripping/from a pipe within a wall,/out of reach" (285-86). In the footnote to the poem Mphahlele admits that the image of blood dropping from the heart is a literal translation of the Northern Sotho idiomatic expression "*pelo e rotha madi* (the heart drips blood)" (289). The expression refers to being profoundly angry or sad. If the reader remains unaware of the Northern Sotho derivation of the expression from which the image comes, the fact that exile makes the poet angry or sad could be underinterpreted or completely misconstrued.

It will not be enough for the non-African English-speaking reader to read the footnote by Mphahlele, unfortunately. It is because the footnote does not bother to explain the

application of another Northern Sotho expression, "*go tetela madi teng*" (to smother the victim in such a way that it bleeds internally). It is an idiomatic expression used by the Northern Sotho people to highlight the probably fatal nature of any internal injury or assault (bleeding externally is culturally associated with a good chance of surviving the injury, among the number of ethnic groups collectively called the Northern Sotho). An appreciation of this implied metaphor in the lines "like water/dripping/from a pipe within a wall,/out of reach" equips the reader to correctly conceive of the impact of exile on the soul of the exiled as carrying the potential to injure terminally without prospects of recovery.

In "A Prayer", Mphahlele again laments the exiled condition of "sowing seed/on borrowed land" (304). This links with the poet stating in a later stanza that what helps him survive in exile is fellowship with like-minded compatriots back home in South Africa, faith in future freedom, and hope that he will return. It is part of the thinking pattern of Africans that whenever one moves house, one should plant seeds for good harvest in case one returns to the ruins at a later time. This kind of thinking is immortalised in the Northern Sotho proverb, "*Maropeng ge re tloga re hlaba dithaka, ra re re boa ra ja maraka*" (Upon moving house we plant melon pips so that when we return one day we may feast on a dish of melons). The antithesis of this is what Mphahlele means in the lines "sowing seed/on borrowed land", indicating that exile is in contradiction of African thinking. It is seen as painfully futile to work hard at any occupation while in exile, for as long as you are in a foreign land and benefiting people other than yourself or your own people, you or your people cannot fully or actually benefit by your labour. Knowledge of the Northern Sotho proverb obviously facilitates a more complete understanding of this image. Tied to the longing expressed in "A Prayer" to return home (where one can "sow seed" on home soil from which one may later reap) is fear for old age in a foreign country "where the young grind the aged under with steamrollers, here where to be forty is an affront to youth" ("Portrait" 235). Mphahlele's fear of losing the energy to be of any use to his people – who, because of respect shown traditionally for old age would welcome him – by the time he returns from exile is expressed in the essay "Portrait of a Man in a Glasshouse":

> Not yet time for [me] to fart like a horse and dangle on an elongated burp without care who's around. Nor time yet for [me] to gargle with words and syllables and sighs and saliva and spit them out together. Nor yet time to flip over on [my] side before [I carry my partner] to the hilltop, flip over and wheeze in long irresponsible bars, the heart panting like it's just turned back on the edge of a precipice … ("Portrait" 235)

There is no doubt that the images of doting old age and senility this passage bristles with highlight Mphahlele's fear of old age catching up with him while he is still in exile. The poetic quality of this excerpts (though formatted as prose) apparently hints at the intensely pensive state in which the writer ponders over the question of aging on strange shores.

It has already been mentioned in the preceding parts of this study that Mphahlele's poems, like his prose, are true to his African humanist conviction that man is at the centre of creation. Creation to the African humanist is an unbroken unity that includes the

Supreme Being, the ancestors, man, inorganic and organic nature ("Notes Towards" 137). Because man in this sense of being at the centre of reality ("Notes Towards" 137) is free to give meaning to reality, nature to the African cannot take any fixed form or shape except as subjectively conceived (as such) by man at the centre. In this way the form or shape of things usually describable in objective terms can differ on various occasions depending on the mood of the specific person from whose subjectively defined centre the particular shape is perceived. That is why in one poem, "Homeward Bound", the first stanza describing the mountains near Denver in Colorado contrasts stylistically with the way Maupaneng mountains are intimately described as "… forms beyond/… of ever-changing tints" (280). While the Denver mountains are described as evoking feelings of a static and intimidating unfamiliarity, the Maupaneng mountains are described in terms of salutary familiarity and pliability of association. With the Africanist Mphahlele as the 'centre' the mountains in Denver evoke in him an eerie mysteriousness that represents his views of American life as impenetrable and unintelligible. On the other hand, the images describing the Maupaneng mountains as unfixed in form and as intelligibly familiar and transmutable, represent the same Mphahle at the centre of and shaping reality with his Africanist consciousness, yet in a way that reveals the way he interprets the culturally defined cognition of worlds symbolised by the two contrasted mountains as dissimilar. Hence Mphahlele's nostalgic recreation (in the imagination) of the home mountains as "those shimmering faraway bodies/… they can look the way I want them" (280-81). It is with the same technique that Mphahlele muses in "Vignettes" about the vivid way in which the beautiful image of the communing geese haunts him. This time the beauty of the geese is not interpreted like the Colorado mountains in terms of the European consciousness that views nature objectively without it being shaped *a priori* by man who (according to the concept of African humanism) is at the centre of reality. That is why the perception of the geese leaves Mphahlele's soul in delighted appreciation due to his having assigned the geese his own Africanist shaping and connotations.

Such differing interrogations of phenomena that are commonly perceived physically on European soil should be an indication of the impulses vaccillating between African and western ways of sensing impressions. Flitting abruptly like this between interpreting reality as an African and as one with westernised sensibility is symptomatic of the virulent alienation that accompanies physical sensations in exile. Such fluctuations in negotiating the pain of exile points to the severity of such pain, for the harassed state of mind when emotions are being tossed backward and forward can be no mitigation or atonement of pain in any status quo. Beauty with an African dimension is enacted in the following lines: "beauty/will not last for its own sake./ Beauty only means the/parts are put together right/to shape the order that you want" (292-93). Man is at the center of reality in the Africanist sense, in these poems, and in this way man *shapes* the reality according to Africanist conceptions of cosmology.

The symptomatic use of mythical tales in Mphahlele's poetry as shown above as well as the other African humanist trait in the poetry that sees reality as having no shape until man has subjectively given it shape (in keeping with African humanist conceptions of cosmology), achieve a vivid illustration and consolidation of the idea of African humanism. The mythical element obtains in the lighthearted poem "Somewhere" to

perfect its optimistic perspective: "a man made a song/out of the wailing of a dove/a song that moved all animals/to rise and kill the serpent/who ate the bird's young ones". High-spirited lines towards the close of the poem stress that though "somewhere a mother sobs", it is important for the world to bear in mind that "somewhere, too, a woman gives the world an artist" who will transform the universe and make it a happier one for his people.

It now remains to examine whether the devices that are as African humanist as they are personal as far as Mphahlele the theorist and artist is concerned are as evident in the short stories as is the case with his poetry.

2.2 THE SHORT STORIES

Mphahlele's short stories can be grouped for convenience to indicate some common traits found in each category.

The five stories published under the title *Man Must Live and Other Stories* deserve separate treatment as they share some characteristics not manifested in other stories. Of these early stories Mphahlele has said in the interview with Lindfors that he "was interested in people, in their own ghetto life and their own little dramas and tragedies, which would not necessarily have to do with the racial issue" ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 167). From subsequent collections of stories two other types of story can be distinguished: those exploiting everyday life chiefly to demonstrate the virtues, follies and frailties of blacks, and those inclining more to the protest mode of laying emphasis principally on apartheid to such an extent that apartheid is portrayed almost as the overriding protagonist in the stories. The binding thread of the two types of Mphahlele's stories that he wrote during the latter part of his writing career is the ubiquity of the crass apartheid context, with the difference that sets apart the two sub-types being that of degree of intensity only. Such common ground consisting of the apartheid milieu and atmosphere is what Mphahlele is confessing in the remark that "in them [he] put the ghetto people aside, by themselves, acting out their dramas but at the same time implying the political pressure over them" ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 167).

The chief aim (as in our probing of selected poems in the preceding section) is, however, to glean whatever traces can be identified in these tales of a consciousness or cultural essence Mphahlele has called African humanism. Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma say of the short stories "Man Must Live", "The Living and the Dead", "The Leaves were Falling" and "Tomorrow You Shall Reap" that they "demonstrate … aspects of the moral dilemma that the black-white encounter entails" (*Es'kia* 462). Actually, all of Mphahlele's writing is invested with the "moral dilemma" mentioned above. Mphahlele's definition of African humanism as being the spiritual resource on which Africans can fall back is a way of responding to this moral dilemma. That is why it is possible here to classify all Mphahlele's narrative writings including the short stories according to whether or not in specific literary pieces African humanist social behaviour takes the foreground or whether it is the "black-white encounter" or apartheid that assumes prominence. Such thematic and stylistic variation will be exposed as being tied not only to Mphahlele's trademark formulation and assertion of African humanism as his way of negotiating the "moral dilemma" pointed out in the above citation (from the four critics in their editorial note to the essay collection *Es'kia*), but also as his discontinuous method – as a "beginner" of the concept of African humanism within the broad social and intellectual framework he shared with other African writers of the fifties. As the authority on *Drum* writing Bruno van Dyk has remarked, these writers "were all members of the displaced intelligentsia, and as such bring to their work the tensions that are inherent in such a designation" ("Writing in *Drum*" 3).

The critic Bruno van Dyk unpacks the cause of the "moral dilemma" that characterised *Drum* writers such as Mphahlele in the following words:

> Most were products of liberal institutions like St Peter's Secondary School (Rosettenville), Adams College and Fort Hare. All were thoroughly urbanised and … while they were supremely scornful of apartheid regulations, debunking strictly African styles of life, they were simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by European culture and black nationalism alike. ("Writing in *Drum*" 3)

While the ambivalences and contradictions identified in this quotation have generally characterised the consciousness of the *Drum* writers, it is the intellectual reaction to them (which will be demonstrated in the analysis of Mphahlele's short stories and other narrative writings) which constitutes Mphahlele's rupture and beginning authority, to borrow terminology from Said's theory on beginnings. His instrument for achieving such a distinction from his contemporaries as a theorist has been the authoritatively inflected definition of his concept of African humanism, as scrutiny of both his writings foregrounding apartheid and those relegating it to the background will testify.

2.2.1 APARTHEID IN THE BACKGROUND

Despite the shortcomings Mphahlele mentions on many occasions including in the interview with Samin (190), which relate to use of diction in his first collection of short stories – published in 1946 under the title *Man Must Live and Other Stories* — the title story is a tale in which the early germs of his characteristic representation of African humanism are found. I agree with Samin that these first-ever published short stories by Mphahlele already point to major aspects of his future writing.

In the title story "Man Must Live", for example, Khalima Zungu's mimicry of white people's manners and his failure to synthesise western and African culture in a sound equilibrium is foregrounded alongside the unfolding depiction of his temperament. Colonisation or apartheid is only accorded secondary blame for some of the motives for Khalima Zungu's conduct. Such tactful downplaying of the apartheid ambience within which Zungu's existential strife unfolds foreshadows what Mphahlele states on his literary treatment of the apartheid theme, when he writes that he is situated "Between the outright protest of Richard Rive and James Matthews at the one end and the romantic escapism of Can Themba at the other [which] is a category in which rejection, revulsion and protest meet acceptance and conciliation" (quoted in *A Vision of Order* 171). Understanding Mphahlele's own description of this "acceptance" as a deliberate shift of focus away from the disturbing immanence of apartheid to the independent spiritual resourcefulness of harrowed Africans, Ursula Barnett explains that "this is not acceptance of township conditions or of life in South Africa; [it is] rather acceptance of the fact that human values of love, trust, and loyalty can continue even under impossible living conditions" (180). That this strand constantly pervades Mphahlele's later writing is exemplified by the vivacity of the Africans depicted attending a wake just before the funeral of Talita's husband in the much later short story "In Corner B", in which Mphahlele comments in his authorial voice that the spirit dominant among the mourners is a symptom of their surrender to or acceptance of life and death that proceeds from their deep-seated "long and huge irony of endurance" (*In Corner B* 38). By "irony of endurance" Mphahlele is alerting the reader to the African humanist aspect of hopeful survival in the face of menacing surroundings (rather than a despondent self-

surrendering). This success of Mphahlele's earliest narratives in broaching a wholesome approach to living and writing has led critics like Ursula Barnett to observe that despite Mphahlele's nonchalant assessment of such earlier works of his own, "in its portrayal of the life and struggle of the black man to survive in his society, [*Man Must Live and Other Stories*] broke new ground for the South African reader" (*A Vision of Order* 172). It is the implicit African humanist consciousness within the characters in the stories collected in *Man Must Live and Other Stories* which serves as survival kit facilitating the successful "portrayal of the life and struggle of the black man" – with its depiction of oppressed people nevertheless managing to live life to the full proving to be the most outstanding aspect of the earlier stories.

Congruously with Mphahlele's approach described above, the voice of Khalima Zungu in *Man Must Live* rises to individual prominence while the collective voice of the commuters recedes into a mere background communal voice. Expressions such as "Masses of people", "the stampeding herd", "like sheep", "group of listeners" and "among themselves" pervade the short story to create images of community in describing the mass of black commuters that Zungu is assigned by white bosses to channel (like livestock on a farm) through the right platforms. These groups constitute the audience of the remarks (by single commuters) about Zungu's behaviour. When Zungu overhears commuters commenting "Isn't he fine in that uniform" (23) or murmuring complaints among themselves that he is "driving them like oxen" (26), the dialogue expresses a societal voice that is a metonymic expression of communal African culture, as informed by a consciousness Mphahlele calls African humanism. It is against the grain of African humanism to espouse a culture symbolised by the wearing of a uniform or by ordering people around in a detached manner. What an audience woven together through African humanist mores would expect is the interactive mode of involving people by negotiating some of their concerns in a two-way dialogue rather than by uttering unilateral commands. It is for this reason that Mphahlele has stated that "we are traditionally great talkers, find comfort in talking to other people, and also want others to know that they can unburden themselves by talking to us" ("Notes Towards" 138).

By contrast, the mimicry of colonialist conceptions of proper conduct underlying the protagonist's conduct is revealed in descriptions like "fine in that uniform", "cringed before his employer and the European workers" and "had been told at school about hell". That the terms above signify conduct conflicting with tenets of African humanism is shown up by Mphahlele when he writes elsewhere that "wrongdoing is not conceived, as in the West, in theological terms, as the abstraction called sin" ("Notes Towards" 138). Mphahlele's attribution of Khalima Zungu's errant consciousness (contrasting with what the character has learnt at school – where curriculum content was defined by the coloniser in the era of apartheid) points to the particular type of hybrid consciousness in him, manifesting itself in the improper way he relates to the commuters as an effect of mental colonisation. That Zungu had learnt in school about "hell" is a further revelation of the ambivalent consciousness galvanizing the protagonist Zungu into action in this story, in which his behaviour conflicts with expected African humanist conduct. On this point Mphahlele has stated that in the lifestyle of African humanists the idea of sin that will be punished in hell after one has died is ridiculous:

> For the human being to survive this world, and upon death rejoin his ancestors, he endeavours to maintain harmony with all the forces that he perceives – physically, emotionally and intellectually. Which means that one has perpetually to attempt to maintain a natural order in which there is a balance with a variety of forces – placating some and beseeching others. A sense of wrongdoing can be atoned for by speaking to the person wronged through an intermediary. One doesn't take the easy way of seeking absolution from the Supreme Being. ("Notes Towards" 138)

It is for these reasons that a community member with a Black Consciousness attitude would not display such a shamefully obsequious attitude towards whites. After the widow that Zungu has married deserts him, and he is trapped in a house set on fire by himself, he runs out of the house only after the colonially-induced memory of hell visits his dazed mind. This exaggerates the point that the protagonist sees life through the eyes of the white man and that without images derived from colonising western Christianity his own African conscience is dead. The neighbour who comes to rescue him comically wraps him in a sack (a symbol of the cruel, consumerist culture of the West that in his happier days he foolishly embraced), and like a western economic commodity he is rolled on the ground to have the blaze doused. This rolling may also be explained as reminiscent of how Zungu has always been tossed around by the westernisation that the sack he is wrapped in symbolises; also, his literally placing himself in fire in this incident (figuratively) symbolises the fact that by his conduct throughout the short story he has harmed his own well-being like someone destroying his own life on a bonfire. Significantly, when he is re-initiated by fire back to Black Consciousness/Pan Africanism/African humanism (as the story unfolds), only his affected behaviour dies and he himself survives as a down-to-earth, communal member of Shantytown.

One afternoon Zungu is required by duty to inform a woman that the Cape Town train is leaving at "ten-ten" in the night. Betraying his desire to be like the white man, Zungu relishes swinging his left arm gracefully, wondering if he has "put enough music in that "ten-ten" (24). The image of a black colonial policeman or soldier that is detestable within the Black Consciousness perspective is desirable to the mimic man, thus indicating his colonised condition. In "Signs Taken for Wonders. Questions of ambivalence and authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817", Bhabha explains psychological conditions of the kind shown by Zungu's behaviour in this scene as having resulted from "a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different* – a mutation, a hybrid" (111). The interesting point is that hard as he may try, Zungu's psychological composition is such that he can never perform what he imitates in the same way the Europeans he is emulating do. This state is throughout made evident in Zungu's dialogue, constantly expressing his crass hankering after European manners and possessions.

Significantly, Zungu is not completely consumed by the aspiration to mimic Western ways, as we see him express disdain for blacks who "wield rackets at balls" or jerk their bodies in "funny movements in dance halls to weird noises" (29). This tells us that

Zungu's "disavowed" (in Bhabha's terms) African consciousness continues to surface, although it does so in an altered form because of his admiration of the ways of the white man. The same is true for the white man: Zungu's resultant hybrid behaviour represents some sort of lampoon of the real manners of Europeans. When he romantically sees his luck with the gorgeous and wealthy Mrs Masite who is still trapped in a frivolous lifestyle that humorously parodies his (imperfect) mimicry of western manners, Zungu attributes the apparent congeniality of their views on love and marriage to the transcendental power of the "magic carpet". The metaphor combines the western idea of romance (as symbolised by the probably exotic "carpet") and the African one of the Supreme Being (symbolised by qualifying the carpet as a magic one). In a monologue to help himself muster sufficient courage to face up to the challenging task of proposing love to the widow, Zungu justifies the erotic aspect of such a move by convincing himself that enjoying sex with the woman would show homage to his ancestors (29). This idea of celebrating life for what it is has been mentioned by Mphahlele as an aspect of African humanism (*Es'kia* 138) ; among Africans a man who dies a virgin has his anus and genitals burned with a red hot amber to signify that the ancestral spirits are unhappy with such a lifeless existence. A celebration of life and the orientation to "love life for its own sake" ("Notes Towards" 138) implies that a man, among other aspects of the definition of manhood, is not a real man if he does not live up to the expectations of playing the lovemaking role skilfully during sexual intercourse. Such an aspect of manliness is confirmed in another *Drum* writer Can Themba's short story "The Suit" (*The World of Can Themba*), when the cuckolded character Philemon praises his ancestral spirits in a monologue in which the sources of his thankfulness include "the goodness of life", "the pure beauty of his wife" and "the [erotic] strength surging through his willing body" (82). To love life for its own sake or to celebrate life in this sense is to perform to the full the acts of fathering or mothering of children as culture demands. Ngugi was confirming Africanist traditions and institutions such as this when he indicated that black writers should not perpetuate European cultures by writing in languages belonging to a system of signification that is embedded within the European cultures. He mentions that among other things an Africanist writer must do in order to act in contestation of the kind of "Afro-European" writer (whom he challenges in quotations above) is to preserve and propagate the "African tradition of poetic self-praise or praise of others" (*Decolonising* 78). It is known that apart from men being expected to perform well during sexual intercourse and sire children to expand the clan, every adult man or woman within African societies is expected (as Ngugi indicates) to know the praise poems associated with himself or herself as an individual and with the clan he or she belongs to, as well as the praise poems of those he or she interacts with on a daily basis.

The effective delineation of Zungu will be understood best by a reader who is aware of the aspects of African traditions that are explained above. Mphahlele subtly portrays Zungu as a personality that oscillates between an uncritical embrace of colonial values (signified in this part of the short story by the word "carpet") and Africanist conceptions of manhood (illustrated by Zungu's belief that a copulation on the carpet that is driven by an adequately concupiscent manhood to achieve exceptional coitus would please the ancestors, symbolised in the part of the short story by the word "magical"). Such a creation of Zungu as a character torn between two opposed world-views points to the

recognition by Mphahlele as a resistant writer of ambivalence and alterity induced by colonisation being inevitable constituents of the psychic orientation he calls African humanism. Despite the colonised state of Zungu's psyche as demonstrated in, for instance, his failure to commune with the commuters, Mphahlele intimates a realisation on Zungu's part of his culturally-defined role to perform well in sexual intercourse as his authorial way of revealing the persistence of vestiges of an African humanist consciousness in Zungu, albeit in a diminished form, because of colonial influence. Mphahlele writes about the accommodation of alterity in his concept of African humanism when he states that "we define and redefine" it ("Notes Towards" 139). More importantly, the short story should be fully understood as Mphahlele's affirmation of the point about African humanism that he has repeated most consistently– that it survives the formidable barrage of practices and traditions that are part of a foreign consciousness that seeks to eliminate it.

The anonymous remark that emerges from the community, that Zungu looks fine in the police uniform (meaning that he and the system symbolised by the uniform are inextricably connected), reveals the reprehensible role of black policemen like him who are out of step with the oppressed or resistant culture of their society. Mphahlele not being a man to conform to a totalising outlook whether from the side of the "centre" or the "periphery", he counterpoises the figure of Zungu in this early story with a different kind of policeman in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*). In "Down the Quiet Street", people comment that Constable Tefo is fine, *except for* his uniform. Tefo is a black constable whose daily tasks involve his being stationed in the black township of Newclare. High on the list of crimes Tefo is required to quell is illicit sale of liquor. Yet as a result of some of the apartheid legislation of the time, most black families can only earn a living by means of this illicit trade. Mphahlele's sustained image in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*) of Tefo always sitting on the stoep of the Indian's shop overlooking the main street of the township and drinking liquor is significant. For Mphahlele to depict Tefo's usual place of relaxation as overlooking Nadia Street is an indication of the black policeman's commitment to understanding the daily life of the inhabitants, for Nadia Street is the confluence of all social activities in the black location. The result that Tefo's committed scrutiny of Newclare life yields is an understanding which leads him not to see the illegal activities of the township residents as crime, due to the paradoxical nature of lawfulness and morality under apartheid in which (as Mphahlele has remarked) "Deception is the fundamental virtue in [the] asymmetrical power tussle between black and white" (*Exiles* 149). The economic tactics with which characters like Manyeu beat the life threats posed by apartheid appear to be justified, instead of being condemned unconditionally as criminal. This matches the point Mphahlele makes in his statement that for "an African in South Africa, the law sooner or later turns you into a liar and criminal" (*Exiles* 110).

It is in the light of this information about Newclare and its people that the contrast of the characters of Zungu in "Man Must Live" (*Man Must Live*) and Tefo in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*) will be fully grasped. Far from being aloof from the community like Zungu, Tefo is at one with the people as is shown by his intimate conversations with Sung Li's wife each time he gulps a drink on the stoep of the shop overlooking Nadia

Street, and also with another patron of the Indian's shop called "Seleke's cousin". Keledi is a female character in the story who always has the opportunity, like the shopkeeper Sung Li's wife and Seleke's cousin, to talk to Tefo each time he is in the township. Keledi's position sets her up as a rival to another female character by the name of Manyeu because Tefo eyes Manyeu as a possible future lover and wife. The fact that the widow Manyeu survives by trading illicitly in liquor lends credence to Keledi's critical judgement of a possible love affair between a policeman and a 'criminal'. Despite Keledi's apparently garrulous declarations of a brewing love affair between Tefo and Manyeu (initially the inhabitants do not believe Keledi), which she depicts as scandalous when she gossips with other women of the location, and despite Tefo's awareness of this dim view of Manyeu's character in the eyes of most Newclare inhabitants, he eventually marries her (Manyeu is widowed and thus 'available'). The marriage serves the important purpose of binding Tefo communally to the people of Newclare. The portrayal of a policeman who relates harmoniously with the township residents because of a profound understanding of the real cause of their apparent criminality is found also in Can Themba's short story, "Ten-to-Ten" (*The World of Can Themba*). The policeman named Ten-to-Ten leads colleagues like Constables Masemola and Ramokgopa, and together they routinely patrol the streets of Marabastad, supposedly to enforce the apartheid laws of the time, yet after the curfew of ten minutes to ten o'clock every night (as they patrol) all Ten-to-Ten does is to clear the township of criminals (69, 73). When Ten-to-Ten walks down Second Avenue and other streets of Marabastad he does not break into houses to arrest the men and women for trading in illicit liquor despite being aware that upon his appearance the residents only switch off the lights and sit "in the dark with their calabashes and tins trying to find their blind mouths" (68). This shows that Mphahlele's narrative writings and those of some *Drum* writers of the 1950s depict the Africans' attempts to cope with apartheid in somewhat similar ways.

The marriage (in Mphahlele's "Down the Quiet Street") of a law-enforcing policeman with a 'criminal' like Manyeu signifies a sympathetic solidarity of the black policeman, not only with Manyeu's plight as a widowed woman who as a single parent needs to fend for herself but also with the lot of the whole disadvantaged community of Newclare. Tefo's acceptance of Manyeu as a lover and wife accords with his acceptance of the Newclare residents, warts and all. His sensitivity to the political plight of the Newclare residents, revealed by his defiance of expectations in marrying the widow, has been foreshadowed by his many confabulations with Seleke's cousin. This is so because Seleke's cousin belongs to a political organisation that represents the aspirations of the Newclare residents to be lifted out of the morass that is their life in the township. By keeping alive the political consciousness of the residents through characters such as Seleke's cousin, Mphahlele subtly justifies the illicit sale of liquor as a reaction to the economic repression they face because of the racist apartheid policies of the time. Mphahlele downplays the superficially criminal aspect of the lifestyle of the people of the ghetto as the expression of an African humanist virtue: to possess the ingenuity to beat the system that oppressively circumscribes their lives at the same time as it wants to efface their distinctness as a group held together by identifiable, profound commonalities.

The garrulous Keledi should be understood as being a typical township woman living life to the full according to the Africanist dictates of the traditions of her people – the sounding board for the Newclare communal voice. She furthermore serves as a vehicle to allow the community to share the news orally, for privacy (or non-sharing) could easily drive one to the unAfrican state of isolated individualism instead of communal living – as Mphahlele's concept of African humanism requires. Such effective use of characterisation in the short story cannot be dissociated from Mphahlele's assertion of the presence of cultural connectedness of any group of communities sharing broadly some common behavioural patterns due to their shared history, the discontinuities between their customs and the "centre", and common futures that result from the nature of their shared past and present. This kind of essentialism which I have already interpreted as non-absolute or as moderate should be understood to function primarily among the peoples sharing these circumstances. It should also be understood collectively as the people's mutually accepted values looked at as a social creation rather than as a sum total of innate qualities. If it is an innate quality of these cultural groups, this is the case only in relation to their cultural cohesiveness, in being at the centre of and binding together their common traditions, customs and practices seen to include the individual people whom the common traits describe. Such an interpretation of Mphahlele's strategic essentialism (which he shares with other Africanist thinkers and writers, some of whom I have already cited in this study) explains itself without contradiction when the author concedes the flexibility of this philosophy or orientation, that allows it to change with the times or even be discarded when it ceases to be relevant. Such a strategic essentialism may be outdated in the unknown future in which "multiracialism" gives way to "non-racialism" as Mphahlele's preferred goal of self-definition ("The Burden of History" 92).

As such, Mphahlele's strategic essentialism in its present phase is in harmony with what some linguists see as the nature of linguistic behaviour. A writer like Matsumoto, in explaining that what are positive face wants for one cultural group may be negative face wants for another, has stated that "superficial similarity can result from different underlying principles" (404). In relation to the character Keledi in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*), the idea of "face" is perfectly applicable. While the description of Keledi as a busybody from whom the township gossip is always available may appear not to distinguish Keledi from any gossipmonger in whatever kind of community, such perceived similarity is deceptive in that it results "from different underlying principles" according to the theory of politeness as explained by linguists such as Fraser (1990) and Matsumoto (1988). "Face" is connected to the speaker's requirements of politeness or desirability in relation to recipients of the speaker's messages or communication (Fraser 1990, Matsumoto 1988). This results in "positive face" and "negative face", according to two different ways in which considerations of politeness in an expression benefit the speaker (Fraser 1990, Matsumoto 1988). "Negative face" or "negative politeness" (which is sometimes called "loss of face") can be explained as a thwarting of the desire of every linguistically competent adult member that his or her freedom of action should be unhindered and his or her attention should be unimpeded; while "positive" face or "positive politeness" (which is sometimes called "gain of face") is the desire that the speaker's messages or communication should be acceptable to at least some others ("Perspectives on Politeness" 229). In challenging the view by some linguists like Brown

and Levinson that the idea of "face" or politeness is universal across all cultural groups, Matsumoto writes that

> What is of paramount concern to a Japanese is not his/her acceptance by those others. Loss of face is associated with the perception by others that one has not comprehended and acknowledged the structure and hierarchy of the group. The Japanese concepts of face, then, are qualitatively different from those defined as universals by Brown and Levinson. ("Reexamination of Face" 405)

The fact that the busybody character Keledi in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*) is talkative is acceptable within the ethos of the Newclare residents in that such behaviour conforms to "positive politeness"/"positive face" in terms of Newclare's collective cultures which (in Mphahlele's terms) are imbued with the consciousness of African humanism. According to such a communally inclined African humanist consciousness, which commonly with Japanese consciousness yet in ways unique to itself conflicts with that of the West where individualism is the outstanding value, being the centre of the village or township gossip like Keledi in "Down the Quiet Street" constitutes positive politeness or positive face. This positive politeness is associated with approval of the gossip by its recipients in society as shown by affirmation criteria shaped by the communal voice, the terms of which the community is able to identify in the gossip one utters. The criterion for acceptance differs from that of the West in that it is not customarily the acceptance of individualistic messages for which expressions must strive – while at the same time ensuring that the application of politeness strategies does not adversely affect the individuality of the speaker's own opinions being communicated. While for peoples belonging to a cultural cluster other than African (such as the Japanese) the strategy for positive politeness would be to put a message across in such a way that it shows recognition of the customarily rigid hierarchical organisation of society ("Reexamination of Face" 405), for the African humanist character Keledi the correct strategy is to put the message across in such a way that it is shifted in attribution from her to the community as a whole. That she succeeds in this is the vindication she earns at the end of "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*), when what initially might have come across to the Newclare residents as ridiculous gossip motivated by personal jealousy is proven to have been a well founded rumour. Imagining what the township 'gossips' would chatter about after Tefo's initially unbelievable marriage with Manyeu enables one to realise that what the principal village gossip has been saying all along is a communal voice, as opposed to an individual one. It can thus be seen that both "Man Must Live" (*Man Must Live*) and "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*) demonstrate the survival of an African humanist consciousness in ghetto life as exemplified by a conception of the purpose of living as a "celebration of life" (in Mphahlele's terms), as well as his highlighting of the communalism of public talk (as a scrutiny of dialogue in his poetry and stories reveals). One way in which the public voice in evidently private utterances is proffered is by Mphahlele's creation of resonances of oral literature, as has been demonstrated to be the case in the poem "Death".

Survival of an African humanist consciousness among Africans who live in urban townships is not evident in stories by some of the other *Drum* writers of the 1950s such as Can Themba. Perhaps this is what prompted Aggrey Klaaste to remark that "On closer study … Can's writing shows a lack of depth" ("The Tyranny of Time and Place" 104).

In Can Themba's short story "Passionate Stranger" (*The World of Can Themba*), for example, the context of the love affair between Reggie and Ellen is shallow in terms of those traditional practices that Mphahlele has identified as components of the African humanist consciousness, despite the rural setting in Chebeng village – where one would expect to find such customs surviving more strongly than they do in the urban environment. In the story, arrangements for *lobola* with Reggie's love rival Dikgang's parents involve the local chief's councillors without the writer mentioning that Dikgang is the son of the chief, which unfortunately distorts his depiction of the institution of marriage among Africans (according to which, when a marriage takes place between two families it directly involves the traditional ruler at the family level only if such a ruler is a parent of one of the fiancees and not by virtue of the families being such a ruler's subjects) (45). In a manner that is alien to traditional practices, Ellen's unmarried brother and the visiting boy Reggie are described by Can Themba as part of the customary *lobola* negotiations, in which Ellen's brother Osbourne even confronts his father and the elders and 'advises' them that "we should display our wares before these gentlemen commit themselves to a purchase" (45). Casting of the paying of *lobola* in such a commercial light as the purchasing of "wares" as well as the involvement of a visiting boy and a young son in customary *lobola* negotiations is not genuine or accurate. Specifically on the tradition of *magadi* or *lobola* Mphahlele has written in contradiction of the light in which it is cast by Can Themba's "Passionate Stranger", in the following words: "The bride wealth, the [rural African] people reasoned, was not a selling price. It was a bond made holy by ancient custom and therefore valued by the ancestors. To scorn the idea was to rebuke the ancestors" (*Father Come Home* 31).

People of a settlement like Chebeng (where the marriage negotiations are taking place according to Can Themba's "Passionate Stranger"), a village in rural Northern Transvaal (now the central region of the Limpopo Province), would be unable to view the institution of *lobola* in a commercial light as the elderly negotiators do upon Osbourne's confronting them. That it is a boy misleading the older tribesmen to veer towards a consumerist valuing of *magadi*/*lobola* should clearly be understood to contain Can Themba's elitist message that the younger generations of Africans should modernise African lifestyle by abandoning traditional values, which is diametrically opposed to Mphahlele's position that African traditions will adapt to modernity yet retain their dignified cultural essence. The "unreal reality" (see below) that is tied to the culturally rootless "projected urban world" of the *Drum* writers sets those like Themba apart from Mphahlele despite his commonly belonging with them to the *Drum* era, for the reason that Mphahlele's life and writings exemplify African humanism as an antidote of what Gready perceptively describes as "the destruction of the community" ("Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties" 145, 157). Considering the 1950s, it is such a destruction of the Africans' cultural cohesion and preservation that, true to Gready's words (157), "prove[s] to be the ultimate real reality". For writers like Themba to have "cocked a snook at racial classifications of Africans", as Chapman explains in "Identity and the Apartheid State" (238) is not wrong. But to have simplistically commended the proper attitude of rejecting racial segregation in the same way as a confused denial that "Africans [are] essentially tribal people from distant reserves" (as Chapman indicates in "Identity and the Apartheid State" 238) is a symptom of superficiality that cannot be consistent with any adequately

analytical writing. Without any suggestion of cultural backwardness, Africans are better off with pride in, rather than denial of, their originally not being urban – in as far as urbanisation at this point symbolises colonisation. It is when self-definition is preceded by such a concession that Africans will appropriate industrialisation and urbanisation on their own terms shorn of the sometimes overly modernist mimicry upheld in the lives and writings of some of Mphahlele's contemporaries like Themba.

The daughter (Ellen) at the centre of matrimonial negotiation in Can Themba's "Passionate Stranger" goes on to wrench the story further away from African cultures when Can Themba describes her as saying during the *lobola* negotiations that "she knows [that according to custom] the woman should be silent and suffer her elders and betters to determine her fate" (46). Such dialogue clashes with the sacredness of both the woman's place in society and the practice of *lobola* as explained by writers like Kaunda and Mphahlele cited above. It can thus be seen that whatever symptoms of an Africanist consciousness may seem to obtain in a work like this by the *Drum* writer Can Themba represent the outlook of individual characters and (unlike in Mphahlele's works) are not rooted within any sound cultural framework that constitutes a distinctive Africanist consciousness. Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma are pinpointing deficiencies in the representation of Africanist social practice like these found in the works of writers like Can Themba in the example above, when they react in comparative terms to Mphahlele's attention in fiction to traditional features in the following words: "Writings by black South African writers have addressed the dynamics of the present, but … have little time to employ indigenous cultural elements beyond diction and idiom" (460).

A thorough recreation and knowledge of culture (which is a constituent of African humanism) is crucial to Mphahlele's aim to make his readers acquire a clearer understanding of the concept of African humanism, as he states in the following words:

> We are talking about culture as a concept that defines what we as humans do and make to cope with the material realities of life. On the other hand, it also defines the body of knowledge, ideas, morals, beliefs, religion, the arts and language that make up the sum total of our being. ("Social Work" 238)

The above quotation explains that it is not enough to do as Can Themba does and pay attention to the culture of Africans only in so far as it defines what Africans "do and make to cope with the material realities of life" ("Social Work" 238). The representations of culture in any work of art should go further than such a description of what the people do at the superficial level to cope with the exigencies of everyday living. Such representations of culture should anchor the superficial manifestations of cultural activity within the more profound (accurate) definition of culture as a definition of "the body of knowledge, ideas, morals, beliefs, religion, the arts and language that make up the sum total of our being" ("Social Work" 238). A distorted representation of African cultures as in the short stories of Can Themba cited above will fail to increase his readers' self-knowledge as embedded within the latter definition of what the culture of a people is.

The representation of culture as the consciousness of a people (the point of view demonstrated by the quotation in the preceding paragraph) continues to be demonstrated

in Mphahlele's short stories by the portrayal of characters like Tau Rathebe. The Rhodesian man Mfukeri in "The Master of Doornvlei" (*In Corner B*) is as grovelling in front of his employers as Zungu in "Man Must Live" (*Man Must Live and Other Stories*). He helps the Afrikaner farmer to make sure that the farm workers comply with the dehumanising conditions of farm work. He is the antithesis of Tau Rathebe, who organizes the labourers into a bargaining group (which is consistent with the African humanist aspect of communalism or deciding together on issues rather than acting in individualist isolation). When the farmer comes to realize that blacks are "no children" (101), Mfukeri does not need to realise anything new as he has always been aware of the reality and has deliberately been telling the white boss a lie. That is why, when the farmer orders him to shoot his black bull after it has defeated the white man's stallion in a fight, his true self jumps up and he walks away in protest. Without overemphasizing the apartheid context, the story illustrates that blacks are equal to any race and should be recognised for being as fully human as anyone else.

The content and texture of the fictional pieces explored above display the features that are illustrated, because of what Thuynsma has called Mphahlele's exploration of "the meaning of raw experience in fiction" (236) . Through the psychological filter that shapes life for Mphahlele in order for him to experience it from the point of view of the 'working essence' he calls African humanism, raw experience for him is his and his people's collective existence according to the African humanist "state of mind" and "way of life". What Mphahlele is exploring in fiction, therefore (by Thuynsma's logic) is the meaning of the concept he calls African humanism. The representative poems and short stories above are thus written in an inflected manner, true to the exploratory nature of Mphahlele's representation of African humanism in order for him and his readers to deduce meanings out of represented reality in an imaginative way or to utilise portrayed reality to grow in reasoning capacity into achieving a richer understanding of their everyday living. The poems and short stories that are analysed above testify to representations of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism in works that are among the earliest in his body of narrative writings.

In Mphahlele's short stories analysed above, the demonstration of the evils of apartheid is effected subtly, with instances of African humanism in the short stories assuming prominence and receiving primary focus. The counterpointing of apartheid's alienation with the sanguine and reassuring presence of African humanism that inhering in the oppressed Africans is what lends rootedness to Mphahlele's fiction. In his 1991 survey of *Drum* writings, Aggrey Klaaste may be implicitly referring to such a redeeming presence of African humanism both in Mphahlele's personal life and in the fabric of his narrative writings when he observes that "Es'kia Mphahlele … seems to have had his feet firmly planted on the ground" (104). By way of contrast, Can Themba has written short stories that (like those of Mphahlele considered above) focus primarily on the way Africans live their lives in the townships during apartheid without overtly centralising apartheid itself. In "Mob Passion" (*The World of Can Themba*), for instance, a young Xhosa man (Linga) and a young Mosotho woman Mapula's love affair suffers as a result of faction fighting between the Basotho and the amaXhosa of Newclare and this leads to a tragic end in which the Basotho (led by Mapula's uncle) kill Linga after which (and in a

fit of rage) Mapula also kills her uncle Alpheus (19). Although apartheid is truly the root cause of such mindless faction fighting (117), the short story highlights the mindlessness of the fights and not the underlying cause rationalised within the two groups' cultural consciousness conflicting with enforced apartheid. For writers like Mphahlele, this contextual aspect would have proven too crucial to ignore. This may be among Aggrey Klaaste's reasons for describing Can Themba's stories (as indicated earlier on) as "[showing] a lack of depth" (104).

Continuation of such a treatment of theme by Can Themba is found in "Forbidden Love" and "The Urchin". In the former short story the black man Michael Chabakeng of Sophiatown and the coloured woman Dora Randolph of Noordgesig fall in love and this leads to a serious assault on Michael by a gang organised by Dora's brother Davie, who sets the assailants on Michael by shouting, "Hey, boys, this is Dora's kaffir!" (29). This assault happens because Davie and his family are jeered at by fellow Coloureds for letting a black man fall in love with their daughter. In apartheid South Africa (as Dorothy Driver has remarked), prescribed black/white social relations were of the nature that "marriages and other sexual liaisons across the colour bar [were not] officially approved" ("Women and Nature" 461). Of course the legislation led to a superiority complex among some Coloureds which would have turned into a scandal any affair with 'inferior' blacks. It is precisely this attitude of some Coloured persons in apartheid South Africa which the other *Drum* writer Todd Matshikiza recalls in his autobiography *Chocolates for My Wife* when he writes that "an educated native was tolerated into" the Coloured Bar in Queenstown "by the coloured community who considered themselves white" (37). The latter story exposes the foolishness of gangsterism that plays itself out in Sophiatown in a gratuitous clash (leading to shops closing down, traffic diverting and people locking themselves up in fear) between a gang led by the rogue Macala and another gang called the Berliners, in which "knives were brandished and plunged, big-buckled belts were swung in whistling arcs, arms were flailed in the centre of the imbroglio with desperate savagery" (105). As illustrated by analyses of stories like these by Can Themba and Todd Matshikiza, Mphahlele is not the only *Drum* writer who protested against apartheid in a subdued voice in several of his earlier short stories.

2.2.2 APARTHEID IN THE FOREGROUND

With the publication (while in Nigeria) of *The Living and the Dead and Other Stories* in 1961, and *In Corner B* while working in East Africa in 1967, the apartheid texture of day to day living in South Africa gets progressively stronger representation in Mphahlele's work, having been present, but in weaker relief, in *Man Must Live and Other Stories* (1946).

Differently from the earliest shorter narratives, the short story "In Corner B" from the 1967 collection, for example, foregrounds apartheid's corrosive effect on African cultures, with the frailties of black characters depicted as largely justifiable responses to this context. The story opens with a focus on the brutality of the boys who have stabbed Talita's husband to death. Instead of the writer manipulating the storyline to expose this criminal offence as most execrable, something different happens.

Contrary to what one might expect, events unfold in such a way that communal feeling is expressed during the wake by the audience sighing "Ja" in a chorus, affirming their agreement with one of the mourners. This immediately polarises responses to the untimely death of Talita's husband into two camps, which are communal opinion (which in Greek tragedy is usually represented by the chorus) at one end and the individual voice of the single person who comments loudly at the other end. Yet Mphahlele's identification of the loud commentator as just one of the mourners without mentioning his name is significant in that it merges his voice into that of the 'chorus', while at the same time Mphahlele sets him apart as an individual because this kind of open commentary comes from his side as an initiator of the speech act. Such a raised voice may appear like individualism in the orthodox sense (in which it is found in societies such as those of the West), while in reality this is a kind of communal individualism as identified in the African humanist sense. This is the case because the chorus's assenting response credits the Africanist individual initiator of the comment as having surveyed communal opinion first before taking the initiative to voice it. To speak in terms of positive and negative politeness as characterised in Linguistic Pragmatics by writers such as Matsumoto (1988) and Fraser (1990), the way Mphahlele describes the actions of the individual speaker indicates that the culturally-specific strategies to achieve "positive politeness"/"positive face" or desirability with the recipients of the message on the part of the loud commentators are shown to have been the appropriate ones. Yet in societies other than those leading an African humanist existence, the individuality of the unnamed commentator could be a kind of individuality in which one speaks to express personal opinion without bothering first to determine what communal opinion on the matter is. The same positive politeness that searches for the communal voice in order to be desirable will (in the latter type of society) become negative politeness in which the individual wants his or her message to pass as desirable while actually seeking to ensure that no conflicting voice on the same issue emanates from the group that are recipients of the message. In societies informed by an African humanist consciousness "positive politeness" or "positive face" is on the other hand achieved by means of calibrating one's communication to be in tune with the communal opinion of the society during a particular speech act. In the setting of the story, the apparently individual speech act comments on a case of death that has just occurred and shocked the community. Though initially it seems to be the individual exclaimer expressing this particular evaluation of the conditions surrounding the death, it should be understood to be society in communal opinion that is stopping short of blaming the death on the black thugs who were the perpetrators, and as simply saying philosophically: "Ja *madoda* … death is a strange thing … We were so close. And now he's late, just like that" (*In Corner B* 123). To say death is a strange thing is to accept this specific death as an occurence whose cause should be blamed on something bigger than the group of miscreants whom Mphahlele does not hesitate to foreground in the early parts of the short story as having stabbed Talita's husband to death.

Earlier on, people attending the wake see a corpulent black constable dragging the murder suspects towards Talita, probably to extract some expression of contrition from them. Both the crowd and the widow simply look at the theatrics of the constable with

indifference. The constable's boisterous chastisement of the youths meets with exasperation, epitomised by the elderly woman accusing the policeman of undermining the sacredness of the gathering. When the elderly woman chases the policeman with a stick to the van waiting at the gate outside, the white policeman finds much amusement in this solemn act and suppresses a laugh. This strikes the reader as conveying the message that, should a black person fail to secure humane warmth from amidst his own people, he should never expect to find it among the whites – no matter to what extent he might be complying with the hegemonic demands of domination by means of conduct described as 'conscientious', 'obedient', 'upright', etc. Soon after the van has left, Talita (representing popular opinion, true to Mphahlele's humanist purpose) is depicted as wondering: "Were the boys merely the arms of some monster sitting in the dark somewhere…" (120). Such a comment by the newly bereaved widow Talita sustains the shift Mphahlele achieves in this short story, of moving the accusation away from the black thugs who have murdered the husband to blame the system of apartheid. It is the same shift of blame that has been initiated by the unnamed loud exclaimer earlier on when he referred to death as "a strange thing" in South Africa. The play on the word "strange" debunks the murder that has been committed by *familiar* compatriots (because they are supposedly imbued with the same African humanist make-up as the mourners and victims) as actually having been caused by a political order in which the *strange* consciousness manifested by apartheid is at work. It is with a similar effect that, while the mourners busy themselves outside the house, making sure the funeral proceeds smoothly, one mourner responds to reported hitches in the smooth running of the funeral without attributing the resultant agitation to the murderers, whose misdeed is at the heart of all the trouble. What happens is that we hear one mourner blaming some of the reported hitches on the apartheid administration by exclaiming: "Pass pass be damned, cannot a man go to his grave in peace without dragging his chains after him!" (121). This is yet another comment confirming the communality of Talita's earlier reference to the grievous incident that has befallen her family as ensuing from machinations of the "arms of some monster sitting in the dark somewhere" (120).

The African humanist sensibility in terms of which the mourners are portrayed together is evinced in such examples as the narrative voice in "In Corner B" showing that other cultural practices may be broken or bent, but not communal support during a funeral. This is due to the cultural aura that death is accorded in the statement "You are a person because of other human beings, you are told" (109). These words are uttered as an explanation of the reason why no-one wants to be absent from the funeral within the African community of which Talita and her family are a part. Communal support is also illustrated in the practice of a relative collecting money donated by mourners to meet catering costs (113); and in the emphasis given to the arrival of the grandmother of the deceased to join the vigil. Further points confirming that Mphahlele is here depicting an African humanist ethos in practice are the comment that relatives who had not seen one another for a long time were there and that family bonds were in place again; and the cultural practice of the elderly ladies washing the corpse after it has arrived from the morgue (121).

All these social images – even the nature of the expressions of societal dialogue rather than the message of individuals; the social roles; the importance of the role of relations; communal sharing of grief, joy and responsibility – all these are facets of the sensibility called African humanism, but demonstrated in action rather than discursively described and analysed. According to critics like Ursula Barnett, writers within the *Drum* generation (unlike earlier black writing which addressed itself to whites), "Instinctively … knew that to tell it as it was, was not enough [because] the reader had to be given some hope, and since hope lay only in change, the writer, in his stories, had to grapple with the forces of oppression" (*A Vision of Order* 181). This observation by Ursula Barnett perhaps explains why black writers prior to *Drum*, including Mphahlele (in *Man Must Live and Other Stories*), write in a conciliatory tone that exposes the evils of apartheid mildly so that the white authorities are propitiated into hearkening, rather than being antagonised. If "the reader had to be given some hope" (*A Vision of Order* 181), being overtly offensive to oppressive white authorities of the time could galvanise the state into a massive clampdown on the less powerful blacks. Such crushing action by government would result in despair intensifying among the blacks – thus achieving the opposite of strengthening hope among the oppressed blacks that the writers saw as a priority. From stories contained in the collection *The Living and the Dead and Other Stories* onwards, Mphahlele understandably protests more stridently against apartheid in the manner demonstrated in this subsection of the study, while mediating the vulgar emotional appeal of protest literature with the intellectually stimulating and more balanced assertion of African humanism, by representing it in his works of art as the appropriate tool to empower the independent, subjective existence of Africans. By this strategy, a balance is maintained between the intensity with which apartheid is condemned and the complex circumscription of what African humanism entails. More importantly, the profundity with which the concept of African humanism is expatiated insists upon an unflagging hopefulness among the blacks facing desperate conditions. Mphahlele's growth as writer in the depth and scope of his representation of African humanism in his later stories which protest more openly against apartheid can thus be recognized as a development of his understanding of this notion.

Proper behaviour, exemplified by the activities cited above, is contrasted effectively with decadent behaviour by some blacks attending the wake. The sacrilegious man who moves from one death gathering to another pretending to be the appointed relative for collecting monetary donations, is uncovered and he is prevented from stealing money intended for a communal purpose (112). The impiety of this deed is as immoral as the act of feigning a funeral procession in order to transport liquor in a coffin, as is shown in the precursor of Mphahlele's "Lesane" stories, "Down the Quiet Street". Similar desecration of the communal ethos occurs when township 'witch doctors' take people for a ride by pretending to be in touch with the mysteries of the spiritual world (as in "A Point of Identity" 153). In all the short stories with black characters engaging in such despicable acts, the narrator's tone and the context he supplies indicate that he wants the deeper cause to be recognised: the disruptive reality imposed on Africans by the apartheid state. Even the base act of the two lovers who farcically roll down in coitus next to a fowl-run could, considering the atmosphere of the story, be blamed on their having drunk the white man's liquor! What saves such stories from being the kind of vulgar or obvious protest

literature Mphahlele himself denounces, is the writer's ability to make heroes out of ordinary men and women and endowing everyday events, which in the hands of the average writer would deflate to banality, with rich texture.

"Grieg on a Stolen Piano", republished also in *Renewal Time* (1988), continues (like the other stories mentioned above) to exemplify how Africans after colonisation "grappled with the processes of assimilation, rejection and synthesis of Western culture and the African personality" ("Thoughts on" 2002). Whenever he is depressed by the inhumaneness of the widowed woman he has married after being widowed himself, the behaviour of Uncle (in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano") depicts the "two streams of consciousness" he straddles, as illustrated in the following description:

> He went back to his whisky … played excerpts from Grieg's piano concerto or a Chopin nocturne, or his own arrangements of Mohapeloa's Chuchu-makhala (The Train) or Leba (The Dove) and others, vocalizing passages the while with his deep voice. He loved to evoke from his instrument the sound of the train's siren Oi-oi-i-i while he puffed Chuchu, chuchu. (*Renewal Time* 124)

Uncle's drinking of whisky rather than traditional beer such as sorghum, and his playing of the concerto and nocturne composed by the Europeans Grieg and Chopin respectively, are indicative of the hybridity that informs his behaviour. By mentioning that Uncle played these Western compositions while vocalising the stanzas with his "deep" voice Mphahlele shows that such behaviour by Uncle is mediated by his own African humanist consciousness and not a mere shallow-minded mimicry. The degree of adaptation of Western art forms in this musical performance is depicted as healthy commensurately with Uncle's high degree of self-consciousness, by means of the constrasting images created by Uncle's juxtaposition of Western tunes in counterpoint with such culturally authentic black South African compositions as those by Mohapeloa. Mphahlele highlights the non-European tradition of Mohapeloa's compositions by mentioning the indigenous-language titles of the tunes, *Chuchu-makhala* and *Leba*. Here Mphahlele humorously refers to the "two streams of consciousness" in a manner that borders on the farcical by means of Uncle's sardonic use of the piano notes (that symbolise westernisation) to evoke the sound made by the train (which symbolises the notorious indenture system during the apartheid era, in which the train transported cheap labourers daily to and from work), with Uncle himself onomatopoeically adding the puffing sound that emanates from the coal train while it is herding cheap black labourers to and from the white man's workplace.

The storyline continues by showing that Uncle's upliftment from abject poverty fails to materialise in Pietersburg. This extends his flight to white residential areas in Pretoria where he survives by means of meagre earnings as a domestic worker. But such a widening of the search for social and economic self-fulfilment does not go beyond Pietersburg for a significant reason. It happens after Uncle has been traumatically maltreated as a farm labourer by an Afrikaner farmer. That such dehumanising treatment by the Afrikaner farmer traumatises Uncle is revealed in his later years in conversation with his nephew in sarcastic observations such as a reference to "how to sit [properly] – not like an Afrikaner cow" (*Renewal Time* 125) and "who do you think I mean [if not the black beauty Mary-Jane] – Vasco da Gama's daughter-in-law?" (*Renewal Time* 135).

For these jarring images, respectively representing hard labour on farms owned by Afrikaners and Portuguese colonisation, to have endured even when Uncle is in his sixties, is Mphahlele's way of stressing the immensity of the trauma Uncle suffered while only a boy of fifteen.

The foregrounding of apartheid in this story is sustained by Unlce's memories of apartheid brutality borne of confrontational incidents that dog him all his life. Examples are the music teacher Mr Lambeth's being "tarred and feathered" by white youths in a city centre as punishment for associating too closely with blacks (115); Uncle's being called a "kaffir monkey" by a young white man when during a break as a teacher in a school he hopes to get service fast at the post office (118); and when as a school inspector suspected of being illegally in possession of uncut diamonds the white policemen batter him and leave him for dead (119). Mphahlele's intention is achieved, which is to imprint in bold strokes the contrast of the two worlds symbolised by an Africanist expectation of social co-existence characterised by warmth and humaneness and the brutality they meet with at the hands of some members of the white population due to such white people's racist views of order which they regard as axiomatic. As in the other stories analysed above, the foregrounding of apartheid is not done in a threadbare manner that would vitiate depth of thought, because Mphahle is one of the Africanist writers who are opposed to such superficiality. Mphahlele skillfully prevents the short story from degenerating into a document in which political agenda is thinly veiled. Apart from Mphahlele's stylistic inventions illustrated through textual scrutiny of the short stories considered above, the point can be made that he achieves literary quality despite the accent on apartheid, through the complex way in which he uses flashback (in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano"). Flashback is implemented to transport the boy narrator psychologically so that he puts side by side the worlds of Afrikaner social violence on the one hand, and on the other hand African humanist resistance, which is exemplified in the way Uncle exerts himself to deal with the socio-political challenges of the apartheid period. Mphahlele hints at the African humanist consciousness within both the narrating nephew and Uncle whose life story the nephew is narrating, by not omitting to mention (through the boy's recollection and narration) that during passage through a forest as he flees from Pietersburg to Pretoria, the vast patches of pristine nature that he travels through evoke in the mind of Uncle a fear associated with the menace of fable and mythical creatures, hence invoking the oral tradition. Mphahlele describes the flight in this way:

> As he travelled through the thick bush [Uncle] remembered the stories he had so often listened to at the communal fireplace; tales of huge snakes that chased a man on the ground or leapt from tree to tree; tales of a giant snake – that came to the river at night to drink, breaking trees in its path, and before which helpless people lay flat on their stomachs wherever they might be at the time; none dared to move as the snake mercifully lifted its body above them, bent over, drank water and then, mercifully again, turned over backwards, belly facing upwards, rollingaway from the people. (*Renewal Time* 114)

The passage illustrates a fear the source of which is imagery of benevolence (represented by Mphahlele's explanation that the giant snake "mercifully" leaps over the supplicating human beings on its way to and back from the river). The malevolent neuroses generated by the urban life Uncle enters into later in life are a far cry from the mystical awe

illustrated above. The malevolent phobias that plague Uncle in urban life are revealed by the unacknowledged restlessness caused by the impenetrability and unintelligibility of urban living (as represented, *inter alia*, by the enigmatic, passive second wife) and Uncle's reaction to it by the ambivalent combination of actions he engages in – such as gambling, ritual appeasing of the ancestors, recognition of the interdependence of blood relations, scheming in a consumerist way as when he attempts to 'sell' Mary-Jane to ghetto business sharks, and so forth.

It is correct to interpret the imagery conjured up by the flashback in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" as a method of highlighting Uncle's African humanist mode of existence. This is made clear when Mphahlele says later in the paragraph quoted above that in mythical oral tales "always the theme was that of man" (*Renewal Time* 114). Mphahlele's concept of African humanism puts man at the centre of a universe consisting of organic and inorganic nature as well as all other components of reality, interwoven by the all-pervading presence of Vital Force or the Supreme Being (137). This aspect of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is confirmed in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" by the way the action of the plot puts man at the centre of nature that manifests itself in various ways around him, exposed by phrases such as "huge snakes that chased a *man*", "before which helpless *people* lay flat", "lifted its body above *them*", "rolling away from the *people*" (*Renewal Time* 114, emphases added).

The farmers, the whisky and other lexical items like "piano" being images of colonial life, and the black family members and African jungle symbolising African consciousness, a metonymic gap and absence are distinctly represented in this short story, as in the earlier examples. This example, in a similar manner as other stylistic features illustrated through textual analyses of other stories above, testifies to the stylistic complexity and excellence of the short stories despite their more overt emphasis on the ravages of apartheid. Critics like Ursula Barnett have identified such a submerging of the stark immanence of apartheid as one of the common features of the *Drum* writers (as follows):

> But usually it is not the highly dramatic incidents – the arrests, the raids and the brutality – that interest him at this stage [of writing for *Drum*]. Rather, it is the weddings and funerals, a young man's first acquaintance with the city, poverty and illness, in short the ordinary events that go on while people try to survive … Throughout, however, there is a note of hope in the spirit of toughness of the individual people who refuse to submit to circumstances and continue to aspire to a better life. (*A Vision of Order* 173-74)

Of course the centralisation of action attributable to individual opinion fades progressively as the latter narratives grow in their depiction of the individual's views on existential issues aligned with the overall verdict of the community.

The important feature to mark (which is related to the above description of the *Drum* generation by Barnett) is that there is a limit to the extent to which Mphahlele conforms generally to the *Drum* generation of African writers by virtue of writing in the same historical period. What sets him apart is the unique way in which he protests intensely against apartheid. The analysis of his stories above reveals his maximal use of protest,

yet writing subtly and in a nuanced manner while (at the same time) he depicts the cultural distinctness of Africans in an affirming manner. This is because the *Drum* writers are not known so much for political writing as for asserting the permanence and distinctiveness of black urban life. The *Drum* writers unfurled their writing enterprises in varying ways – as the above comparisons of Mphahlele with other *Drum* writers like Can Themba and Todd Matshikiza show – yet as a group reacting to the same environment there are features they share broadly. It is for this reason that one agrees with the acknowledgement of both similarities and dissimilarities among *Drum* writers as observed by Lewis Nkosi in his remark about the "misleading insistence on a *Drum* school of writers … if it means a common style more than a common stimulation" (*Tasks and Masks* 99).

2.2.3 MPHAHLELE'S USE OF LITERAL TRANSLATION

What stories like "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" introduce, which is not there in *Man Must Live and Other Stories*, is Mphahlele's unique mediation of the difficulty of using English (as a foreign language) to carry African culture. This is acknowledgement on his part of the need to mediate what the theorist Said describes as "the formal and psychological question of the interdependence of literary and sociological approaches in dealing with how English, for example, is at once a national and a world language [tied to] the question of the cultural domination of one intellectual or national domain over another" (Said, "Conclusion: Vico" 381). Other African writers recognise this problem and the need of African artistic writing to confront it, as Njabulo Ndebele's following observation reveals: "South African English must be open to the possibility of becoming a new language. This may happen not only at the level of vocabulary … but also with regard to grammatical adjustments that may result from the proximity of English to indigenous African languages" (*Rediscovery of the Ordinary 114*). Ndebele goes on to motivate the inevitablity of English "[assuming] the cultural colour of its respective users" as a consequence of recognising "that the sphere of human knowledge is much wider than any one language can carry" (115).

Such a grappling with a language of colonial or Western origin is one of the challenges each postcolonial writer is faced with. Writing in *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin indicate that the discussion of postcolonial writing cannot but include a discussion of the process by which language with its power, and the text with its signification of authority, have been wrested from the dominant European culture" (7-8). The same writers state in *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* that the concept of a standard English requires to be subverted in postcolonial writing because it is a construction of imperial rhetoric that constantly separates "centre" from "margin" (148-49).

A critic like Daniel P. Kunene (505) rightly illustrates the contradiction in Mphahlele's claim that, though writing in English, the *Drum* writers wrote material that appealed to a black proletarian readership (that only thoroughly understood African languages) (Mphahlele, "Landmarks" 53) . This is because the readership that *Drum* reported on and wrote for consisted of people with hardly any secondary education that would equip them

with an adequate knowledge of the English language to fully grasp what was written in *Drum*. It would have been logical, according to critics like Kunene, to write anything for such a readership in the different indigenous languages they spoke and in which they had achieved literacy even with the mere elementary school education they had. What is true is that Mphahlele himself, in the way he manipulates language, manages to make his expression mean more (to those blacks who have acquired enough English) than it would mean to a native speaker of English. Still, such a black reader would not be a mere average speaker of English as a second language. The clear achievement of such complex expressiveness was meant to appeal to the black middle class who in the 1950s, according to Mphahlele, were competent enough to grasp messages in the English language and also had the will to define themselves as a permanently urban group of Africans with a distinct conglomeration of traditions and customs. Such targeting of a middle-class is a departure (unfortunately) from Mphahlele's usual dislike of elitism and any sort of class discrimination. One potential achievement would have been if significant numbers of the English-speaking white sector of society were inspired to familiarise themselves with at least some indigenous South African languages and the cultures of their speakers. This is because Mphahlele's African humanism as represented in his writings is non-racial – hence it cannot lock out entry by non-blacks, this time through immersion by reading. Yet it is not likely that Mphahlele's English-speaking readers noticed the need to know some African languages and cultural practices as a means towards complete understanding of Mphahlele's texts written in English, as the English language in the way Mphahlele uses it in his writing appears deceptively to be fully comprehensible to non-African readers who understand English.

It is known that Mphahlele frowns upon African writers who address Europe instead of addressing fellow Africans. This is understandable because, rather than demonstrating the injustice of colonisation or apartheid, Mphahlele's literary and expository aims have been to strengthen the souls of fellow Africans in continuing to assert their independent existence by means of sensitising them to their own distinctness in terms of the concept he has chosen to call African humanism. Without excluding members of other races who volunteer to adopt an African humanist existence, Mphahlele focuses on blacks as the target audience of his writing. This justifies why Mphahlele has to resolve the potential danger of English becoming a barrier between his writings and fellow blacks who do not fully grasp English because it is not their native tongue. Nor have all of them acquired adequate school education through which they would have attained proficiency in English. One mitigating factor for Mphahlele is the untenability of a belief that only blacks who belong to the middle-class are competent in English. This is easy to grasp in the light of what Mphahlele indentifies as the non-conventional nature of manifestations of class among Africans, brought about by colonisation, when he writes that "class stratification has become a more complex condition in Africa today than the relatively simple notion of upper, lower and middle class" ("In Search Of' 211). Such unusual manifestations of class among colonised Africans have resulted in some blacks who are eloquent in English but do not belong to the middle class, and those who constitute the proletariat often being fully conversant in English due to a variety of factors. It is therefore incorrect to conclude that the non-educated blacks who do not belong to the middle class necessarily fail to understand a work that is written in the English language.

This shows that Mphahlele's choice of writing in English does not negate his intention of communicating with the blacks that need the kind of moral boost he sets out to provide. What remains to be probed is how he approaches the task of writing for an audience that has to deduce from his writings that he is postulating a specific way of life that he proposes they should comprehend fully in order to live it.

One tool Mphahlele uses to sensitise Africans to the concept of African humanism is his literal translation of African expressions in his works. Mphahlele in this way joins the company of African writers who, as Ursula Barnett writes, "have … adapted English as an African language [so that it] is a new language with symbols and terms of its own" (*A Vision of Order* 36). A writer like Fanon is implying the need for such a domestication of the colonial language when he cautions that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 38). One example of such an abrogation of English is found in the short story "Grieg on a Stolen Piano".

In "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" (*In Corner B* 1967), after Uncle's altercation with the second wife for nagging him about his gambling and illicit trading, he defiantly confirms aloud (pretending to direct the conversation to the nephew) that the piano was "lifted out of a shop". Later in the incident the uncle uses the words "she *wants to eat me up and swallow me up raw* the way she did her first husband" (*In Corner B* 48, emphasis added). The expression here is an idiom literally translated from Sotho languages, hence it represents the Sotho culture of the characters by means of synecdoche and in this way is a carrier of African culture – even though on the surface the expression is clad in the foreign (English) language. There is no denying that a native speaker of English not cognisant of the cultural gap would read this vividly realist language as the individual voice of the character, or as pure authorial creation. However, being a communal expression transmitted through the art of orature, the phrase actually contains a communal propositional content that reveals a collective cultural attitude that assumes that, however brave and feared a man or husband may be, when confronted by a woman or wife, the wisdom of a woman always triumphs. Without sharing in the culture manifested by such a collective expression, it is difficult to grasp the true, culture-specific meaning of such expressions.

Linguists have long highlighted the difficulty of decoding such literal translations – as when Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish explain that learning to communicate in a language involves acquiring a variety of shared beliefs or presumptions, as well as a system of inferential strategies (352). Monolingual English speakers lack the background knowledge of speakers of Sotho languages who can also read English. As linguists like John Lyons note, "so-called literal translation is at times more appropriate than free translation" (326). This comment is entirely applicable to what Mphahlele sets out to achieve with the transliteration of Sotho sayings into his English texts.

Such a mediation of a cultural gap by the writer occurs when Uncle (in the story "Grieg on a Stolen Piano") is depicted scheming with his nephew where the village girl will reside while being groomed for the beauty contest. Considering the blustering temperament of his wife, Uncle decides that Kefahliloe/Mary-Jane had best be

accommodated in the house of a friend named Tau. He is made to use the expression "his wife *has a beautiful heart" (*49, emphasis added*)*. This is yet another literal translation from the Sesotho sa Leboa language. Culturally, that is communally, the expression describes someone who puts communal intercourse with fellow men above petty quarrels (a survival strategy among Africans). Other instances of this feature of the dialogue featured in the story are "We don't all *have the liver*" (emphasis added) and "Are you going to *wait till horns grow on your head* before you marry?" (61, emphasis added).

More stories published after *Man Must Live and Other Stories* also bear such instances of literal translation. The narrator's wife in "A Point of Identity" would often overhear Karel laugh with his wife and say to the narrator: "Hm, just hear how Karel *is eating laughter*!" (*Unbroken Song* 156, emphasis added). This is a literal translation of *o ja lesego* from Sepedi, which idiomatically distinguishes a hearty, blissful laugh from less hearty forms of laughter such as tittering or giggling. Signifying that the love affair between Manyeu and Tefo in "Down the Quiet Street" (*In Corner B*) has been dragging on for quite a while without people noticing, the writer twice hints at the fact that she was pregnant with Tefo's child by using literal translation of the Sotho idiomatic expression *mpa ye mpsha* as "new belly" (128; 135). The death of Talita's husband in "In Corner B" is described as occurring when "he turned his back on his people" which is a literal translation of the Northern Sotho idiomatic expression *o ba furaletše/o sepetše* used to state that someone has passed on (108); the thieving boy who attempts to collect condolence money during the wake is described as having long fingers (which means having the tendency to steal) (113); while restraining a philandering husband or flirting wife is referred to as "chaining your dog" or "chaining your bitch" (*go kgoka mpša ya gago* in Sesotho sa Leboa); a remonstrating woman externalises her anger and challenges the culprit in the words "I can make her see her mother … " meaning literally (from Northern Sotho) that she will knock the culprit out if a fist fight were to ensue. There are many other examples to prove that Mphahlele, even while writing in English, is employing the rich resources of communal Sotho speech. The proverbs and idiomatic expressions that he adapts and cites (without pointing) are themselves the carriers of an African humanist value system.

What Rob Gaylard writes in the *English in Africa* article entitled '"A Man is a Man Because of Other Men": The "Lesane" Stories of Es'kia Mphahlele', is true as far as it illustrates Mphahlele's realism – that he dramatises by means of letting his characters speak with the colloquialisms representing their communicative uniqueness as a group. It could be argued that idiom in the sense used by Gaylard actually refers to dramatic devices to effect naturalness of speech and they are applied in real speech by blacks irrespective of whether they reside in "urban ghettos" called townships or "rural ghettos" called villages. But the fact that such dramatic devices are indices of speech performances unique to blacks surely attests to their idiomatic stature. But if the distinction of the words "idiom" and "idiomatic expression" is kept in mind, it becomes clear that Mphahlele implements the device discerned by Gaylard to camouflage the underlying uniqueness of the world-view which he has called African humanism. Not to use the punctuating expressions identified by Gaylard would harm the camouflaged simplicity of dialogue in Mphahlele's narrative writings, which would render the

dialogue stilted and (as far as the representation of African humanism is concerned) make it appear contrived and propagandistic. The "township idiom" Gaylard writes about merely renders life-like dialogue by means of tsotsitaal and mother tongue terms like "Ao Bathong", "Fakabond", "what *nawsons* is this?" or "Ho, chief!". It is the literal translations of proverbs and idiomatic expressions that (shown by means of examples from the stories above) are the implements employed more significantly by Mphahlele in his works, to mediate the divergences between the English medium and African cultural ways of interpreting reality. That the conjuncture of the English language with aspects of African languages such as proverbs and idiomatic expressions advances towards resolving the problems attendant on writing African experiences in English is attested to by writers like Lewis Nkosi, as when he states that "like other peoples, black Africans possess a rich and living heritage in philosophy, ethics, religion and artistic creation, the deepest roots of which are embedded in the rich soil of African languages" (*Tasks and Masks* 3).

2.2.4 A More Marked Appropriation of English

Short stories like "Mrs Plum" (*Renewal Time*) abrogate (see below) and appropriate the English language more radically than do earlier stories like "In Corner B" (*In Corner B*). This will prove true if one understands the terms "abrogation" and "appropriation" in the way writers focussing on postcolonial writing define them. Within the context of postcolonial writing, Ashcroft, Grifiths and Tiffin write that:

> abrogation refers to the rejection by post-colonial writers of a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard' English used by certain classes or groups … [It] is usually employed in conjunction with the term **appropriation,** which describes the processes of English adaptation itself, and is an important component of the post-colonial assumption that all language use is a 'variant' of one kind or another (and is in that sense 'marginal' to some illusory standard). (*Key Concepts* 5)

In this way, Mphahlele's purpose of utilising the English language to convey meaning from a group of communities whose world-view in some respects contradicts that of the West (from where English has originated) has compelled him to add novel features to the English language itself. By this very act of introducing novel features to the English language, Mphahlele is abrogating normative English, because in the way he conducts his business of narrative writing he is confirming and demonstrating that he "rejects a normative concept of 'correct' or 'standard'" English language (5). In defining the word "abrogation", Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin go on to state that it implies arguing for the parity of all forms of English and "offers a counter to the theory that use of the colonialists' language inescapably imprisons the colonized within the colonizer's conceptual paradigms" (5).

The key word here is "inescapably". As soon as the significance of the word "inescapably" in the above definition of abrogation is fully appreciated, it is clear that the coloniser's language will attempt to taint the mind of the user with the coloniser's way of interrogating reality, but such an effect is not inevitable. It is for this reason that Mphahlele's choice of writing in English should be seen as manifesting abrogation, the purpose of which is to prove that such detrimental influence of the colonial language

which one writes in is not unavoidable. To its advantage, in the process of Mphahlele's abrogating it by means of his mode of literary practice, the English language itself undergoes appropriation, which is the quality of adapting itself to meet the pragmatic challenges it faces in a situation in which it has to communicate appropriately with people whose making of meaning is underpinned by African humanist consciousness. The overall effect, tied to appropriation, is the postcolonialist assumption by Mphahlele, who adds to the epistemological voice of fellow postcolonial writers like Ashcroft *et al.* , as in the latter's statement that "all language use is a 'variant' of one kind or another" (*Key Concepts* 5). Mphahlele should thus be understood as implicitly asserting that the African humanist 'variant' of the English language that he harnesses to achieve his purpose is as important as any 'variant' of English that a writer uses as scalpel to operate on the malady of an obtrusive world-view that is 'inappropriate'.

It is in keeping with the above definitions of the terms "abrogate" and "appropriate" that the present writer judges Mphahlele's later short stories like "Mrs Plum" as more radical in abrogating and appropriating the English language (*Renewal Time*) compared with the earlier ones. While the earlier stories deviate from standard English by using literal translation as well as implementation of pure and hybrid African colloquialisms, only the later stories go further to signify the thought pattern of the speaker as uniquely African by communicating the non-English, African-language syntax underlying the English lexicon featured on the surface.

Karabo tells us the story of Mrs Plum, Kate, Moruti K K, Dick and Chimane – directly, as first-person narrator. To an extent this justifies the 'wrong' English syntax she uses, as it reminds us that she is actually speaking in Setswana. It is, however, significant that the 'wrong' syntax in English is the correct syntax in Setswana, so that the notion of correctness is taken from the propriety of the "center" to that of the "margin." An example of this occurs when Karabo relates to the reader the teachings of the political figure Lilian Ngoyi (conveyed at the squalid Black Crow cafe) and starts off by saying "At other times Lilian Ngoyi *told us she said* …" (175, emphasis added). This syntactic structure is standard in Sotho – *o buile a re.* This could simplistically be explained as indicative of Karabo's speaking in English while she is thinking is Sotho – if one were to ignore the significance of such a use of dialogue by Mphahlele as a technique to reveal profound meaning. Instances of Sotho syntactic structure (as explained above) permeate the entire short story, occurring (for example) on pages 168 ("I ask her I say"; "She says to me she says"), 169 ("I say to Kate I say"), 170 ("I say to her I say"), 176 ("I tell her I say"), and so forth.

As this is an intensification and not a reduction of the appropriation of the English language typical of postcolonial writing, the earlier device of strategic literal translation still occurs. When Kate describes the physical stature of Mrs Plum she proceeds to speculate about her temperament in the words "her forehead seems to tell me *she has a strong liver*" (167, emphasis added) meaning that she is brave. On another occasion Karabo uses an inappropriate English term to describe her attitude towards the actions of the liberal white women. She reveals that Kate reprimanded her impatiently by using the words "Kate says *with a short heart* …" (170, emphasis added).

An interesting aspect of Karabo's situation is that besides being the "kitchen girl" attending adult education lessons at the Black Crow, she is also taught English by Mrs Plum and her daughter Kate. Despite the two white women teaching her the correct form of the target language both verbally and through stale newspapers, she does not go beyond the interlanguage stage in which the deep structure of the mother tongue underlies the surface diction of English. That is why, when expressing her contempt for the picketing action of the liberal white women claiming to represent black sentiment to government (modelled in reality on the Black Sash movement) she says the women are "wonderful" instead of "strange". In the Sotho languages the term for the idea of being strange and that for the idea of being wonderful is the same – *makatša* in Northern Sotho. The 'unconventionality' of the kind of English Karabo uses has been commented on by some writers, like Thuynsma, when he states that "["Mrs Plum" is written] in the simple idiom of a girl relating the story to her friend, *as if in her own language*" (239, emphasis added). Thuynsma in the essay from which the above quote has been extracted is analysing Mphahlele's "Mrs Plum" to emphasise different features of Mphahlele's writings from those this study focuses on. Thuynsma's reference to Karabo telling the story "as if in her own language" accords with identification by this study of this feature of "Mrs Plum" as significant. The significance of Karabo speaking "as if in her own language" is its function of showing that the apparent failure by Karabo to learn grammatically 'correct' English is a wielding by Mphahlele of characterisation to enhance recognition of the behavioural aspect of African humanism resisting defeat by whatever existential challenges it may find itself dealing with.

Such a symbolic use of Karabo's resistance to unmediated cultural assimilation as a representative of the black people who (according to Mphahlele) are informed by an African humanist consciousness, is confirmed by Maqagi's analysis of "Mrs Plum" ("She's There" 210). Maqagi describes Karabo's determined "planning of entry into urban territory" as motivated by a conscious effort to learn more fully by means of the boss-servant interaction about the ways of the whites in a way that should empower her to co-exist more functionally with white people even in future places of employment (210). Maqagi comments that such a self-planned manner of interaction on the part of Karabo reveals "Karabo as being in the subject position" (210). Maqagi's description of Karabo as being in the "subject position" and her highlighting of Karabo's search for a job in the Johannesburg suburb of Greenside as "consciously planning her entry into this urban territory" is worth a comment (210). Without using the perspective and terms the present writer is using in this study, Maqagi in this article is pointing to Mphahlele's revelation of the abrogating quality (by means of Karabo's "subject position") on the part of groups of people informed by an African humanist consciousness (as symbolised by Karabo) in interacting with people of non-Africanist mentality (as symbolised by Mrs Plum and Kate). This has to do with Mphahlele's stylistic goal. The moral is revealed by the way the interaction of blacks and whites in the apartheid South Africa depicted in "Mrs Plum" is not taking place in the way prescribed by the consciousness of the rulers (represented by the Plums' volunteered task of 'teaching' Karabo). The black-white interaction is appropriated to happen in the way blacks (whom Karabo represents in the story) give it shape – which is what the verb "planning" means in Maqagi's description

of Karabo as “consciously *planning* her entry into this urban territory” (“She’s There” 210, emphasis added).

As such, the condition of the two women volunteering to teach Karabo their mother tongue without suspecting that the structure of Karabo’s mother tongue could be responsible for the “mistakes” she makes, is ironical. In his own way and in illustrating features of “Mrs Plum” to pursue Mphahlele’s writings for different emphases, Thuynsma has written about Karabo’s position that “She is ‘made’ to eat food that is quite foreign to her at the family table with a knife and fork. She is treated very well, paid regularly, and yet *there is no real attempt made at understanding her*. She is no more than a target for Mrs Plum’s patronising intentions” (“Whirlwind” 238, emphasis added). Teaching something to someone as Mrs Plum and Kate do to Karabo does not necessarily have a negative connotation. Despite the positive connotation teaching *per se* has, teaching something to someone in a patronising manner negatively changes the quality of the activity. It is this patronising, homogenising attitude of Mrs Plum and Kate which colours the English language (in the conception of the two white ladies) as if it is not amenable to appropriation and thus has only one variety which can be considered correct without other equally valuable variants of the same language being possible – hence their hellbent efforts to teach Karabo English with the ‘correct’ grammar shown up by their ironically failing to discern that, since she has a home language other than theirs, her language ‘errors’ are a result of her following the underlying grammatical rules of her own home language (which is Setswana). Put differently, Karabo’s grammatically incorrect English (due to an underlying interference by her native Setswana language and culture) is grammatically correct from the appropriating viewpoint that regards all varieties of English as correct. Unfortunately Mrs Plum and Kate fail to be ‘taught’ the new variety of English by Karabo, because to them Karabo, like the rest of the black world, has no worthwhile distinctive identity of her own and therefore, no distinctive mother tongue and culture, and nothing important to teach them. The critic Percy More interestingly stretches this aspect of the “Master and Slave (servant) relationship” even further by asserting that by the “[according of] more recognition and respect [to animals] than black people” in “Mrs Plum”, Mphahlele is “[making] use of the Master/Slave key categories such as recognition, reciprocity, dependence-independence, and struggle” (11). The significance of such an observation is that it illustrates how Mphahlele counterpoints the alienating effect of such apartheid-inflected interpersonal relations with African humanist counteraction as displayed by the character Karabo’s non-conformity. This is no different from the way Jackson in the story “The Living and the Dead” in *In Corner B* is depicted as being without identity since that is how he is observed by Stoffel. Stoffel not being a liberal, the similarity of the flaw between him and the Plums in the way they treat Jackson and Karabo (respectively) is a revelation that what Mphahlele (being by his own admission not racist in his formulation of the concept of African humanism) is satirising is neither English liberal nor Afrikaner consciousness at the narrow, almost personal level. What Mphahlele is ironically demonstrating is failure by certain social groups or classes to admit that their normative understanding of the world is not the only correct one. This is not to discount perceptions of critics like Ruth Obee when she remarks that “[in suggesting blacks are nothing more than animals, Stoffel is] the

Afrikaner equivalent of Mrs Plum … [and like Mrs Plum] he also defies easy labels" ("The Unbroken Song" 185).

As a point in the continuum of self-assertion, Karabo's insistence that the Madam should buy her a weekend paper with black stories by black writers and her rejection of second-hand white papers where whatever little is said about black life is said in the voice (reflecting the perception) of white journalists, warrants a comment. This stand she takes should be put side by side with Kate's confession that on Thursday afternoons all the black nannies "dress the way of many white madams and girls", which she thinks makes them look really smart (166). Being one of the black household helpers, by making this remark Karabo is confessing that she also behaves like these female domestic workers. This manner of dress being a symbol of their cultural assimilation of a European lifestyle, it betrays the ambivalence of the women's position in their present social context. However hard they try to resist the temptation of the white culture, the African women also do wish to identify culturally with whites. The author levels the ground in making Karabo remark that their Thursday style of dress catches the eyes of white women. Such a reaction by white women is indicative of the paradox of colonisation, in which the coloniser wants to assimilate the colonised while at the same time feeling threatened by the obliteration of otherness that might result in homogenisation. Such a homogenisation is threateningly tied to an undermining of the authority of the colonizer. Bhabha refers to the threat and erosion of colonial authority by the mimicking colonised when he writes that "The display of hybridity – its peculiar 'replication' – terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 115). What he highlights here is that the likeness of manners of the hybridised colonised to the coloniser's is unsetlling because of the inherently usurping bent it bears as far as power and authority are concerned (as the terms "peculiar 'replication'", "*ruse* of recognition" and "mockery" entail). The magnitude of such a threat is outlined in another remark by Bhahba that "The paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside." He adds: "In the productivity of power, the boundaries of authority – its reality effects – are always besieged by 'the other scene' of fixations and phantoms" ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 116). It is the "fixations and phantoms" (to use Bhabha's words) behind Karabo and her fellow female workers' immaculate western dress on Thursdays which instill fear in the white women.

That the white employers are threatened by the black employees once they are rigged out on Thursdays is evident from the detail that on such days the black women "dress the way of many white madams and girls" and that this makes the black women "catch the eyes" of the white women (166). Mphahlele is sarcastically suggesting that the white women are possessively aware that, given the opportunity, the black women can 'outperform' them in matters relating to social taste – such as dressing smartly when the situation demands. True to the ironic nature of mimicry, the black women looked at thus by white madams feel good about it, even though they may be misinterpreting the white women's cultural jealousy as personal envy.

Mphahlele being an Afrocentric writer, the black women appear to be stronger than the white women as the short story unfolds, because their mimicry of western ways is outweighed by their primary identification with African humanism. It is for this reason that when Mrs Plum censures the girl next door for calling Karabo by the colonial name of Jane, Karabo's response is dismay at the white woman speaking "as if she knew a name is a big thing" (*Renewal Time* 165). The colonised mindset that would have induced someone in Karabo's position to see Mrs Plum as being at one with her and her people's cause is smothered here by the strong Africanist position which insists on seeing Mrs Plum as an "other". The progressive 'decolonisation' Karabo is experiencing enables her to reverse the direction of othering from being invariably *from* the "center" *to* the "margin", thus signifying a gradually increasing psychological freedom from colonisation. Mphahlele in this way revolutionises the notion of marginalisation, for the ones suffering from this condition at this time are the powerful whites and not the politically and socially weaker blacks, as hegemonic order would have it. Because what Karabo says in the dialogue (even though this is reported in monologue form throughout the short story) is true not of herself alone but of all blacks in apartheid South Africa; dialogue in this story therefore also expresses a public, communal voice. This public voice is permeated by an African humanist consciousness, as revealed by the "english" Karabo uses in lieu of English, and shown in her grasp of what is considered moral or immoral among blacks. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, among other writers, distinguish English from english in the following words:

> We need to distinguish between what is proposed as a standard code, English (the language of the erstwhile imperial centre), and the linguistic code, english, which has been transformed and subverted into several distinctive varieties throughout the world [and has been] employed by different linguistic communities in the post-colonial world. (*Empire Writes Back* 8)

This is why the variety of English Karabo uses in "Mrs Plum" is depicted in this study as containing a challenging of the "centre" as represented by Mrs Plum and Kate – confirming the point that such an approach by Karabo necessarily conveys an African humanist mentality. It is in keeping with this point about Karabo's dialogue that writers like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe their concept of "english" as the state of a communicative system that has been "transformed and subverted" with the purpose of appropriating English to carry ontologies recognisably belonging to "others".

Mphahlele shows that Karabo ends up the victor and that she to some extent calls the shots when Mrs Plum goes to collect her from Phokeng after her uncle's death and burial. The story closes after the two dogs Malan and Monty have disappeared (along with the love that Mrs Plum lavished on them), so that there is hope that love in the madam's house may now be directed towards human beings instead. The disappearance of the dog Malan also marks the end of a love affair, symbolising failure of liberals to try and combine interests with Afrikaner nationalists like the politician Malan. "Either you are on the side of blacks or on that of Afrikaner nationalists" seems to be the point Mphahlele is trying to make concerning that stage of South African history. Both "Mrs Plum" and "The Living and the Dead" convey Mphahlele's message that the solution of the political problem in the heyday of apartheid does not lie in liberal humanism, but can only be perpetuated by maintaining the apartheid order, or dismantled by means of a take-over by

the blacks, who are a majority (as suggested by the claustrophobic atmosphere Mphahlele creates in the two short stories, which derives from the large number of blacks swamping whites during garden parties and in servants' backrooms). Mphahlele depicts the South African social and political atmosphere as claustrophobic in "Mrs Plum" and "The Living and the Dead", and defines the claustrophobia (from the point of view of the privileged whites) as caused by blacks who overpopulate areas demarcated for white residence. Kate's concern in "Mrs Plum" (*Renewal Time*) similarly reveals her discomfort at the liberal humanism of some of her own people that causes some malaise among the whites, as revealed by the narrator Karabo when she says: "one day I heard Kate speak to her mother. She says I don't know why you ask so many Africans to the house. A few will do at a time" (181-82). Comparable to Kate's standpoint shown in the above quotation, Stoffel Visser and Doppie Fourie in "The Living and the Dead" resent the liberalist position in Government, which to them comes across as a foolish blindness to the reality that such an ideology is leading to an inevitable take-over of government by blacks (suggested by the overwhelming presence of blacks in white areas) (33).

While in such stories as "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" and "A Point of Identity" Mphahlele manipulates style to juxtapose the typical Afrikaner mentality of the time with the type of mindset and cultural profile he has named African humanism, stories like "Mrs Plum" seem to show a writer more bent on exposing the impotence of Christian liberalism in its attempts to bring about political change in South Africa.

This is the case because Mrs Plum and Kate (as stereotypes) represent collective liberal thinking and not just their own private feelings, no less than Stoffel's apocalyptic tone in "The Living and the Dead" represents Afrikaners' restlessness in the current social and political landscape and their conception of the future of South Africa as that in which black and white are likely to explode into a conflict much bigger in scale than the mere friction at present between mere individuals. The stereotypical characterisation of Stoffel Visser is revealed when he evaluates his role on the political scene as that of someone who is "working and sweating to defend ready-made attitudes, stock attitudes that various people had each in their own time planted in him: his mother, his father, his brothers, his friends, his schoolmasters, his university professors and all the others who claimed him as their own" (*Renewal Time* 37). The apocalyptic state of Stoffel Visser's mind (symbolising the Afrikaner mentality of the time) is revealed when, in the face of an administrative delay ironically brought about by reliance on the domestic services of the black man Jackson, the white man (Visser) says in agitation:

> Just what I told these fellows on the commission. Some of them are just so wooden-headed they won't understand simple things like kaffirs swarming over our suburbs, living there, gambling there, breeding there, drinking there, sleeping there with girls. They won't understand, these stupid fools, until the kaffirs enter their houses and boss them about and sleep with white girls. What's to happen to white civilisation? (33)

Mphahlele indicates the intensity of the feeling expressed by Stoffel Visser through another Afrikaner (Doppie Fourie) in the employ of Government. Mphahlele explains that Doppie Fourie "often hated himself for feeling so inferior. And all through his friend's miniature oration Doppie's face showed a deep hurt" (33-34). This is an

indication that the other Afrikaner Doppie Fourie shares Stoffel Visser's paranoia caused by the "liberalist" position of the (apparently opposition party) liberal policies that have led to blacks swarming into white residential places. Blacks are the two Afrikaners' obsession. The way the two Afrikaner characters maltreat their servants symptomises a hatred of the black people. That is, if we understand that "he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behaviour", in the way Fanon defines hatred (*Black Skin, White Masks* 53). The existence of such hatred explains why Mphahlele's consciousness detests apartheid as it is portrayed in this and other stories, for hatred is diametrically opposed to the known African humanist value of humane gravitation towards fellow humans. It is behaviour such as this in Doppie Fourie and Stoffel Visser which starkly contrasts with the humanism displayed in the action of the black servants in the short stories, with which it is juxtaposed.

The story "The Living and the Dead" goes on to portray Stoffel Visser and Doppie Fourie as consumerists who put material gain above the sacredness of human life, as shown by their interest in their servants' mechanical performance of menial duties without ever caring about the personal lives of the workers. A similar valuing of material gain above the sacredness of human life is shown by the behaviour of the Afrikaner farmers from whom the character called Uncle is forced to flee towards the town of Pietersburg (in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" – *Renewal Time* 114). Mphahlele describes the dehumanising behaviour of the Afrikaner farmers in the following words: "Those were the savage days when the whole white family came and sat on the stoep to watch, for their own amusement, African labourers put under the whip" (114) for failing to exert themselves in farm labour beyond human capacity.

The railway employee Lebona in "The Living and the Dead" is portrayed as leading a life motivated by a philosophy that contrasts with that of the Afrikaner farmers just demonstrated in the preceding paragraph. Lebona displays an African humanist prioritising of human life above material concerns. That is why, unlike the two white characters in "The Living and the Dead", he cannot be associated with attitudes such as money-driven expectation that workers must be punctual for work without considering such workers' wellbeing, as well as unconcern about the welfare of people belonging to one's immediate human landscape. For instance, he expresses horror at the impersonal manner in which commuters, in a hurry to get to work, trample over Jackson after he was gratuitously assaulted by a group of whites on the train (31). Such foregrounding of an African humanist value system in the opening sections of "The Living and the Dead" resembles the way Mphahlele opens "In Corner B" with the following words: "How can boys just stick a knife into someone's man like that?" (141). Lebona's consciousness conflicts with that of Stoffel Visser (in "The Living and the Dead"), as revealed also by his efforts to trace the relatives of the stranger Jackson to deliver a letter that probably dropped from Jackson's pocket when he fell off the train. Stoffel Visser knows Jackson solely in terms of their relationship as boss and servant. It is only the contents of the letter Lebona has brought, the mournful utterances of Jackson's wife who comes to report his disappearance, and his startling discovery of the badly injured Jackson in the servants' quarters that for the first time galvanise Stoffel Visser into looking at Jackson as a fully-fledged human being who has aged parents back home in Venda, and a wife and children.

Mphahlele not only highlights the liberal problem through the conversation of Stoffel Visser and Doppie Fourie in "The Living and the Dead". To testify to the gravity of the inter-racial problem in apartheid South Africa, the character Mrs Plum's concerns (in the short story "Mrs Plum") are shown as the concerns of the whole liberal establishment. Since the story is told by Karabo (the I-narrator) with Mrs Plum as the central character of the story, Mrs Plum's own dialogue is mostly expressed as directed to Karabo. Mrs Plum hardly ever refers to non-whites as blacks without qualifying them (to Karabo) as "your people", as when she says "you know, I like your people, Karabo, the Africans" (208). Mrs Plum's repeated use (in conversation with Karabo) of the term "your people" when referring to blacks by implication identifies Mrs Plum's own race as "my people". To think in terms of "your people" and "my people" shows that Mrs Plum does not think of herself and the socio-political challenges she is facing as personal to her and her family, but sees herself as one of her social group and the challenges as shared among her fellow liberals. The converse attitude among blacks as a collective towards legislated segregation such as is expressed by the characters Stoffel and Fourie in "The Living and the Dead" (as well as Kate in "Mrs Plum") serves to highlight motivation for the white characters to display a malaise as far as living with black Africans is concerned. One autobiographer of Mphahlele's period, Bloke Modisane, has voiced the flip side of this "crisis" of black and white co-existence in the following words: "I cannot live in the residential area of my choice; I am committed by the colour of my skin to live in segregated ghettos or locations or slums" (*Blame Me* 308).

Such an exposure of liberal thinking through indications of loathing and contempt for blacks as is evident in the conduct of Kate and Mrs Plum (in "Mrs Plum") is an expression of Mphahlele's dislike of the liberal attitudes displayed by some whites during the apartheid period, which he shares with several other African writers. In the expository writing of Ursula Barnett, Mphahlele is quoted as saying that "white liberalism … was beginning [since the 1950s] to be stigmatised as paternalism by black writers", and she cites his observation that James Matthews continued beyond the bannings of black South African writers in the 1960s and after "to write stories in the *Drum*-school style … deal[ing] with the hypocrisy of white liberalism …" (*A Vision of Order* 21, 23). Perhaps the above illustration of the similarity of (on the one hand) the liberal Kate in "Mrs Plum" and the incarnations of apartheid mentality Fourie and Visser in "The Living and the Dead" (on the other), in their opposition to blacks' desire to live in comfortable residential areas like whites, is the best demonstration of the "hypocrisy of white liberalism". This is because, despite what they profess, in practice such liberals do not differ fundamentally from stark proponents of apartheid. Kate's protest against Mrs Plum's "[asking] so many Africans to the house" betrays the hatred for blacks no less than Fourie and Visser's remonstrations against "kaffirs swarming over our suburbs" do (*Renewal Time* 33, 181). That these citations reveal a desire within the oppressed blacks to live as luxuriously as the whites is clear. This is the same constant feeling of desire to be given equal treatment with whites which Mphahlele exemplifies in many more scenes – as in "Mrs Plum", when on Thursdays the African maids in the white suburb of Greenside "dress the way of many white madams and girls" (*Renewal Time* 166). The gravity of the white characters' negative reaction to this desire of the blacks can best be

comprehended in the light of Fanon's observation in these words: "As soon as I *desire* I am asking to be considered … I demand that notice be taken of my negating activity insofar as I … do battle for the creation of a human world – that is of a world of reciprocal recognitions. He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 218). This quotation should serve to remove any doubt that the action of the white characters in the two stories opposes the African humanist motives within the black characters.

The earlier stories sustain a juxtaposition of the African humanist consciousness with the apartheid consciousness by means of dialogue that reveals underlying modes of interpreting reality. Apartheid consciousness within the South African population whose living is informed by this mindset (symbolised by characters like Stoffel Visser), in Mphahlele's words includes "a perverse Calvinism, the fear of black revolt, of miscegenation and biological extinction" ("The Function of Literature" 419-20). Mphahlele's (earlier) stories that juxtapose the conflict between African humanist and apartheid consciousnesses are followed by those that enrich the intended assertion of the distinctiveness of Africans by adding transliterary devices by means of which the indigenous languages of the Africans creep underneath the surface of what appears to be 'normative' English. In his more recent stories, the stereotyping of characters who symbolise the incongruous world-views of their respective communities intensifies Mphahlele's manoeuvring of the short story form and content to highlight the persistence of the African humanist ethos of the peoples distinguished by such a consciousness.

2.2.5 African Cultural traces in the Short Stories

Another African humanist (behavioural) aspect depicted in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" (*In Corner B*) is the explanation that Uncle slaughters a goat for the ancestors and gathers his relations whenever he lacks peace of mind (46-47); that he summons a traditional healer without hesitation when the need arises, as when something in his financial sphere or in the physical well-being of his nephew or himself (47) goes seriously awry; and the remark that a black man never starves if he lives among his people, unless there is famine (50).

In "A Point of Identity", the coloured man Karel Almeida, despite appearing culturally to be more white than coloured, amazes the black neighbourhood in the section named Corner B when he calls a "witchdoctor" to cure his foot. This points to the counterdiscursive effect of black culture on western culture even as western culture also affects black culture. Belief in witchcraft, the holding of a service in honour of ancestral spirits and the practice of consulting diviners, herbalists or any type of traditional healers on any matter have been ridiculed as heathen and barbaric within the western Christian context of the apartheid period. Karel Almeida's belief and involvement in these customs is thus a kind of behaviour which counters discourse from the (then) apartheid "centre" which had an opposite notion of these customs as heathen and barbaric. To practise your traditional religion quietly and simply should be seen as a sign of greater self-confidence, for it is self-confidence that will tell you that you do not need to elaborate and debate your cultural customs with members of societies whose customs are opposed to yours.

Mphahlele refers to this attitude as a *sine qua non* in the self-definition of the Africans whose collective cultural practices are imbued with an African humanist consciousness. With this story falling in the category of those that foreground the apartheid context, the traditional healer attending to Karel turns out to be a fatal fraud with Mphahlele subtly blaming such vile desecration of a hallowed cultural practice on the evils of apartheid rather than on the quack himself. Nor does Mphahlele maneuvre the short story in such a way that the reader is made to put the emphasis on Karel's embracing of black culture. Mphahlele's description of Africans encompassing a section of the South African population then called "coloureds", and Karel Almeida being described in the short story as a "coloured", there is no way the consultation of the traditional healer can be considered as *appropriately* (or predictably) failing because he is experimenting dangerously with 'foreign' practices. It is in order to bring out the African identity of Karel Almeida that Mphahlele (through the mouth of the narrator in "A Point of Identity") remarks: "but the Hotnotte, Boesmans and Kaffirs and Coolies are all frying in the same pan, boy, and we're going to sink or swim together, you watch" (*Renewal Time* 95). In this way Karel Almeida's move in consulting a witch doctor is a proper move. By mentioning that the next door neighbour Karel and he are "frying in the same pan", the narrator means that they are suffering together under apartheid as Africans. According to Mphahlele's definition of African humanism, traditional medicine men and women (according to African cultures) are endowed with the specialist capacity to unravel mysteries that an ordinary man or woman may not possess and as such the healers must be consulted each time the individual's balance with the surrounding natural forces seems to have been upset. In this way, Karel Almeida cannot be blamed for consulting the 'witchdoctor' unless it is proven that he knew the service provider was a fake.

The way Mphahlele describes the setting of the story against the background in terms of which Karel Almeida's actions should be judged, the blame for his mishap is shown to rest squarely on apartheid's system of social engineering through pieces of legislation like the Land Act of 1913 and the pass laws, which prevented the creation of social conditions for blacks that would encourage a stable identity – and that would be accompanied by such corollaries as a stable economy and equally-distributed primary health care resources in the same way as these were made available to whites. Mphahlele pieces together where Karel Almeida comes from before fate deposits him amidst the residents of Corner B, who ceaselessly speculate about who and what Karel is and has been, in these words:

> Me my mudder was African, my farder was Portugalese, Karel often said in conversation, not de Portugalese what come an fuck an' den dey vamoose off to Lourenco Marques. An he die sudden, man, just like you blow a candle out, T. [My mother] died in Sibasa, man, way up nort' Tranvaal [because she] didn't like Jo'burg not dis much, so I took her back to Sibasa … I'm not a Hottentot or a Bushman, I've got European blood straight from de balls no zigzag business about it … But serious now, true's God, I've always lived wit' Africans an' never felt watchimball, er, discomfortable or ashamed … Damn it all man, if my farder slept wit mudder an' dey made me dat's dey business. (*Renewal Time* 95)

The ambient imagery of authoritarianism constituted by references to such items as reclassification documents, a marriage certificate, a residential permit and a superintendent succeeds in foregrounding the apartheid system. It does so by creating the choking atmosphere which Mphahlele blames implicitly for the deaths (spiritually or otherwise) of Africans like Karel Almeida. Such an indictment against apartheid is implied also in the narrator's conversation one day with the neighbour Karel, when he says: "I can't understand why you cycle to work and back instead of taking a bus. Just look how the rain beats on you and the wind almost freezes you in winter" (95). When the narrator in the latter parts of "A Point of Identity" tells the reader that "death came and took [Karel Almeida] away from us", the image of the man cycling to work and back whether in rain or freezing cold and the cruelty of a system whose inhumane policies are responsible for this kind of difficult survival are bound to be inextricably entangled in the mind of the reader (*Renewal Time* 109).

The character Lebona – allegorically delineated in "The Living and the Dead" as a personification of the co-operative spirit of the black community that pass daily through the conduit of the train system on their way to and from work in the whiteman's world – displays an African humanist trait that leaves the symbol of oppressive Afrikanerdom (in the person of Stoffel Visser) dumbfounded. After Lebona has picked up the letter from the injured Jackson next to a railway line, he takes the trouble to trace the employer, with the hope that the employer would then be able to trace the supposedly dead owner of the envelope. Stoffel marvels at such care taken on behalf of a man Lebona does not even know; at the intimate compassion with which Lebona describes the helplessness he felt when the man was trampled underneath the railway stairway (*In Corner B* 91). The trampling that has been initiated by a group of white male commuters symbolises the invincibility of the apartheid system in those days, which is by extension symbolised by the might of the train itself as a creation that does not wait for anyone who falls off its steps to stand up before it resumes motion.

The impatience with which Stoffel listens to (the servant) Jackson's wife when she comes to enquire why her husband never came back from taking the children to the zoo (90), and also the impatience and contempt with which Stoffel listens to the news-bearer Lebona (88-90) are etched deeply on the mind of the reader by Mphahlele. When Stoffel later finds the bandaged Jackson in a room, the latter explains how he reacted naturally to an unwarranted insult by a white man on the train, after which he was brutally assaulted. Instead of sympathising with his servant, Stoffel is angered by the servant's refusal to 'know his place' in the South African hierarchy in daring to protest against (and punish) the white man's contemptuous treatment. Stoffel resolves to continue keeping Jackson working for him like a machine, due to his (the white man's) own convoluted consciousness – as already explained in the earlier parts of this study. The story closes as Stoffel hurries to dispatch a document to parliament in which stratagems intended to intensify the rules of racially demarcated Group Areas (and other segregation laws) are outlined after reminding himself in an overtly "othering" self-address that "He was a white man, and he must be responsible. To be white and to be responsible were one and the same thing" (95).

Such a juxtaposition of Lebona's humanity with Stoffel's inhumanity serves to heighten the vividness of such inhumanity in Stoffel, revealing it as a condition much more wide-spread than the temperament of just one individual. By Stoffel's own admission (in the above conversation), the conditions behind the brutality meted out to Jackson should be blamed on the legacy of apartheid, considering that Stoffel is a mere symbol of apartheid culture. The pessimistic message of the short story seems to be the futility of any attempt by the black man to accept the white man as someone whose common humanity can be relied on. In the allegory of Lebona and the woman commuter (symbolising the white regime) who stares with detachment while Lebona is deeply troubled by memories of the incident which the letter in his pocket revives, Mphahlele conveys exactly this message.

It is significant that the woman just gazes at Lebona and the letter he is carrying with no interest at all in the contents of the letter: "The letter in his pocket. It wasn't hers – no, it couldn't be" (80). Hopes of a possible romance or marriage are dashed by Lebona's observation that "she just sat and looked at you for no reason; probably because of an idle mind" (80). This allegory thus strengthens the idea of apartheid as a system one cannot change or correct, but needs to dismantle. The pessimism of such a message is tempered by Mphahlele's reference to the woman symbolising the unconcern of the apartheid government of the time in response to the plight of the blacks – without emphasising the colour of her skin. This de-racialisation of the apartheid system should be seen as Mphahlele's consistency regarding his practice of naming or not naming anyone "African". Mphahlele has written that white people can be Africans if they "earn" the kind of Africanness he has conceptualised. In other words, it is not the whiteness of the people who are behind the apartheid consciousness that matters; what matters is the conflicting consciousness in the agents of apartheid. Fortunately such a conflicting consciousness can alter with time and evolve towards an African humanism which (by Mphahlele's own definition) is a pliable, accommodative state of mind and way of life. But the people driven by apartheid thinking will have to decide this on their own, for the reason that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is not a proselytizing one and seeks to colonise no one. Such a qualification of the method of dismantling apartheid as neither violent nor militaristic but rather an accommodation of whoever undergoes a voluntary change of consciousness is in line also with Mphahlele's views on the distinctive roles of the writer and the political activist.

The consistency mentioned earlier in the stances and concepts articulated throughout Mphahlele's expository writing is evident also in his narrative writings, as regards the aspects this study has already demonstrated. For example, the point on which I disagree with Maqagi (namely her implicit interpretation of Mphahlele's writings as an affirmation of the point that traditional African cultures sanction the abuse of women) is demonstrated in "A Ballad of Oyo". True to the Africanist view Mphahlele adheres to, that sees women as pillars of society who must be handled delicately and held in reverence, Ishola's own sister rails against Ishola's apparent weakness in the following words:

> You are everbody's fool, are you not? Lie still like that and let him come and sit and play drums on you and go off and get drunk on palm wine, come back and beat you, scatter the children – children of his palm-wine-stained blood

> (spitting), like a hawk landing among chicks, then you have no one to blame only your stupid head (pushing her other breast forcibly into her baby's mouth for emphasis) (78)

When the speaker here ruminates on a serious if not life-threatening situation while at the same time "pushing her other breast forcibly into her baby's mouth" she reaffirms a woman's position as nutritious for the sustenance and preservation of society. To refer to Ishola as "everybody's fool" is a revelation of the remonstrating sister's sensitivity to popular opinion in the village of Oyo concerning the deviant manner in which the husband Balogun treats his wife. As the rural Nigerian residents of Oyo gossip about it, the majority criticise Ishola's reaction to her husband's cruelty as foolish, hence Ishola's loving sister in the above quote refers to her as "everybody's fool" – meaning that everybody is calling Ishola a fool for not insisting on rightful treatment by the husband (Balogun). That is why the sister here focuses on Ishola's improper reaction rather than on Balogun's action. That this is so is revealed by the sister declaring in the above quotation, "then you have no one to blame only your stupid head". The significance of such a remark is subtle, reporting that neither the closely-knit community of Oyo nor their African culture is to blame for Ishola's unfortunate situation. This is because the sister serves as a sounding board of the opinion of the society, whose expression is communal and thus informed by traditional customs and values. As the sister reports in her deceptively individualist voice, members of the society do not approve of Ishola's maltreatment by her husband, because their culture does not sanction it.

It is this aspect of the story on which the critic Mbulelo Mzamane appears to have misjudged Mphahlele's depiction of popular censuring of Balogun's uncustomary conduct by the African community of Oyo as "connivance against [Ishola] between her husband's people and traditional authority" ("The Nigerian Short Stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele" 50). That the sister represents the communal voice in the short story (as I argue in the preceding paragraph) is supported by Mzamane's discerning observations that "[Oyo] is one of two areas considered to have been the cradle of Yoruba civilisation"; and that "Ishola belongs to the tradition of West African market women, famous for their aggressive lifestyle but known also for their long suffering" ("The Nigerian Short Stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele" 48, 49). In this way the condition of Oyo being steeped in African cultures and the stereotypically Africanist delineation of the woman character Ishola are affirmed. What seems to escape the attention of Mzamane is that in the same vein, Ishola's sister is only superficially individualist in her dialogue while in reality she is communal in her pronounced disapproval of Balogun's disposition. This study demonstrates elsewhere that it is the nature of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism to conceive of African women as sacred economic pillars on which society is supported as well as the fountain of a people's perpetual regeneration and self-conservation. The two elements of the proclivity of traditional, rural life to be a better custodian of Africanness and the revered position of women in African societies are in keeping with what Mphahlele approves as the salvaging aspects of African humanism that ensure its survival. As such, it would not make sense for Mphahlele to use characterisation of the women in this story (that is steeped in African humanist substance -- as this paragraph attempts to clarify) while at the same time failing to affirm African humanism. Despite both Mphahlele and Mzamane belonging to the Afrocentric mould

like most of their fellow African writers, Mzamane ironically tends in his interrogation of this short story to support a Eurocentric position that would divest any African custom or mores of value. This is brought out when Mzamane judges that "the stranglehold of tradition is particularly paralysing" or that the story should "champion the rights of women in [the] male-dominated society" ("The Nigerian Short Stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele" 48, 52). What should not be missed is that the prominence of male characters in the story is just a fact of the innocuous patriarchal nature of the society about which it is written. They are not a sign of the male characters' culturally-determined chauvinistic strain as Mzamane unfortunately seems to suggest. Unless the traditional role of men in African societies were positive (which Mzamane acknowledges), it cannot be true that the traditional leader "Baba Dejo decides to chart the middle course, a decision that is in keeping with his traditional role" which demands that as a father figure to the whole community "the first duty of a patriarch in tradition, in cases of matrimonial discord, is to effect a reconciliation and only when all else has failed can he sanction a divorce" ("The Nigerian Short Stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele" 51). It is true that Baba Dejo's integrity in deciding on the matter of divorce between Ishola and Balogun is harmonious with the traditional role of a traditional leader. Such a characterisation corresponds with Mphahlele's approach of weaving aspects of his concept of African humanism affirmatively into the fabric of his fiction and autobiography. This is the case because Baba Dejo's way of handling the discord between the husband and wife is in keeping with the African humanist propensity of seeking harmony with fellow humans and the universe rather than advocating disharmony.

All the same, it comes as no surprise that the theorist Mzamane falls into the trap of examining Mphahlele's works through a feminist filter. Using only female characters as an outlet of societal opinion on the matter of Ishola (highlighted in the story through remarks by Ishola's sister and the women's continual chattering as they sell their wares daily at the Oyo market) could lead one to misinterpret such protests as feminist. That is why it is important to investigate whether the male section of the society takes sides with the male culprit, Balogun. It should be borne in mind that, consistently with Mphahlele's manipulation of characterisation already demonstrated in this study, the opinion of any male character, too, should be understood to be communal as opposed to individual.

When Ishola visits the leader of traditional rulers, Dejo, in order to motivate why she should be granted a divorce, Dejo listens intently to her account of Balogun's unmanly deportment as recounted by the wife, Ishola. Dejo then responds in the following words:

> So he drinks himself stupid. I know there are certain places in Oyo where you can hear the name of Balogun spoken as if he were something that smells very bad. So he drinks himself stupid until he is too flabby to do his work in bed, a-ah! … If a man gets too drunk to hoe a field another man will and he shall regret, he will see … But a man who comes home only as a he-goat on heat, and not as a helper and father is useless … Animals look for food for their mates and their brood, why cannot a man? (85)

As a sounding board not only of the male section of the Oyo community but even more importantly as head of the traditional ruling class, Dejo's reponse does not sanction the

male character Balogun's unmanly behaviour. The African values within Oyo society are revealed: that substance abuse is culturally unacceptable (shown by censure in the words "drinks himself stupid"); that a man, as head of family, should strive to build himself a good reputation in the eyes of society (revealed by the censorious tone of the words "name of Balogun spoken as if he were something that smells very bad"); that a man must perform in bed as that is one of the manly roles according to expectations of the society (as it is revealed by the tone of disapproval in "too drunk to hoe a field" in which "field" is a metaphor for a wife, associated among others with the societal regard of a woman as an economic pillar that nourishes the nation in renewed cycles, like the field as seasons rotate, for its survival); and that a man must provide moral and material support for his wife and children in addition to performing the other roles (as the the words "not as a helper and father" express Dejo's dissociation from the unmanliness displayed in the male character Balogun).

The similarity of stance between the male character Dejo and the female character Ishola's sister confirms that opinion on the errant behaviour of Balogun is motivated neither by male chauvinism nor feminism, but that it is informed by the African humanist value system common to members of both genders within the Oyo community. In other words, an African female character may deceptively seem to act out of an individualist feminism while in truth she is acting out of an African humanist consciousness. African women are expected to take initiative and even lead men in finding the solution of a crisis, as revealed by proverbs such as *mmagongwana o swara thipa ka bogaleng* (meaning "a female grabs a sharp blade by her own bare hands [while men run away out of cowardice]").

Such an Africanist conception of the role of a woman in the family and in the broader community explains why Ishola's sister censures Balogun's behaviour in the same way as the male section of society does, yet in a braver tone than that of the male characters, as in the following comments:

> I would never allow a man to come stinking of drink near me in the blankets (spitting) … Are you a daughter of my father? … Just a black drunken swine that is what he is. A swine is even better because it can look for rubbish to eat. Balogun does not know what people are he would not go a long way with me no he would not he does not know people. Eat sleep and lay a pile of dung, eat sleep and lay a pile of dung while men of his age group are working: the woman who gave birth to that man … (87)

The communal nature of the sister's diatribe is reinforced by some features of the above quotation that add to those already revealed in the comment by Deju. The expression "while men of his age group are working" brings to the surface the African humanist trait of viewing society as consisting of a social hierarchy in which respect includes the ability to distinguish among people according to their age groups or regiments or traditional initiation schoolmates – a point that has been made by writers like Kaunda (1962). Senior citizens belonging to certain age groups are not expected to work and that is why Ishola's sister does not omit to indicate that in the case of Balogun the contravention of social code is not the blanket failure to work in order to provide for his family. The

actual transgression of community expectations lies in the fact that Balogun is not working "while men of his age group are [still] working".

One more such consistently presented African humanist aspect is traditional respect for death. Traditional respect for death is still noticeable (similarly to the way it has been represented, for example, in the discussion of "Grieg on a Stolen Piano") in the short story set in exile, "A ballad of Oyo". In the short story the abused woman Ishola's elopement with Lijadu is reversed as soon as Lijadu announces that Ishola's father-in-law Mushin died the previous night, crying out about the loss of his grandchildren. Ishola at an earlier stage of the story expresses shock when her sister's exasperation with Balogun's wrong conduct threatens to overlook customary recognition of the borderline between the living and the dead. She protests in the following words upon suspecting the sacriligeous direction her sister's remarks threaten to take: "Sister! Leave that poor woman *to lie quiet in her grave*", to which the contrite sister responds: "I will *but* not that wine-bloated creature called Balogun" (87, emphasis added). In the same way, Ishola's father-in-law Mushin invokes ancestral spirits later on when he chastises his worthless son for neglecting paternal responsibilities and maltreating his wife: "When are you going to wake up you useles boy, he gasped, as he had often done before. What kind of creature was given me for a son! *What does your mother say from the other world to see you like this*!" (86, emphasis added).

This aspect of African humanism in which ancestors are, *inter alia*, piously invited to join in the affairs of the living in times of tribulation or jubilation features in a more sustained manner in Mphahlele's novels after being introduced in short stories such as this.

2.2.6 MPHAHLELE'S USE OF STYLE TO REPRESENT PERSONALITY TRAITS AND INDIVIDUAL CONDUCT

In proposing, defining and refining the concept he is now associated with, that of African humanism, Mphahlele has used certain theoretical formulations as well as declared specific stances on sociological issues, which may be attributed to him personallly although they tackle universal topics. These are his descriptions of "resonance", "tyranny of place", "tyranny of time", "perspective", "irony", "Zionist and messianic religious practice" and "the strength of women". It is not enough to examine the presence of aspects of the concept Mphahlele calls African humanism without an investigation of Mphahlele's adherence to the ideas and stances enumerated above in his narrative writings. To succeed – in expository writing – in defining and announcing the intention to use certain tools and to admit to adopting certain positions on social issues is different from being seen in narrative writing to apply those tools and to adhere to the stances taken on social issues. Writing on the relationship between a writer and his work in 1975 in "The African Critic", Mphahlele confirms that "a useful poet should be able to let us enter his private world and make us feel it is ours" ("Exile" 387). This statement is Mphahlele's admission that unless he is failing as an artist, his private literary theories and personal opinion on certain social issues should be an organic part of his works while at the same time these should not detract from the public nature of what he conceptualises

as African humanism. His personality traits thus dovetail organically with aspects of his philosophy of African humanism.

As parts of any study are separated only for convenience while in reality they constitute an organic whole, the presence of such tools and stances in Mphahlele's poems and short stories could not but be pointed out when other features were explained. At this point of the study the intention is to distill some of those that have already been subsumed in preceding analyses in order to highlight their presence in Mphahlele's writings in their own right; and to indicate at the same time those that may have escaped notice. A description of the presence of some of the features will not be repeated where it is felt that they have been dealt with sufficiently elsewhere in this study – aspects like Mphahlele's personal description and representation of "perspective", "irony", "the tyranny of place" and "the tyranny of time".

Through individual definition and adoption, the features enumerated above have now acquired the status of the standard delineations of Mphahlele's distinct writerly personality as manifested in his writing. If this is so, it makes sense to probe whether the plot and themes of Mphahlele's poems, short stories and novels unfurl as determined by such personality features. It is pertinent also to identify ways in which these personality features feature as some of the aspects of African humanism within Mphahlele's broad theoretical framework. It is not as if this study rambles from studying Mphahlele the writer to studying Mphahlele the person. Africanist writers such as Ngugi have, at the general level, argued that a writer's life cannot be separated from the material of his or her writing, or from his or her involvement in the challenges that face the people he or she writes about and writes for. Mphahlele himself has admitted to a blurring of any division between his life as a person and that which he lives as a writer or social activist. Some writers on Mphahlele's creative writing (such as Thuymsma) have also remarked about such an enmeshment of Mphahlele the person with Mphahlele the writer because of the strong autobiographical element in his fictional writings.

It is therefore not irrelevant in any study of Mphahlele's fiction to look for aspects that constitute Mphahlele's writerly personality as far as it reflects itself in the style of his fiction.

2.2.6.1 The Fabrication of Resonance

Apart from the other stylistic techniques of Mphahlele already dwelt on in this study, the Africanising device (as employed for example in "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" – in *In Corner B*) functions through the creation of resonance. Resonance has already been described in this study as Mphahlele's way of maintaing myth and other reflective modes mirroring African identity, by means of which African readers relate to their lives as refracted in his fiction writing. Such African readers' lives are refracted rather than reflected, as the depiction is invariably accompanied by African humanist inflections that indicate the distinction between African lifestyle and the lifestyles of people in other cultural clusters. Resonance (bearing in mind that Mphahlele defines it differently from many other writers in whose works one finds resonance) should guide the African readers

towards creative solutions of the sociological problems they face, while at the same time sensitising them to the trail of their distinctive cultural identity as it has survived through the ages.

In “Grieg on a Stolen Piano” Mphahlele establishes resonance through the mythical stories interspersed in the opening paragraphs (38) and in the contextualising image of the *malaita* or young men marching in white shorts and tennis shoes for a fist-fighting sport in an open spot near Bantule location, and then herded back to the hostels by mounted white policemen for amusement. The image of the *malaeta* is an interconnecting one in that it serves not as a central part of the story, but recedes to the fringes of the story for the role of merely creating an atmosphere of a persistent repetitiveness that is Mphahlelesque. The origins of the hybridised institution of *malaeta* among urbanised African are actually to be found in rural herdboys’ traditional sport tied to the traditonal ways of preparing young boys for adulthood. Mphahlele is referring to these origins of the *malaita* urban sport when he states in *Exiles and Homecomings* (for instance) that “On moonlit nights we used to converge on the sandy banks of the Leshoane river to have the regular fist fights in which country boys establish a pecking order” (34-5). The indispensable grounding of fiction within the framework of distinctive cultural institutions creates resonances with which the African reader from the northern parts of South Africa identifies, in much the same way that the cultural *deja vu* and colourful description of locale in the much later novel *Father Come Home* does. Resonance is created again when commentary by Mphahlele’s busybody characters like Seleke’s cousin and Keledi (“Down the Quiet Street”) and the servant Dick (“Mrs Plum”) lend an oral texture to the prose and invoke traditional oral narrative devices.

Differently from Mphahlele, the *Drum* writer Can Themba (*The World of Can Themba)* creates an atmosphere of Africanness by means of a superficial if not distorted reference to African customs. In “The Will to Die”, for example, Can Themba makes a lame justification of the morally deviant teacher Foxy’s actions by a distorted reference to the African traditional custom of polygamy and the paying of a bride price, in the following words:

> If you are a school-teacher, you can only get out of a situation like that if you marry the girl, that is if you value your job. Foxy promptly married – another girl! But he was smart enough to give Betty’s parents fifty pounds. That, in the hideous system of *lobola*, the system of bride-price, made Betty his second wife. And no authority on earth could accuse him of seduction. (50)

To refer to the sacredly-held African custom of paying *magadi* (in Sotho) or *lobola* (in Nguni) as “the hideous system of *lobola*” is indicative of the unscrupulous manner in which *Drum* writers like Can Themba attempted to convince their black township readers of the supposed ‘backwardness’ of some of African traditional practices. A similarly condescending attitude towards traditional cultures (represented in this example by attitudes towards the mother tongue) is discernible in the autobiography of another *Drum* writer, Todd Matshikiza, when he writes with evident pride that his Xhosa-speaking family allowed an atmosphere in which his erudite father would exhort them “in English” (which was their “adopted home language”) to “sing the English song” (*Chocolates for*

My Wife 29). Such an adoption of English as a home language in a Xhosa family is elitist because it lacks the necessary attachment to indigenous languages displayed by ordinary Xhosa people. That is why, in Nat Nakasa's 1964 autobiographical (journalistic) piece about the independence of Xhosaland's Transkei, one illiterate Member of Parliament who is a tribal chief gripes that "the Government have turned [their] Southern Sotho into *fanagalo"* in that "children are made to write what they don't speak" (*The World of Nat Nakasa* 55, 56). Traditional leaders being custodians of traditional customs that are embraced by their subjects who are mainly ordinary people, the sentiments of the chief quoted above is an indication of the value attached by the masses to the use of indigenous languages in their everyday life. The influence of Todd Matshikiza's home with its elitist leanings shown above could be responsible for the elitist tone of his writings of the *Drum* period. However, the elitism found in other *Drum* writers like Can Themba (exemplified by his dim view of African traditions in the short story outlined above) can be taken as evidence of elitist orientations among some members of black urban residential areas like Sophiatown (and Queenstown, as in the case of Matshikiza's family), endorsed by some *Drum* writers (unlike Mphahlele).

Perhaps looking down upon traditional cultures is one of the negative aspects of what some *Drum* writers may have wanted to define as the "Sophiatown Renaissance" – as referred to by Essop Patel in the prefaces of both *The World of Can Themba* (2) and *The World of Nat Nakasa* (x). But Mphahlele (though one of the *Drum* writers) does not conform to this aspect of the "Sophiatown Renaissance", which is probably responsible for his denigration by those like the critic Michael Chapman who seem to endorse the move by some *Drum* writers mobilising against the "retribalizing mentality" of members of the intelligentsia like Mphahlele with his "sometimes austere standards of African worth" (*The Drum Decade* 201, 214). The disparity in temperament and thinking between the elitist *Drum* writers and Mphahlele explains their disparate approaches to social analysis pointed to above. While Mphahlele is known for asserting the soundness of African identity, other *Drum* writers like Can Themba and Arthur Maimane go down in history as Africans who snobbishly "claimed that [they] could speak no African language" (*The Drum Decade* 191). Even more startlingly, Bloke Modisane "sought to stand apart from what he saw as the undifferentiated mass of black people and cultivate his [elitist] individuality" (206). That the "Sophiatown Renaissance" as a writers' circle did exist is confirmed by commentators such as Ursula Barnett: "For the English writers, Sophiatown in Johannesburg became the centre of literary activities until this area ceased to exist in 1953. Writers, including Todd Matshikiza, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane, formed a coterie which met to discuss literature" (*A Vision of Order* 16). It is, however, some aspects of the "Sophiatown Renaissance" other than elitist affectation which Mphahlele partly conforms to and actualises in a manner differing from that of his contemporaries. Other *Drum* writers, for instance, encouraged the kind of literary attitude in which "everything that went before in African literature was discarded as being crusadingly Christian or unacceptably romantic" and the writers revolted "against what they conceived as the naïve and simple-minded generation" of earlier Africans "just as the black Americans had revolted against the concept of Uncle Tom many years earlier" (*A Vision of Order* 16). Belonging to the so-called "Sophiatown Renaissance" does not point to any curtailment of each writer's freedom to

pursue writing in his or her individual way. While Mphahlele and other Afrocentric writers like Achebe and Ngugi (already cited in this study) admitted to the need to discard some of the traditional practices that are hideous, there is not a totalising condemnation of everything traditionally African as 'hideous'. It is this difference between Mphahlele and the other *Drum* writers which prompts him to assert "the survivals of tradition we see in urban African life" ("The Fabric" 154). In Said's terms, Mphahlele as a beginner like all other theorists who should be seen as beginners in their own right is driven by the impulse "to begin again rather than to take up writing dutifully at a designated point and in a way ordained by tradition; … to write in and as an act of discovery rather than out of respectful obedience to established truth" ("Conclusion: Vico" 379). To compromise his personal writerly character by conforming servilely to the biases of the "Sophiatown Renaissance" as revealed in the attitudes of contemporaries like Matshikiza, Modisane and Nakasa would be "obedience to established truth" rather than "to write in and as an act of discovery" (in Said's terms).

There are further distinctions betweeen Mphahlele and his contemporaries of the *Drum* decade. Like most good writers (including Mphahlele) do, Can Themba in "The Will to Die" (as quoted above), does create resonance. But the resonance he creates is that of decadence among black township people probably caused to some extent by the repressive laws of apartheid, in which Africans interact with colonisation as peoples without any sound culturally-defined consciousness. The theme of problems facing the educated African during apartheid (in "The Will to Die") is handled by highlighting the dimness of the subculture among the educated African township men or women (such as lack of work ethic in Foxy), without any sound recreation of African ethics against which unethical behaviour can be judged. In a manner evincing this flaw, Casey Motsisi's "Riot" (*Casey & Co*) illustrates the sensitivity of the educated African township man or woman towards the injustice of apartheid through the dialogue of a policeman during a pass raid, who explains that he is arresting one of the "educated tsotsis" because he "has no pass and he's cheeky" in saying that the policeman has "no right to ask him for a pass when he's in bed" (82). The same theme receives attention in Mphahlele's "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" and hinges on Uncle's debauched behaviour, yet with a clear indication of Uncle's African humanist consciousness against which the degree of his behavioural deviation can be gauged. The message from writers like Themba is thus one that may be interpreted as calling upon fellow Africans to be assimilated into modern western cultures that contain the lure of urbanised lifestyles – suggesting that such 'new' cultures should at all cost replace 'barbaric' traditional customs. In other words, the unethical conduct of characters like Foxy (in Can Themba's "The Will to Die") should be judged within the framework of the 'new, superior' township culture which itself is nondescript. Unlike what happens in Mphahlele's writings, the alterity of the Africans in the fiction of some *Drum* writers like Can Themba is unmediated by any distinctive traditional consciousness of their own. That is why in the passage quoted above Can Themba goes on to regret that "no authority on earth could accuse [Foxy] of seduction". Can Themba as author in this statement conveys regret that (due to the barrier of "hideous" customs) Africans like Foxy can get away with crimes such as the normatively defined one of 'seduction' (which according to his sloppy hybridity can be appreciated as a crime only from the dominant culture of the coloniser).

In this way it can be seen that the personalised narrative patterns of Mphahlele (as distinguished from the plane in which he merely shares them with some writers as universally-used literary devices because of a common Africanness) form the very texture of Mphahlele's literary style — as they do also in the autobiographies and novels (to which this study turns later).

2.2.6.2 THE AFRICANIST ABROGATION OF WESTERN CHRISTIANITY

Mphahlele's novels and short stories reveal a dialectical synthesis between western Christianity and so-called traditional religions, as practised today mostly (but not exclusively) by large numbers of black Africans all over the continent and in the African diaspora. This existential trait is characteristic of African humanism – existential in keeping with the "strategic essentialism" that is the result of group shapings by the environment through various historical periods. That my interpretation of Mphahlele's concept as existential and *strategically* essentialist is correct can be deduced from Mphahlele's statement that he "always take[s] the empirical view in such matters" as theoretical constructs that define African existence and his "essays are therefore *exploratory* …" ("My Destiny" 435). In exploring the religious practices among African people in their various cultures, some Afrocentric writers like James (1954), Hlophe (2002) and Asante (2004) have gone as far as stating that semblances of Christianity that are discernible in such religious practices by Africans are due to such Africans' rediscovery of their own ancient religion on which Christianity was modelled by its founders.

Though Mphahlele nowhere conforms explicitly to views by extremist Afrocentric writers like the ones cited above – who have written that Christianity started in Africa before it came back affected by western culture — the sustained representation of practices of Christianity as appropriated in Zionist sects by the characters in Mphahlele's works cannot be ignored. Writings by non-extremist Afrocentric writers like Kaunda (1962) and Kenyatta (1979) on a dialectical merging of traditional religions with western Christianity are in accordance with Mphahlele's recognition of Zionist or messianic religious practice as one aspect of appropriation which is an example of many more African humanist existential modes needed to cope with the changing world. It should be remembered that Mphahlele himself has admitted to an element of strategic essentialism that Africans need to draw strength from when their distinctiveness as cultural groups is threatened by colonisation, as when he writes of African humanist existential survival as attributable to "the collective unconscious" and reliance on "that Africanist essence" ("In Search of" 217). As such, the strengthening of African humanist consciousness cannot exclude aspects such as the occurrence of Zionist sects as long as the Zionist sects are a manifestation of existential self-definition by Africans.

Mphahlele uses the terms "nationalistic Christian", "Zionist" or "Ethiopic-Zionist" to refer to any breaking away from orthodox Christianity that was inspired by a religious nationalism ("Landmarks" 302; "Prodigals" 336). Such a nationalistic appropriation of western Christianity to strengthen the movement among Africans towards intellectual

independence has its origins in African American movements that were inspired partly by the belief that Ethiopia was prophesied as the place Jesus would return to during the Second Coming ("Your History" 158; 163; 164; 165; 168; 181). The term "messianic" refers to a self-defining African religious leader acquiring the stature of a messiah in the eyes of his followers, like Isaiah Shembe who "became the Zulu Messiah and created his own hymns" ("Landmarks" 302). In this way such an appropriation of western Christianity usually combines the Zionist nature of the new church with the messianic conception of the leader of the sect. That is why Mphahlele writes about Isaiah Shembe as "a leader of a messianic and nationalistic Christian sect" ("Prodigals" 336).

It is important, with regard to the abrogation of western Christian religion by Africans, to appreciate that the extremist Afrocentrists do not disagree with the non-extremist ones like Mphahlele, Kaunda and Kenyatta on the contemporary existence of a dialectical merging of traditional African religions with western Christianity. On this point there is no doubt that they agree. That is why Mphahlele writes in the essay "From Dependence to Interdependence" that "the dependency syndrome has its roots in colonialism and conversion to the Christian-Judaic faith"; and also that he has "a sneaking admiration" for messianic sects because they have tried to "carve a corner for themsleves where they could *independently* create a simple kind of worship" ("From Dependence" 200-201, emphasis added). This clarifies Mphahlele's personal preference for the messianic sects (such as the ZCC in the way it is described elsewhere in this study) for the reason that their mode of abrogation of Christianity is an example of the ways Africans have used to break free of dependency on imported religions. What Mphahlele and the extremist Afrocentrists cited above seem not to accentuate to the same degree is the origin of western Christianity before it could historically enter the African's consciousness and way of life through religious expansionism. Probably because of a dissimilar prioritisation of pursuits between the extremist and non-extremist Afrocentric writers, Afrocentric writers of Mphahlele's kind have not gone as far as writing like Asante does in the following statements:

> Greeks who learned philosophy ventured to Africa to study…Colonisation was not just a land issue, it was an issue of colonising information about the land … Imhote, Pthahotep, Amenhote, son of Hapu, Akhenaten, and the sage of Khunanup, are just a few of the African philosophers who lived long before there was a Greece or a Greek philosopher … Philosophy begins first with the black skinned people of the Nile Valley around 2800 BC, that is, 2 200 years before the appearance of Thales of Miletus, considered the first Western philosopher. Thus, even before writing, we have evidence that Africans were engaging in meaningful discussions about the nature of their environment. (19)

It is clear from the above quotation that by implication Christianity (if considered as an aspect of philosophy) is thought of by the writer as having originated in Africa. Another radical Afrocentrist cited elsewhere in this study, James (1954), explicitly states that Christ came to study in Africa and as such Christianity originated in Africa. Mphahlele's concern with the way Africans have in present times abrogated western Christianity in order to create their own variety of religious worship in a self-defining way is evident in

the way he does not omit descriptions of Zionist/messianic religious practices of some of the characters in his stories.

In the short stories and novels, a highlighting of such an abrogation of western Christianity is achieved by recurrent depictions of African worshippers in Zionist/messianic sects that have broken away from mainline American and European churches. An example is the repeated image of Moruti KK who is most of the time a part of the place where young women are involved in social upliftment projects in "Mrs Plum" (*Renewal Time*). Mphahlele caricatures Moruti KK as a mere resonance- or perspective-forming background figure, for the reverend is described as the owner of the Black Crow who plays no active role besides incessantly coming in and going out from the club, looking at the girls busy with various projects "with a smooth smile on his smooth round face" (*Renewal Time* 177). Moruti KK is presented in "Mrs Plum" as a leader of one such Zionist/messianic sect who "had been driven out of the Presbyterian Church and had formed his own church" (177). In *Down Second Avenue*, again, mention is made of the Donkey Church and the priest who breaks away from the Methodist Church in protest against the exploitative raising of the tithe particularly against the backdrop of the economic slump of the 1930s (100). True to the role of an activist who is bent on nation building, Mphahlele does not fail to parody such priests in his writing for their often dubious conduct resulting from greed. All the same, the moral anecdotes about break-away priests is also that apartheid as a variant of western value systems has influenced the priests to slant more towards individualistic rapacity than the Africanist self-fulfilment through contribution directed towards the well-being of the entire community.

Most of Mphahlele's contemporaries from *Drum*, except Todd Matshikiza, engage in merely superficial ridicule of western Christianity. Hence they fail to delve any deeper than the level of a character's personal attitude, in order to suggest that the cynical attitude towards western Christianity results from adherence to traditional consciousness. Even more significantly, such references as theirs to western Christianity tend to support the hegemonic discourse of the need for conduct invariably having to be judged against the norms of western Christianity. It is with this shallow mimicry that Can Themba lets the cuckold Philemon and his adulterous wife Matilda (in "The Will To Die") "[pass] the church crowd in front of the famous Anglican Mission of Christ the King" with Matilda having "to carry the suit" left behind by the fleeing man caught in bed with her "on its hanger over her back" (92). The image of churchgoers watching someone like this whose sinning is paraded in public can only serve to deepen contrition in keeping with the western Christian view of interpreting unethical behaviour as sin punishable in the afterlife with damnation in hell. That these are Can Themba's own assumptions is confirmed when Philemon discovers the body of Matilda (after remorse has apparently made her commit suicide) on the day of the week indentified as the western Christian "sabbath" (96). To testify to the absence among most *Drum* writers other than Mphahlele of any concern with the merging of traditional customs with western Christianity, not one of Casey Motsisi's short stories anthologised in *Casey & Co* (published 1978) makes a direct reference to religious practices or attitudes.

The general lack of focus by *Drum* writers such as Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba and Casey Motsisi on the undercutting of surface westernised township culture with the resilience of African humanist lifestyles and thought contrasts them with Mphahlele. Both Mphahlele and his contemporaries cited here clearly exhibit engagement with what Michael Chapman has described as the then township intelligentsia's "petty-bourgeois contradiction between identification with a specific local reality and the desire to find in art a universalizing, even a transcending image of experience" (*The Drum Decade* 221-22). This is to say that the *Drum* writers have had to wrestle with the lure of a romantically culture-free identity that would put them on equal footing with the oppressors, which demands a disowning of their unique lot as urbanised blacks whose tearing from the rural setting by the demands of industrialisation has transplanted African cultures and ways of interpreting reality onto the urban terrain. Some *Drum* writers other than Mphahlele resolve this conflict by yielding to the dazzle of mimicking western ways in a manner lauded by a critic like Michael Chapman as "the slick sophistication [which] acts in defiance of the retribalizing mentality" (*The Drum Decade* 201). Mphahlele contradicts this very conduct which he sees as deleterious by means of positing the reinforcement of African humanism as the right direction the urban African should take. Chapman implicitly recognises such an assertion of African humanism in his brief discussion of Mphahlele's thematic evolution evinced mildly in the earlier stories "Blind Alley", "Reef Train" and "The Coffee Cart Girl" and with greater intensity in the later "Down the Quiet Street" and "Lesane" stories (*The Drum Decade* 215).

Todd Matshikiza is among some *Drum* writers who, similarly to Mphahlele, depict the appropriation of western Christianity by Africans during apartheid in a significant way. This is revealed when Matshikiza explains that:

> There was a religious sect back home in the Cape Province ... They were the followers of the Xhosa religious leader Mgijima. He and his followers had refused to yield the land they had occupied in the Bullhoek district near Queenstown. They regarded this district as their spiritual home. But the South African Government wanted that piece of land for re-allotment and White occupation … General J. C. Smuts mowed [them] down and out of the territory. Those of them that remained fled to Queenstown to pursue their religious belief. As youngsters we attended their spectacular Saturday ceremonies and sang with them their rousing flag waving hymn: When ah de lodga see de bla, /I wee pass over you … As young men we discovered Mgijima's Biblical references in the hymn to be: When I the Lord shall see the blood, /I will pass over you.
> (*Chocolates for My Wife* 26-27)

Mgijima's was what Mphahlele has commended as a Zionist sect which is a form of religious nationalism that sought (during colonisation) to resist the eradication of the African identity and to ensure group survival of Africans and their traditions. The phrase "refused to yield the land" in the passage above points to this (*Chocolates for My Wife* 26). The conduct of the religious sect led by Mgijima demonstrates its originating in a sense of communal identity that conflicts with the demands of those wanting to remove them by force, because they regard the location of their centre of worship "as their spiritual home" (which is not the way the agents of apartheid see it) (*Chocolates for My Wife* 26). The group faithful to Mgijima remain faithful to their communal

consciousness, rather than giving in to the attempt to annihilate them because they flee "to Queenstown to pursue their religious belief" (26-27). Recasting of the Zionist/messianic hymn in a novel variety of English is an activity already explained in this study as constituting (in Mphahlele's terms) an African humanist aspect conforming to a postcolonial re-definition of the self.

That Mphahlele sees the appropriation of western Christianity by African peoples as important to the consolidation of African humanism as a consciousness and a way of life is borne out by his devoting a large portion of a section in *The African Image - Revised Edition* (revised) to the description of attempts by Africans to Africanise Western Christianity and turn it into an organic part of the liberation struggle — what he describes as a "religious nationalism" (61-63). Mphahlele continues in the 1998 essay "Your History Demands Your Heartbeat: Historical Survey of the Encounter Between Africans and African Americans" to commend efforts by some African Americans and black Africans towards a "religious nationalism, which was an expression of a desire for self-reliance and intellectual independence" (164). While some *Drum* writers like Can Themba and Casey Motsisi seem not to consider such an appropriation of western Christianity as warranting stylistic articulation and support in their fiction, there are those like Todd Matshikiza who view literary representation of this self-defining act of Africans as crucial.

2.2.6.3 The Portrayal of Black Women as Stronger than Men

In the essay "Es'kia Mphahlele. Man and a Whirlwind", Thuynsma writes that "Eva Mphahlele is the epitome of motherly tenderness – in sharp contrast to the menacing father" (226). Thuynsma goes on to remark that Eva "remains, perhaps to this day, [Mphahlele's] *private* symbol of Africa's resilience and tenderness" (227, emphasis added). The description of Mphahlele's adoration of his mother Eva as a "private symbol" is interesting. The contrast of such an adoration of the mother to the rejection of the father's abusive disposition subtly points to Mphahlele's taking of sides in relating to his two parents. The immensity and endurance of Mphahlele's love for mothers or women in the family is revealed when Thuynsma explains that the "private symbol" that is Mphahlele's admiration of his own mother manifests in Mphahlele's conscience – not in his view of the place of a woman in just a single, private family. Curiously, such a "private symbol" derived from experiences in a single, private family magnifies in the psychology of the then young Mphahlele into a 'public' symbol representing (even in the mind of the adult Mphahlele today) the admirable qualities of women as opposed to those of men in the whole African world. The significance of Thuynsma's remark is that it points to Mphahlele's possible personal bias in favour of mothers or women in his narrative writings to this day.

The portrayal of Ishola and the other women who work daily at the market for survival as constituting the family's pillar of strength in "A Ballad of Oyo" is congruous with the attitude of the African society of Oyo towards women in a family unit as well as in consideration of their social roles in an extended family and in their community as a whole. This has been illustrated in this study by communal dialogue that disguises itself

as individual dialogue by characters such as Ishola's sister and the headman Mushin. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the regard for a mother or a woman as demonstrated in stories such as "A Ballad of Oyo" is a public one espoused by the entire African community within the village as a cultural norm. Against this backdrop, the unacceptable temperament of the abusive husband can be appreciated fully for the scandal it constitutes. Such a communally-held view of the place of a woman in society as sacred and as a pillar of socio-economic survival has been confirmed by writers like Jomo Kenyata (1979) and Malegapuru Makgoba (1997; 1998), who have explained the elevated status and role of women in African cultures.

Apart from Thuynsma, critics such as Manganye, Samin, Gaylard and Obee have rightly shown that Mphahlele tends to depict women as stronger than men in his fiction. While it is not untrue that the characterisation of women as stronger than men in Mphahlele's fiction represents a cultural value consistent with the definition of his concept of African humanism, such fictional characterisation of women may stem from Mphahlele's family background, Mphahlele's mother having held the household together while the father tended to disrupt its well-being.

Ishola and the other toiling women of Oyo yield a recurring image in "A Ballad of Oyo" – the image of cyclic toil starting daily with the break of dawn and ending with the arrival of dusk. The never-ending rhythm of these women's toil constitutes the rhythm of economic and social life in Oyo without which life would cease, like the rising and setting of the sun. What one finds striking is the gender imbalance in this image of toil that tilts in favour of the female gender. It cannot but be an exaggeration of the crucial role of women in the economic survival of the villagers, considering that Ishola's husband in the same short story is censured by the entire community for not working while men of his age group were working. What this means is that by the community's own admission (important though the role of women is in the socio-economic sphere) men are and should equally play a major role in the daily hard work. The conspicuous fictive marginalisation of males in the economic life of the village of Oyo thus strikes one as a sign of Mphahlele's private bias that tends towards a somewhat capricious preference of women to men or wives to husbands. Without being far-fetched one might conclude then that Mphahlele's personal admiration of mothers is on show here, apart from the portrayal of women as economic livewires of the village as supported by the ethos of the African community. Writers like Ekwe-Ekwe (2001) have been quoted in this study as stating that men and women's roles have in Africa traditionally co-existed in a complementary relationship.

In the other story written in exile and given a Nigerian setting, "The Barber of Bariga" (*In Corner B*), the men Anofi, Bashiru and Okeke appear to constitute the rhythm of the story in the same way as Ishola and the other women constitute the 'ballad' in "A Ballad of Oyo". However, the opening remark by the philanderer Bashiru (that "A mahn mos' always have to lawve ay-gain un ay-gain" – 7) should alert the reader to the fact that within the culture of the Bariga African society itself women are acknowledged to be stronger than men as their almost hypnotic power compels men to involuntarily subsist on continual sexual intercourse. It would tilt the scales significantly if Bashiru were to

accentuate women as those who cannot live without recourse to sex with men, almost as if men were their lifeline. The cryptic projection of women as stronger than men is revealed by the position of Bashiru's remark as the opening line in the story. Such a position tends to impress it upon the mind of the reader that whatever happens, women are on top because men cannot survive without erotic love, the control of which is in the hands of women. At face value it might appear as if the linking of women with coitus is a vulgar one that is indicative of some chauvinistic attitude among the men to disrespectfully use women as objectified instruments for the satisfaction of their fatuous lust. But for a reader equipped with knowledge of Mphahlele's personal soft spot for women as well as his anchoring of plot and characterisation within the African humanist frame of mind, the fate (in the plot of the story) of men – not women – who suffer defeats of various kinds should strike one as deliberate. The tone of the Casanova Bashiru in the opening line is that of perplexity in the face of the supremacy of women and powerlessness of men in the hands of women, as revealed by the following statement that precedes the line quoted above: "Ha ha ha! Na be fonny worl' dees" (7). It is a funny world because men appear to be in control while the reality is that women are. The critic Mbulelo Mzamane discerns that the character Anofi bears "[an] attitude of disengagement from the life around him … [and as this is] a violation of the people's communal ethic … he pays dearly in the end [when the realisation that] Bashiru also had an affair with [his] wife … jolts him out of his customary detachment" ("The Nigerian Short Stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele" 45, 47). Once more Mphahlele plays on the theme of appearance and reality to illustrate a point which necessarily has to be detected in order for the moral of the story to be apprehended – the appearance of Anofi as an economically powerful and weighty socialite until the flaw of unAfricanist withdrawal from the rhythms of the community tragically shatters his cocoon of false self-assurance, thus exposing the reality that he is weak. This should helpfully be strectched to the necessary point of highlighting that the male character Bashiru's weakness pinpointed by Mzamane effectively contrasts his individualist frailty with the communal strength of Ishola as a voice of the people in "A Ballad of Oyo".

A further dimension of Bashiru's weakness (in "The Barber of Bariga") from the African humanist point of view is his taking advantage of his wealth to seduce married women – a weakness for which he eventually pays with his life at the hands of a jealous husband. Less wealthy men in Bariga watch powerlessly as *macho* men like Bashiru humiliate them sexually. But powerful men like Bashiru and ordinary men alike cannot beat the power of woman. The general weakness of the men in Bariga is exemplified in the cyclist accident scene when the black man is so bold as to demand ten shillings from the white man but shrinks with deference when the white man's wife confronts him. Significantly, the defeated cyclist remarks as he gives in to the bravery of the white woman that "If not to say she's a woo-man, I coul' 'ave slapped her" (14). Mphahlele by the cyclist's remark highlights the irony that (because of the commonly-held belief among menfolk that they are stronger than women) the defeated cyclist still does not openly acknowledge his yielding as a defeat by the power of the woman. The cyclist reacts to the confrontation by the white woman by indicating what he would have done if it had been the woman's husband confronting him. If it had been the man doing what the woman was doing to him, the cyclist would have slapped the husband. Man-to-man, the

cyclist's strength would have displayed itself. The message here is that even stronger men will pass as such within the Bariga society only in the world of men, but as soon as a woman appears on the scene all men are levelled down to a grovelling powerlessness. The cyclist behaves no less timidly than the barber Anofi does in front of women. When the driver Andrew temporarily disobeys his wife and is about to pay the cyclist ten shillings for the damage, the wife ventures out of the car and wants to hear the version of the accident from Anofi. The erstwhile laughing Anofi fearfully replies to the driver's wife by saying "I never know, I never see not'ing. I mean moch" after which Anofi walks off to the safety of his barber shop (14). Yet Anofi had been laughing boisterously when it was not the wife but the driver Andrew. While women remain in the background as when the driver Andrew's wife trails behind with the husband taking the lead as they try to solicit an account of the accident from the milling crowds, the male cyclist and the male barber Anofi display courage and manly confidence. But as soon as a woman asserts her presence on the scene, the male characters shrink back in helplessness. At work here is the African humanist consciousness with which the men face reality – that of revering women.

When the womaniser enquires why the barber sounds anxious about his latest escapade, the barber answers that he fears the latest sex victim could be a married woman. Despite the sense of morality he possesses (shown by his apprehension as he makes seductive advances to the woman he suspects may be married), the barber Anofi still proceeds to have sex with the woman. This is because of the weakness of men in the presence of women as has already been intimated in the opening line of the story. The same weakness of males in the face of females is evident in the action of Okeke. Upon discovering that Bashiru has been having sex with his wife, Okeke kills him. Because he is confronting a male who has cuckolded him and not a female, Okeke has the courage to kill. Surprisingly, no form of discipline or punishment of the wife (who has been part of the misdeed) is mentioned. Anofi reprimands Okeke after Bashiru has been found murdered in the following words: "You don' kill man, Okeke" (19). The differential treatment of men and of women in the case of transgression exemplified in the story by the killing of Bashiru while Okeke's wife's part in the guilt is neglected, is testimony of the men's fear of women. The remark by Anofi that a human being should not be murdered for whatever misdeed he or she has committed is a reaffirmation of the Africanist view of human life as sacred, as the dialogue is Mphahlele's way of reinforcing the seriousness with which the people of Bariga view Bashiru's murder – irrespective of whether Bashiru was in the wrong or not. That the murder is committed by a man is, however, a subtle pointing to men, rather than women, being so weak as to flout public morality with impunity.

After the jealous husband Okeke has killed Bashiru for sleeping with his wife, the opposite happens when Anofi discovers that his own wife has also been a victim of Bashiru. Anofi does not kill his wife as, unlike Okeke, he is not faced with a male but with a female. The irony of the words Anofi expresses perfunctorily to Okeke (before his eyes are open to the truth that comes with the unravelling of the plot) catches up with him (Anofi). Significantly, Anofi's timidity when confronted with a woman precludes his murdering his wife in a fit of jealousy. Significantly, the power of woman makes Anofi

appreciate his wife's beauty more than before and jealously move house so that he may enjoy his wife alone far from any envious men. By such a characterisation, Mphahlele highlights the overwhelming strength and the hold women have on men. Considering Mphahlele's painful descriptions of women abuse in narratives like *Down Second Avenue*, his plots in which women prove overwhelming to men could be seen as an ideal tied to the visionary aspect of his concept of African humanism by which not only what is seen as part of the African humanist lifestyle is highlighted, but also what is thought of as ideally belonging to it.

The same can be said of what may appear to be discriminatory punishment for wrongdoing. The level of obsession with their libido on the part of the male characters (indicating a pervasive weakness of men upon females entering whatever scene) and the male characters' helpless reaction when confronted by women in "The Barber of Bariga" are exaggerated to the level of betraying Mphahlele's deep-seated, perhaps unconscious, dislike of fathers in favour of mothers. The one-sided recompense for adulterous relations in which men kill men and nothing is done about the participant women, also unmasks some private dislike for men or fathers within the family unit in Mphahlele, even while it affirms the Africanist value system within the society of Bariga of holding women as essential to cultural self-preservation.

A look at Can Themba's "The Nice Time Girl" and "Marta" (*The World of Can Themba*) reveals women as characters who are central but whose portrayal differs from the way Mphahlele handles his woman characters. In the former story, Eunice Maoela is depicted as a dishonest wife who finds her teacher husband Theophilus boring (53). The frivolous woman (Eunice) slips out to a party in Atteridgeville where she flirts with Matthew Modise. Her immorality is perfected when she lures her husband to a desolate spot where Matthew Modise and some hired killers murder him. Can Themba's tone in the description of the bloody scene attests to *no attempt* to vindicate Eunice's dishonourable conduct, in the following words: "Then the butchers stabbed him to death in cold, greasy blood" (56). The word "greasy" could suggest the sexual motive behind the cruel murder. Through the portrayal of Eunice's manners Can Themba represents superficial reactions of the character to environmental pressure that is rationalised by means of the events in the story, rather than as a profound trait indicative of the Africans' collective consciousness. That is why Eunice's flirtatious behaviour is portrayed against the backdrop of the character Theophilus's boring nature, and not against any specific personality features that could be contrasted with African cultural expectations of manhood. The same applies to the woman Marta (in the latter story), whose irresponsible conduct, unbecoming of a married woman, is best summed up by her husband, who swears in the following words: "Strue's God, Marta … one of these days I go to chock you tille you die. I'll tech you to stop drinking and for to start looking after your house … Agh, sies!" (76). When Sophia and other drinking friends invite her for a binge she goes and comes back with a young boy whom she seduces in her husband's house, upon which the husband catches them red-handed and kills the young boy in a fit of rage (81).

As such, Can Themba's depiction of woman characters in the short stories above does not pit the woman characters against customary expectations concerning their role. The

women merely display behaviour that corresponds to social expectations irrespective of of culture-specific matrices, such as loyalty in marriage and the valuing of a woman as a delicate member of the family who should live up to that image. This contrasts with the depth of characterisation of women by Mphahlele as demonstrated in the above analyses of some of his stories.

2.3 CLOSING REMARKS

The preceding scrutiny of Mphahlele's short stories has illustrated that apartheid is foregrounded in some of his short stories. Examples are stories like "A Point of Identity", "In Corner B" and "The Master of Doornvlei". It is probably for this reason that Mphahlele has been classified by some critics as a protest writer and lumped together with other writers of this ilk in the censure of the weaknesses of this school of South African writers. The interesting point to remember in the midst of this motley of views on South African protest literature is that Mphahlele himself is not bothered much by any hairsplitting attempts to pin down the meaning of protest literature, as shown by his views on this (expressed in the 1971 interview with Lindfors) in the following words:

> It seems to be a permanent human condition for poetry to be protest poetry of one kind or another. It will reflect a sense of urgency at one time which it doesn't at another time in history. There will always be people who will be writing poetry that does not have any kind of social relevance but is a kind of music box. It replays a human experience and that is that. But there will also be poets who simply are committed to some ideal, whose poetry makes a frontal attack on social or political matters of one kind or another. Today, or say twenty years from now, it may not be the same kind of protest, but it will always be protest for the simple reason that whenever you write prose or poetry or drama you are writing a social criticism of one kind or another. If you don't, you are completely irrelevant – you don't count. ("Es'kia Mphahlele" 171 – 172)

From this citation it can be seen that Mphahlele's conception of literature, apart from considerations of relevance, spans a wide trajectory. It includes even seemingly purposeless playings with the beauty of words yet stresses that at stressful times the kind of writing should entail protest in order to be relevant at that juncture. This quotation makes clear also that Mphahlele's use of the term "protest literature" is not as narrow as the way some other critics use it, and is widely accommodative.

Among critics whose conceptions of protest literature are not as inclusive as Mphahlele's is Njabulo Ndebele. Ndebele in "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa" rationalises the shift among black South African writers of the 1950s such as the *Drum* writers from entertaining stories that "show the growth of sophisticated urban working and petty-bourgeois classes", to a dramatic politicisation of creative writing as being caused by the political disillusionment that followed the banning of the ANC and PAC ("The Rediscovery" 40). The result, according to Ndebele (in this article), was the birth of protest literature, which he describes as:

> stories revealing the spectacular ugliness of the South African situation in all its forms: the brutality of the Boer, the terrible farm conditions, the phenomenal hypocrisy of the English-speaking liberal, the disillusionment of educated Africans, the poverty of African life, crime and a host of other things. The bulk of the stories of James Matthews, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex la Guma, Can Themba, Webster Makaza and others falls into this category [of protest literature]. ("The Rediscovery" 40)

The redeeming feature in those of Mphahlele's stories that foreground apartheid, as in the protest poems, is a counterbalancing of stark representations of apartheid with instances

and ideas of African humanism, a factor which links all of these writings as characteristically Mphahlelesque. This feature of Mphahlele's handling of theme and style in his short stories has led to the critic Ruth Obee remarking that "The Living and the Dead" is a good example of how Mphahlele "effectively strikes a balance between themes of alienation and African humanism" ("The Unbrokeng Song" 186).

A critic like Ndebele does not seem to appreciate fully the redemptive nature of the African humanist essence of the short stories by Mphahlele, for such a focus by Mphahlele on cultural detail inevitably supplies the stories with a subjectively woven cultural context, which is the nuanced antithesis of spectacular representation. It distinguishes Mphahlele to a great extent from protest writers like La Guma, James Matthews and Mtutuzeli Matshoba, and to a lesser extent from those like Can Themba whose cultural contextualisation of the plot tones down spectacle to a certain degree. This is not to say that Ndebele is not right in pointing to similar dominant themes among Mphahlele and the other protest writers (if he can be called such at all). These are the "brutality of the Boer, the terrible farm conditions, the phenomenal hypocrisy of the English-speaking liberal, the disillusionment of the educated Africans, the poverty of African life, crime and a host of other things" ("The Rediscovery" 40). Yet the style in which Mphahlele provides instances of African humanism in his works atones for whatever excesses could have occurred which are typical of protest literature, and in practice Mphahlele shows, as Ndebele was to write in "Actors and Interpreters", that "fiction can never replace politics in the total scheme of things" ("Actors" 95). Bloke Modisane has also observed some aspects of raw experience upon which the fiction of writers within the protest literature mould commonly drew, in the following words:

> Church buildings have been among the first edifices of oppression which are stoned and burnt down, and acts of violation have been committed against nuns. People have deliberately refused to face up to the truth surrounding these actions, the tendency to become melodramatic with shock, and the over-simplification of the issues has been all too frequent; people will not learn that shouting 'savage' has not helped the mind in the understanding of the underlying truth behind these acts. (*Blame Me* 185)

Surely a writer who distinguishes between merely being an "actor" amidst one's own people and the more challenging exercise of being an "interpreter" will not represent society's failure to analyse experience meaningfully without the subjective infusion of prophetic truths.

As such, various writers of the 1950s and 1960s handle raw experience as summed up in the quoted words of Njabulo Ndebele and exemplified above in Modisane's observation differently. Because of this, for a South African writer to write on the common contemporary themes tabulated by Ndebele and other critics does not necessarily qualify him or her as a protest writer *per se*, if what critics have pinpointed as the defects of South African protest literature are anything to go by. An alternative view like that of Michael Chapman could also help us to see the apparent melodrama of the writings of those *Drum* writers who are accused of stark protest as realist representation of the urbanisation of the African in the apartheid era, which "has often seemed spectacular in its violence and crime, as well as in its political mobilizations" (*The Drum Decade* 226-

27). However, if *Drum* protest writers like Can Themba exercise their realism in depicting the spectacle that enforced black urban life under apartheid, Mphahlele seeks in his narrative writings to assert equal intensity of the drama of self-defined black life by means of which African humanism plays itself out.

Aspects of apartheid are made subservient in the "Lesane" stories and others, including those published in *Drum* earlier than the "Lesane" stories, such as "Down the Quiet Street". Mphahlele's major achievement in these stories is his successful suppression of the melodrama of apartheid spectacle, due to his giving more space to a detailed representation of uniquely black (ghetto) characters who move through a setting that recalls aspects of African humanist resilience. The toning down of the apartheid theme, not compensated for by much conscious attempt to appropriate the English language (as in stories like *Man Must Live and Other Stories)*, may be attributed to Mphahlele's self-confessed relative literary naivety of the time, for which he "admits that reading his early work is somewhat embarrassing" (*Es'kia* 461). But even in these early stories the use of dialogue to express the communal voice starts to take shape. The illustration of a culture-specific mode of thought and conduct that Mphahlele has called African humanism already starts to show in such early works as the title story "Man Must Live", as has already been demonstrated in this study. For Mphahlele's intention of asserting what he understands to be Africans' modes of thought and lifestyle to start coalescing through the density of his stories as early as those in *Man Must Live and Other Stories* is an indication that he joins other African writers, as W.E. Abraham has remarked about African writers in general, "In the preoccupation with the African personality [which] they appear to hold … [as] the guiding principles of the future of Africa" because it is "authenticated in the African experience and cultures" (*Mind of Africa* 38).

The self-confessed 'amateur' nature of Mphahlele's writing when he started to write short stories such as those published in *Man Must Live and Other Stories* should not be mistaken as having marred his work to any great extent or for too long a period. This is despite even researchers on Mphahlele like Ruth Obee having derogatorily described this as early prose of "*Man Must Live* in which Victorian pastoral settings, contrived romantic endings, and mission-press English figured heavily" ("The Unbroken Song" 193). Indeed, language in the earlier stories is not harnessed as effectively to serve Mphahlele's theoretical position as in the later ones. One example is the grandfather in "Tomorrow You Shall Reap" explaining that he is revealing that the narrator's mother has killed herself because of chronic mental illness: "But now, when you are on the threshold of a new life, to be master of your own destiny, I have thought it fit and right to tell you …" (*Man Must Live and Other Stories* 49). The repetitive use of clichés such as "master of your own destiny" and "thought it fit and right" renders the language stilted because the prose acquires a languid ring. Similarly, the repetitive use within one paragraph (in "The Leaves were Falling") of descriptions such as "the valley in the cloak of twilight" and "almost completely hidden in the valley" in describing the same aspect of the setting (which is that the character Reverend Katsane Melato is meditating from the gloom of a sunset scene) renders the pace of the story aimlessly static (13). Far from effectively and organically relating the theme and intention of the story, repetition in these and other stories produces an unappealing turgidity typical of beginners' preference for flamboyant

style. By the time he had joined *Drum* and was publishing later stories like "In Corner B" and "Down the Quiet Street", Mphahlele the fiction writer displayed the stylistic accomplishment of a seasoned writer – cited passages from the later stories dispersed through this study exhibit the fully functional use of dialogue, setting and expression. Whatever seeming unconcern with the impact of apartheid on the lives of blacks these stories exhibit should be ascribed to the literary context of the 1950s. This is what Ndebele remarks on when he states that creative writers in the *Drum* age "simply titillated the readers with good stories" while it was journalists who wrote (in careful English) in newspapers and magazines about politics, sports, fashion and other spheres of black life" ("The Rediscovery" 40). Mphahlele himself, in a 1980 essay, puts it as follows:

> The imaginative writing *courted no political confrontation*: it spoke of the drama of black life, its triumphs and defeats, survival, its culture and sub-cultures, and the police terror and legislated restriction it was subjected to. The black writer was asserting his sense of permanence in an urban ghetto life where he was being told he was a mere migrant worker with no hope for security of tenure in his municipal box-house. ("Landmarks" 308, emphasis added)

The important point to note in the quotation above is that the attitude of the fiction writers of the 1950s not to court political confrontation should not be mistaken for detachment from the political turmoil of the time – and this is made clear by the fact that (in addition to writing on the "drama of black life") the works of the *Drum* writers "spoke of … the police terror and legislated restriction [black life] was subjected to". Such a description of South African black fiction of the 1950s is confirmed by short stories of the period by other black writers, such as Can Themba's "Ten-to-Ten" (*The World of Can Themba*). The astute policeman Ten-to-Ten makes the following revealing statement about his job, that "It's a bastard of a job. Funny hours, low pay, strange orders that make no sense, violence, ever violence, and the daily spectacle of the degradation of my people" (71). This explains why Mphahlele's short stories of the *Drum* period progressively foreground apartheid in their creation.

What separates Mphahlele from other fiction writers of the 1950s in terms of theme and approach is the emergence in him of a resolute philosophical position which starts to reflect itself in his writing. In this regard Mphahlele has stated that "the myth [he endeavours] to establish is that this part of our South African humanity will yet outlast at least some of the malicious gods, even when these have been replaced by another pantheon" ("Versus the Political Morality" 374). By this he means that he has made a deliberate choice (in the face of the harsh realities of black life under the then apartheid government) to highlight apartheid's irrelevance to the ultimate value of the lives of the Africans while at the same time foregrounding the resilience of African humanist existence in its transcending apartheid's challenges. To Mphahlele, African literature should address itself to "what of this ghetto life [under apartheid] can process itself, independent of or in spite of the malicious gods that waylay it" ("Versus the Political Morality" 374). In his opinion, over-emphasising the brutality of apartheid at the expense of empowering the oppressed to cope spiritually with the existential challenge, was in a way a declaration that without apartheid African life did not exist – this he sees as black Africans (under apartheid) succumbing to the demand "never … to forget the

high-voltage fences" ("Versus the Political Morality" 374). In positing the concept of African humanism, therefore, Mphahlele wanted to assert Africans' self-sufficient, distinctive identity on the strength of which the Africans had survived and would continue to survive the age of colonialism. For this reason, even those of Mphahlele's stories that seem to emphasise the immanence of apartheid in the lives of the Africans are actually highlighting the existence of an African humanist consciousness that enables black South Africans to continue to live without despair. That is why any apparently triumphant depiction of apartheid is always compensated for (thematically and stylistically) by an equally insistent assertion of an African humanist existence and survival. This Mphahlele achieves in stories like "The Master of Doornvlei" and "The Living and the Dead" by means of the skillful manipulation of style and characterization, as demonstrated in the earlier parts of this study. Right from the late 1950s, while some of his peers are still as understated in their writings as critics like Ndebele indicate ("The Rediscovery" 40), Mphahlele's relatively more overt critique of the apartheid system of the time is already discernible, as well as a commensurate assertion of the antidote to the impact of apartheid that he proposes and represents in his writings as African humanism. Theoretical formulations and philosophical stances characteristic of Mphahlele start to reach a noticeable prominence in his short story writing – carving for him a distinctive niche that sets him apart in the literary world of the 1950s. A careful reading of Mphahlele's short stories reveals his progressive but artistically subtle deployment of his African humanist vision documented elsewhere – in his autobiographies and published interviews he addresses social issues, as in his affirmation of the pre-eminent stature and role of women in society. His personal beliefs on writing pervade his writings.

As the choice of the language in which one was to write was topical in the 1950s (as Ngugi's essays of that period indicate), Mphahlele had to devise a resolute strategy with which to justify his language choice. As such, Mphahlele's incorporation of African-language idiom from that time until now in his short stories and poetry written in English should be seen as an attempt to try and circumvent the language problem and reach a readership of black masses, an aspiration that can unfortunately not be reached fully due to the sociolinguistic realities of South African societies. On a more elevated polemical level, however, the linguistic approach of incorporating indigenous languages in his English literary works should also be seen as paying allegiance to mother tongue oral literature in the more remote past and in the more recent past, as well as to literature written since the latter part of the 19th century by South African writers in African languages. The distinctive way in which Mphahlele attempts to remove the language barrier between him and his readers (whose mother tongues are not English) succeeds in demonstrating that to a certain extent the language barrier can be overcome. Furthermore, it is an indication that Mphahlele is aware of the continuing debate about the problem of writing for a black proletariat audience in the foreign tongue of English, which problem Ndebele has written about as recently as 1991 in the following words:

> South African English must be open to the possibility of its becoming a new language. This may happen not only at the level of vocabulary … but also with regard to grammatical adjustments that may result from the proximity of English to indigenous African languages. ("The English Language" 114)

In practice as he goes about writing his fiction, Mphahlele seems to concretise Ndebele's views outlined in the quotation above. This is despite the presence of some black South African writers to whom the success of such an attempt seems to be inconceivable, such as Daniel Kunene when he writes that: "The claim that a book written in English is addressed to blacks makes no sense unless one specifies that it is for those blacks who have acquired enough English to be able to read and understand it. Then we would understand that it is not intended for the masses, counted in millions, who do not have that skill" ("Language, Literature" 505). Kunene seems not to acknowledge the efficacy of the appropriated varieties of English such as Mphahlele achieves in the ways already illustrated in this study, as if no other English exists than the one that supposedly fails to reach the majority of Africans.

Rather than stress a chasm between black writers writing in English and those writing in the indigenous languages, Mphahlele is disposed towards the unification of the two literatures into one canon, which, in keeping with his techniques of consolidating and asserting his concept of African humanism, will only serve the good purpose of enriching the fabric of cultural resonance and perspective. That this is Mphahlele's polemical stand is affirmed by his allegiance to indigenous language literature, expressed in his article "Landmarks of Literary History: A Black Perspective"— in which he acknowledges, similarly with the writer Daniel P Kunene, that indeed some English writings by black writers from the 1950s till the 1960s and beyond are not necessarily superior in content and texture to earlier African–language writing, considering texts by Ntsikana, Soga and Jordan in the 19th century, as well as other later writings of Jabavu, Mqhayi, Dhlomo, Mofolo, Vilakazi and Sekese in the early 20th century ("Landmarks" 37-57). It is not only Kunene who regrets the ignorance of some African writers writing in English of the good quality of literature written in African languages. Regretting Michael Chapman's separate survey of South African literature written in English from its African language counterpart, a critic of African language literature Maje Serudu writes in his critique of selected Northern Sotho literary pieces published in the period spanning 1951 to 1983 that "South African literatures written in the vernacular are as [profound] and committed as any literature written in English, French or Portuguese" ("South African Vernacular Literature" 235). Though the article "Landmarks of Literary History: A Black Perspective" exposes Mphahlele's relative oversight in denying the merit of black language literature of the 1960s to the present day (claiming that the whole oeuvre was stilted by negative apartheid attitudes towards African languages), at least his homage to the earlier writers is consistent with his well-known belief in the need for younger writers to "[reassemble] the fragments of Africa into a whole and single consciousness" ("Landmarks" 57). This task, according to Mphahlele, should be tackled in the form of continuing (from the point where what he considers past good literary works stopped) with the "long unbroken song" of African excellence (*Unbroken Song* 2-3).

Mphahlele's stylistic traits can be recognised both in the poetry and short stories he has written. These stylistic traits assert the subjectivity of the African narrator and characters in the making of meaning. They function as expression of communal statements through the use of apparently individual dialogue, the reconstruction of orature and other components of the traditional past (by means of imagery as well as metaphors and

symbols that possess an allegorical loftiness) – hence all these stylistic aspects of Mphahlele's writing collectively establish the Mphahlelesque resonance and perspective. It remains now to probe whether longer prose writings also display such patent craftsmanship.

3. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

3.1 OPENING REMARKS

Among Mphahlele's longer prose narratives, *Down Second Avenue* (1959) and *Afrika My Music* (1984) are the two autobiographies. The two works exist in a complementary relationship: while *Down Second Avenue* tells about the writer's life since the age of five until he leaves for exile in September 1957, *Afrika My Music* describes his life in exile from 1957 up to 1983, after he had returned permanently (in 1977) to his place of birth and had settled in the semi-urban area of Lebowakgomo – just twelve kilometres from the village of his childhood, Maupaneng. Obviously the relationships between the two autobiographies are many and varied, with the one I typify above as just one example. Aggrey Klaaste, for instance, has singled out continuity of the search for ideal cultural environment within which to write as the link between the two:

> His search, in exile, took him across the world and brought quite joltingly home to his sensitive spirit that phenomena such as race, hate, fraud, perhaps even love and anger were universal. He has come back home … to his roots to find the scum, the filth and the hate still very much around … [The] bitterness captured in such fresh and vibrant colours in his first novel, *Down Second Avenue*, still breathes angry life into his latest book, *Afrika My Music*. (104)

Awareness of these and other relations between the two books should help to clarify Mphahlele's interpretation of what it is to be black in apartheid South Africa continually since he was five years old in 1924 until the events of 1983 described in *Afrika My Music.*

It should be remembered that the preceding section of this study shows that Mphahlele is more importantly an "interpreter" rather than just an "actor" in the way he handles his poetry and short story writing. In other words, Mphahlele as a theorist does not only reflect unmediated raw experience in his writings. This is not to refute that his narrative writings are a reflection of reality that is represented in a dialectical relationship with his subjective re-interpretation of it, which departs from the way other theorists work. This is the kind of operation which Said has affirmatively described in an interview with Gauri Viswanathan as "concrete circumstances and highly abstract appetites (and even fictions) [combining] to provide one with an intentional method of formulating projects for oneself" ("Beginnings" 22). Of course Mphahlele's project (as this study has shown and will continue to show) is that of positing and clarifying the concept of African humanism as the apt tool for the self-preservation of Africans in the wake of colonisation. Hence this chapter will explore whether the literary features ascribed to Mphahlele's writing through the earlier considerations of his poetry and short stories are also discernible in the autobiographies.

What the critic Thuynsma has written about Mphahlele's works will be helpful to consider. Thuynsma has observed that although *Down Second Avenue* is an autobiography, its narrative is poetic enough to involve the reader in the world of a novel (224). As for *Afrika My Music*, the same critic remarks that the book is "so

Mphahlelesque" (224). Afejuku concurs with Thuynsma by remarking that "in *Down Second Avenue*" and literary autobiographies by other African writers such as Abrahams, Gatheru, Laye and Soyinka "descriptions, whether of atmosphere or the physical environment, gain aesthetic appeal through the various means employed by the writers to give their autobiographies the stamp of artistry" ("Setting in" 248). Thuynsma's position, therefore, is that both of the autobiographies can be enjoyed as novels if the reader were to opt to read them without reference to their autobiographical verity. In a 1972 interview with Cosmo Pieterse Mphahlele responded to a question about the extent to which *Down Second Avenue* is "true" by saying that perhaps "there is only autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography in the final analysis" (quoted in *A Vision of Order* 225). Presumably he means by this that his autobiography employs fictional devices to the same extent as his fiction contains autobiographical material.

The above quotation indicates that fictional elements are a common denominator in both Mphahlele's writings described as autobiography and those classified as fiction. For this reason, instances of African humanism are presented at two levels in Mphahlele's autobiographies. The first is the level he occupies as a veiled "interpreter" of the experiences of his people by endowing his fictional narratives with African humanist aspects. This is why the critic Keith Shear's remark, that scenes in *Down Second Avenue* that depict Eseki's childhood "convey, rather, in their very lack of specification, a sense of timelessness [because] the author does not really recognise himself in these images of boyhood" ("Depictions of Childhood" 46), is significant. This observation is accurate as it points to what this study will call metonymic representations (in *Down Second Avenue*) of the consciousness and way of life Mphahlele has termed African humanism. That this is essential to autobiography is affirmed by the critic herself when she writes about the genre's partial basis in "perceptions of the available identities that [the autobiographers] could subscribe to in their childhoods" (49).

The second level at which exemplifications of African humanism take place is the one which Mphahlele assumes when he interprets the life of his people directly, taking his own personal life as an example. This is shown by the role he plays as an "interpreter" in autobiographical writing which depicts subjectively patterned experiences and developments (in a personal search for the self). Mazlish and Manganyi respectively describe autobiography as a "a picture from a specific present viewpoint of coherent shaping of an individual past" as well as "[a sorting] out [of] themes and patterns [and] not dates and mundane calendar events which sort themselves" (Mazlish as quoted by Barnett in *A Vision of Order* 224; *Exiles and Homecomings* 5). The exclusion of "dates and mundane calendar events" in writing autobiography should be understood as the throwing into relief of the autobiographer's rigorous task of interpreting, rather than merely recording events and motives as they occur in the day to day experiences of a person or people. It is for the same reason that Edward Said has said of his autobiography that it "is an attempt to *make sense* of an effort at self-liberation" from the imprisoning or limiting life that he had as a child ("Edward Said Talks" 15, emphasis added). To use Mazlish's words, Said's "specific present viewpoint" is self-liberation, while the "individual past" he wants to depict is "imprisoning and limiting life" that he and fellow Palestinians have gone through since his childhood (*A Vision of Order* 224;

"Edward Said Talks" 15). The hazard of reporting on the behaviour of a people rather than infusing an intellectual interpretation into the everyday events, is that in the behaviour of ordinary people "There exists a brutality of thought and a mistrust of subtlety which is typical of revolutions" ("Spontaneity" 117). From this quotation of Fanon's essay, it is clear that the spontaneous behaviour of ordinary people, especially during political resistance, conflicts with the social scientist's theorisation of the formal culture of a people as demanded by his or her role as (what Ndebele has called) an "interpreter".

The way in which the postcolonial writer Mphahlele handles his "interpretive" role on fictional and autobiographical planes is furthermore reminiscent of what Ndebele says in his theory concerning the function of literature during the struggle for liberation. In "Towards Progressive Cultural Planning", Ndebele points to the functional demands for liberation literature in the following words:

> We aim not only at changing the content of our cultural expression, but also at efficient social organisation where such expression can be assigned a definite place. The aim is to restore to the community of the oppressed, a practical sense of organised and organic civic society … For the oppressed do have a culture; what they need to do is pay closer attention to its material expression during the process of struggle, such that that culture itself can constitute the material content of a changing alternative consciousness. ("Towards" 131)

An analysis of Mphahlele's poetry and short stories has already demonstrated that its content and expressive devices are alternative to those of the domineering culture of oppression on home ground and in exile abroad, within which he writes. His positing of the concept of African humanism as the organising principle underlying the social ordering of Africans satisfies Ndebele's requirement of liberation literature attending to "efficient social organisation" ("Towards" 131). Our consideration of his poetry and short stories has also indicated that the cultural construct of African humanism which Mphahlele asserts does "constitute the material content of a changing alternative consciousness" as Ndebele believes literature should do "during the process of struggle" ("Towards" 131). It should be remembered that "In the case of a political identity that's being threatened, culture is a way of fighting against extinction and obliteration … [and is] a form of memory against effacement" ("Rendezvous" 159).

A search for specific ways in which Mphahlele is an "interpreter" of the plight of the oppressed blacks during apartheid should thus also ask whether he interprets in an adequately intense manner such as Ndebele and Said project in the above citations. The key thing in analysing autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography such as Mphahlele's is probing both of patterns that represent fictive elements and those that constitute the autobiographical data of the writer. The two autobiographies will thus be discussed in order to establish how Mphahlele uses them as a vehicle to convey to the reader his moves towards elucidating and communicating his concept of African humanism. In addition to discussing Mphahlele's own assertion of the concept by his deployment of the contents of the autobiographies, the texts will also be analysed with the intention of establishing how Mphahlele employs them to enable his readers to develop their understanding of the concept of African humanism.

3.2.1 GENERAL INSTANCES OF AFRICAN HUMANISM IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

In the chapter of *Afrika My Music* chronicling Mphahlele's experiences in Philadelphia from 1974 to 1977, the writer explains the career crisis facing his wife in terms of an outlook that is imbued with African humanist thinking. Being a social worker, Rebecca is said to be living at a crossroads of consciousness:

> She is aware, on the other hand, that her approach to human problems is severely ethical or indeed moralistic: she feels passionately *what one's behaviour should be.* Because of this, she is always going to have to rethink her set of ethics in relation to the social problems of other people whose ethics are totally different from hers (and mine), which derive from African humanism. (*Afrika My Music* 150)

In a passage following the cited paragraph with its expository narrative style the writer switches to vivid descriptive narrative when he evokes the waste polluting Philadelphia pavements in the form of "dog diarrhoea messes" (150). Significantly, Mphahlele hastens to mention that the dogs are "outrageously" pampered by their American owners. In narrative writing containing a number of the culturally metonymic images such as "gravestones for pets" and "his diet pills" (with the pronoun "his" indicating a pet dog) the American way of life is clearly depicted as conflicting emphatically with the African humanism of the writer's perspective. Mphahlele betrays this cultural conflict in the statement that "western attachment to animals, wild and domestic, that goes beyond basic utility, disgusts [him]" (*African Image - Revised Edition* 71). At the heart of this remark is the African humanist outlook of valuing human life in such a way as to reserve certain modes of affection for human beings – thus making sure not to misdirect such manifestations of love towards animals or other parts of nature. The same prioritisation of love for humans is evident in the way Mphahlele expresses conflicting attitudes between westerners and Africans with regard to relaxation. According to the African humanist way of life (as Mphahlele writes in the essay "The African Personality"), "[Rather than] go out to lonely places for a vacation, just for the scenery, [Africans] go to other people" (*African Image - Revised Edition* 71-72). This quotation is yet another demonstration of the Africans' conscious focus on humans rather than on other components of the universe, in keeping with the African philosophical premise described by another African theorist (Mbiti) as "an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man" (*African Religions and Philosophy* 15). This is another way of saying love and other ways of showing attention must be directed towards man and not other things accompanying man in nature – with the exception of less important forms of such attention.

The dialogue of the American characters portrayed by Mphahlele contains expressions such as "he loves oxheart" (151) (with the pronoun "he" referring to a pet); "don't sit on that chair, our cat Suzie won't like it" (151); "When's the burial?" (151); "Was at the dog morgue this morning" (151); "His crushed little body ... It's hideous, all these trashy drivers deserve to be shot …" (151). The writer's satirical tone is unmistakable to the reader cognisant of the African humanist consciousness from which the perception emanates. A close look at the performed speech acts in these citations reveals a national psyche that does not put man at the centre. It becomes crassly evident, in this way, that

American “face wants” and African “face wants” or conventions of politeness are not the same (using these terms as shown earlier in this study – in the manner of linguists like Matsumoto and Fraser). What this means is that it might be socially acceptable within the American culture to speak in such a way that the person one is communicating with receives the message that the life of a pet is valued to the same degree as that of a human being, but that within African cultures with an African humanist outlook such dialogue reveals a perception deviating from the social value system.

In *Chocolates for My Wife*, his own autobiography, Todd Matshikiza writes of a similar attitude among white South Africans valuing dogs’ lives to the same degree as those of humans, as follows:

> When we go visiting [the nice girls who live in at their places of domestic employment] at their quarters, we share their food which is whatever’s left over from the boss’s table. It’s really meant for the dog. But if you’ve been ducking the cops through the white suburbs for an hour, you get there hungry … (13)

The passage quoted above exposes a practice of South African whites resembling that of the Americans Mphahlele describes in the previously cited part of *Afrika My Music* (150). It is because food feeds the white employers, then goes to the dogs, and is then only available to the live-in employee if not given to the dogs (as the employers expect). In an autobiographical piece published in *The World of Nat Nakasa*, Nakasa contrasts the treatment of dogs by African Americans living in Harlem with the way whites spoil theirs in downtown New York as follows:

> I did not see poodles and fox terriers in [Harlem]. I did not see housewives take dogs for afternoon walks, a practice I know only as having to do with [whites] … When I asked if the community had its poodle-raising set, I was told a story about the last riot. Appparently someone swiped yards of sausage from a shop during the riot lootings, only to be besieged by Harlem’s dogs as he went down the sidewalk. The dogs, it is said, forced the man to the ground and made off with much of his loot. I can well imagine the same thing happening in Edenvale, Johannesburg. (116)

The absence in Harlem of “housewives [taking dogs] for afternoon walks” indicates that such cosseting of dogs as whites indulge in does not happen in Harlem. The humorous tale of the African American who steals sausages only for Harlem dogs to relieve him of the delicacy attests to the inverse prioritising of man in acts of intimacy such as feeding people rather than dogs which, like the black domestic workers back home in Johannesburg, are made to survive only on left-overs. The exile Nakasa’s noticing of these parallels between Harlem and the African residential area of Edenvale in South Africa is a way of highlighting the bond of common social behaviour between the two far distant black worlds which (in Mphahlele’s terms) should be seen to spring from their underlying African humanism. As has been demonstrated earlier in this study, African humanism (as Mphahlele describes it) binds together Africans the world over, due to common historical experiences (such as subjection to racial prejudice) that have impacted on them in the same way. A common historical heritage is equally the explanation why

whites in societies as distant as Johannesburg and New York display a similar treatment of Africans that emanates from an underlying, shared consciousness.

The fact that the conversing characters in the citation above from *Afrika My Music* are not mentioned by name signifies that, in typical Mphahlele style, the dialogue conjoins the personal voice with that of the public (150). Such a technique subtly demonstrates to the reader that the views expressed here are societal and have nothing much to do with individual character traits. Mphahlele being an African humanist, it is only natural that a work by him should concern itself more with the communal voice. The Black Consciousness philosophy of the exiled writer remains ineradicable; he persists in looking at society from a communal orientation, due to his Africanist consciousness.

Upon sampling life in Nigeria and Kenya, the writer states that back in South Africa stubborn sediments of the Africans' collective personality dynamically helped them shape ghetto life to make the best of it, in the face of the cultural onslaught of apartheid. This contrasts with the cultural exuberance and abandon the narrator experiences in the free African states – behaviour that is informed in a similar way as that of South Africans by an African humanist consciousness because of the closeness of the cultures of the two groups of people.

In a *Down Second Avenue* chapter named "Saturday Night", Mphahlele describes how the Marabastad people in general and Aunt Dora and Grandma specifically survived by illicitly brewing home-made beer (among other strategies). One paragraph describes the beer-making practice in this way:

> Women brewed some of the most terrifying compounds. 'It's heathen!' grandmother said indignantly. 'My beer's the pure and healthy food a man's stomach needs.' And we never had the fighting type of customer. 'But even with that, God'll help me make money to send my children to college.' (*Down Second Avenue* 43)

Similarly to the example from *Afrika My Music* quoted earlier, there is a theme of cultural resilience underlying the above example from *Down Second Avenue*. It is the humanist cultural perspective from which the grandmother conceives her surrounding which impels her to put man at the centre. The economic hardships do not debauch the female character (Grandma) to the vile practice of putting material gain above the sacredness of human life. That some African women (as the above quotation shows) do indeed concoct deadly liquids that they sell for beer suggests Mphahlele's recognition that individual depravity does exist alongside the collective consciousness informed by African humanism.

Indeed, the brewing of such deadly concoctions in the townships (perceived as a cancer that had to be stopped from consuming society), was a concern of the South African black writers of the times – as is revealed by Can Themba's agitated reference to such a phenomenon in "The Will to Die" (*The World of Can Themba*). Here he speaks of "a violent, alcoholic concoction brewed in the location called Barberton" that contributed to destruction of the health of the teacher called Foxy (51). But in Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* such an indictment against the women of Marabastad for brewing lethal

substances like "Barberton" spares Grandma only at one level. At another level all women who deal illicitly in liquor are acting criminally. It is for this reason that Grandma flatters herself after extolling her beer for being "pure and healthy food" when she continues and says "but even with that, God'll help me …" (43). Despite her beer being the traditional, nutritious type, Grandma still needs God's help in order to survive police raids and make enough money to send her children to college (43). The irony of Grandma trying to efface the 'criminality' of her practice in order to focus on other women's crime in which she does not share is Mphahlele's subtle way of trying to indicate that apartheid is to blame for the illicit trade (and not the brewers themselves as indicated by the way Grandma shifts the blame from herself). Through Grandma's unassailable moral primness, Mphahlele wants to show that even in conditions of dehumanisation such as the Marabastad women experience, conscience influenced by African humanist values is still expected to prevail. Despite accentuating the resilient nature of African humanist consciousness as exemplified by Grandma, another layer of meaning remains an admission that the aberrations of some black characters – such as the women who brew corrossive concoctions with a disregard for human life – are their desperate bid to rise above the morass of conditions thrust upon powerless Africans by apartheid. In this regard Mphahlele has written that "[Africans must] recover from the violence African humanism has suffered", meaning in this instance that the other women of Marabastad should do as Grandma does and stick to brewing healthy traditional beer ("Humanism and Corporate World" 132). Another *Drum* writer, Nat Nakasa, explains the apartheid origins of township-style shebeens as follows:

> For too long [the non-whites] have been the stewards serving whisky to whites in places where no black man can drink. Out of these conditions, from the bottles stolen from hotel cellars, the shebeens were born. As outsiders, excluded from the hotel lounges by law and convention, we drank our drink the shebeen way – a way outside the normal human experience of drinking in bars, hotel lounges and clubs. (*The World of Nat Nakasa* 58)

The double-layered crime that sets the other women apart from Grandma is Mphahlele's way of indicating the enormity of apartheid's impact on the township blacks who are doubly grappling with the hardships visited on them by apartheid as well as attempting to reclaim the African humanism that is battered by apartheid practices. Only the underlying vestiges of African humanism and the enduring cultural orientation that accompanies its purposeful orderliness undercut whatever frenzy might seem to reign on the surface of daily living in Marabastad. The critic Afejuku seems to be detecting the achievement of African humanist consciousness within Mphahlele's characters who manage to maintain "some order" when he remarks that "in *Down Second Avenue* … Mphahlele's description of his environment is … graphically vivid … [but] subtly creates humour by the ambiguity of the phrases which suggest that *there is some order in the disorderliness described*" ("Setting in" 257, emphasis added).

It should be borne in mind that Mphahlele's definition of African humanism includes its ability to survive. That is why Mphahlele has written that "whatever happens, human life must survive as a collective or communal force" ("Notes Towards" 138). It is from this ability of African humanism to survive that Mphahlele derives the encouragement and hope needed to defeat the challenges that threaten to submerge him throughout his life, as

the following statement reveals: "The smiles on those old and young faces, the simple humanity of my people at a time when white people were reported to be buying firearms by the dozen, was enough to give strength to my resolve to return permanently at a later stage" (*Exiles and Homecomings* 17). According to Mphahlele's observation (above) upon arriving at Jan Smuts airport on his temporary return to South Africa in 1976, the survival of African humanist qualities within the Africans who are welcoming him at the airport is imprinted on the "smiles on those old and young faces", because such countenances are (as the quotation testifies) an expression of "the simple *humanity* of [his people]" (17, emphasis added). As a way to reaffirm his own description of African humanist individualism as partly defined by what the community demands of the individual, Mphahlele in the remark above ties his own resilience as an African after almost two decades in exile to the larger resilience of his fellow Africans gathering at the airport to welcome him. That is why he contrasts these people's constant "simple humanity" with the hostility of the whites (whose consciousness is opposed to African humanism) at the time when the latter "were reported to be buying firearms by the dozen" (17). The effect of the reference to "firearms" is to make vivid the brutality of the political climate within which Mphahlele is landing, for the visit is happening at the height of the shootings and torture that follow the recently past 'riots' of June 16, 1976.

In sketching the historical background through which the peoples empowered by African humanism have moved, Mphahlele concedes that the violence African humanism suffered through the challenges of colonisation (which includes the impact of apartheid on urban ghetto life such as is experienced by Grandma and the other women in Marabastad) is massive. The critic Colin Gardner pays homage to such a contribution by Mphahlele (*Down Second Avenue*) towards the fostering of much needed "acute *shared awareness* of what white rule has meant in the lives of black people ... [which is] essential as a background to serious political negotiations" (especially in the wake of F.W. de Klerk's 2nd February 1990 speech that was a "response to a process of inexorable change") ("Two Thrusts" 18, emphasis added). Because of the immensity of the impact of apartheid on the lives of the blacks represented successfully by the characters in *Down Second Avenue*, ensuring survival of the African humanist consciousness and way of life is not an easy task. This is why Grandma in the earlier quote from *Down Second Avenue* (43) is portrayed as the solitary figure that cares about morality and is swamped by the majority who are unscrupulous about the unhealthy kind of beer they trade in – a point we gather by means of Mphahlele's use of the opening word "Women" (instead of "Some women"). Such an image of a solitary figure asserting the survival of African humanist values against immense odds prefigures Mphahlele's own steadfast role (as depicted later in *Afrika My Music*) in the face of adversity inflicted on his African humanist consciousness by the alienating experience of exile. This may be why critics Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma say (in their editorial note in the collection of Mphahlele's essays *Es'kia*) that in writing *Down Second Avenue* "Mphahlele confirms his identity" (*Es'kia* 455).

The handling of autobiography in both *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music* plays around with notions of "fiction" and "imitation" (theorised by Pavel) in an intriguing manner. It is in this aspect of Mphahlele's writing of autobiography where the truth of

Thuynsma's remark (quoted above) about imaginativeness conjoining both Mphahlele's plain fiction as in novels and short stories on the one hand, and on the other hand his autobiographies that in the hands of a different writer would most likely remain at the imitative level. The latter would show this quality to mimic reality directly, considering that characters in autobiography are real-life people whose actions are imitated or recreated in the organising of events exactly as they are in the life they lived. Mphahlele bulges out of such a conventional way of describing autobiography. It is this feature of his autobiography that enables him to "[confirm] his identity" as Ogude *et al*. rightly observe (*Es'kia* 455), because it is constituted by the sublime artistic texture of his autobiographical writings which presences imaginativeness that would regularly have been absent. It is in imaginative writing where a person may "[confirm] his identity" and that of his people who he relates with in a communalism that is a constituent of African humanism as Mphahlele characterises it. Such an imaginative element enables Mphahlele's two autobiographies to be laced with what the writer interprets to be symptomatic action springing from an African humanist consciousness. A mere direct imitation of reality as conventional autobiography has no room for such theoretical and visionary interweaving, because lived life in direct reflection of its surface plainness does not hesitate in a discursive manner from being, or propose in a visualising manner what it is not – it simply is.

The American literary theorist, Thomas Pavel (2000), analyses the difference between factual writing and fiction in terms of criteria that may be very simply described as distinguishing between plain imitation of reality on the one hand, and on the other hand as maneuvred imitation of reality, in an essay published in 2000. Pavel remarks on the primacy (in fiction) of inferred messages (as against overtly stated messages) in these words:

> We use literature as a springboard for reflection about the human condition, and because of this, to gauge the mimetic success of fiction is far less important than to seek in it the opportunity for raising questions, pondering hypotheses, and debating issues relevant for the kind of beings we are. ("Fiction and Imitation" 522)

This means that according to writers like Pavel fiction is a direct imitation of life at a certain level. But there is a more important level at which fiction provokes readers to question the imitated reality in order to make meaning of their own existence. To use Ndebele's terms, the place of the writer in the fiction he/she writes as an "interpreter" is more important than that of him/her being just one of the "actors" in the slice of life he /she is depicting.

Pavel's elevation of the creative act to a force assisting us in "raising questions, pondering hypotheses, and debating issues relevant to the kind of beings we are" can be linked with Mphahlele's even more explicit statements, such as his remark that "every good artist goes beyond the moment into the future [and] must have a vision" (in *Looking Through* 35). It can be posited that it is the African humanist consciousness infused in the characters of *Down Second Avenue*, and the same consciousness in Mphahlele himself emanating from discontinuity of simply acting life out without pondering about it as the fictive element of his autobiography accommodates that endows them with "a

certain quality of control" (as observed by Gardner 18) leading to *Down Second Avenue* picturing "a black person reaching the end of his tether, but at the same time holding himself together, refusing to be destroyed by the 'system'" ("Two Thrusts" 21). Such control is epitomised by the disciplined reactions of the character Grandma in *Down Second Avenue* in coping with apartheid challenges to Africans' existence in Marabastad as well as in Mphahlele's "controlled" stylistic responses to life under apartheid. In positing African humanism as an organising principle in the lives of Africans, Mphahlele can be said to be administering "control" or order which apartheid otherwise sought to destroy. Noting this, Gardner says of the reader of *Down Second Avenue* that "what [he or she encounters] is the heroism of endurance, of survival" ("Two Thrusts" 21), both of which are qualities shown in this study to be associated with Mphahlele's concept of African humanism.

The images yielded by phrases like "most terrifying compounds" *(*referring to the lethal brews of some women in *Down Second Avenue* – 43) may be taken to symbolise the socially corrosive hybridity caused by modernisation under apartheid conditions – the antithesis of African humanism. Mphahlele's characterisation of the consciousness and culture he has titled African humanism includes the ability to rely for subsistence and survival on organic material. One example of this practice is the use of African medicine in traditional healing ("Notes Towards" 139). That the beer brewed by Mphahlele's grandmother has pure organic matter as ingredients is borne out by her statement in the above citation that the beer is "pure and healthy food a man's stomach needs." Grandma's pride in adhering to the practice of using only organic material in her home beer business accords with Mphahlele's explanation of one aspect of African humanism as "an extension of that connection between the human being and nature as a vital force" shown by the fact that – in his treatment of his patient – the medicine the traditional healer dispenses "is organic: an animal or vegetable product" ("Notes Towards" 139). Hence, the grandmother's dialogue on the type of home beer she cooks is to be read as a communal declaration, and not a mere private opinion. By this is meant that her words express the way the African community of Marabastad view (culturally defined) proper conduct. The grandmother's invocation of God to help her afford college fees for her children is another confirmation of the basic tenet of African humanism, to see the sustained presence of the Supreme Being in every phenomenon.

Since the long narratives presently under scrutiny are autobiographies, Mphahlele in these texts takes the liberty of directly stating his convictions about the desirability of a sense of community, as in the following declaration from the later text: "I cannot today help feeling nostalgic about the sense of community we shared in Marabastad; nostalgic even about the smells, the taste and the texture of life as we experienced it in those days – even though I would not want to live in a slum again" (*Afrika My Music* 11). Parallel instances of Mphahlele's sense of the African humanist psyche abound also in the earlier autobiography, *Down Second Avenue*. When the book opens with Eseki and his two siblings going to stay with their paternal grandmother in rural Maupaneng, the seminal image of the grandmother sitting "under a small lemon tree next to the hut, as big as fate, as forbidding as a mountain, stern as a mimosa tree" (11) sums up the boy's impression of the cosmic milieu.

The concrete entities denoted on the one hand by means of the terms "lemon tree", "mimosa tree" and "grandmother" and on the other hand the abstract concept denoted by the term *fate* are juxtaposed in a manner transcending categorical demarcation. The protagonist Eseki, who is still a boy, still perceives reality in a novel way at this point. The stylistic merging of the components of reality — in such a way that they defy classification as animate or inanimate, human or non-human, abstract or concrete, physical or spiritual, positivist or romantic — represents the boy's vantage point, whereby the universe (according to the way Mphahlele defines the concept of African humanism) is a continuous whole with man at the centre ("Notes Towards" 137; "Social Work" 240). Man is represented here by the paternal grandmother, for the boy's focus on the environment unfolds from his perception of this psychologically larger-than-life personage. In keeping with Mphahlele's notion of African humanism, Eseki conceives of the grandmother as being in the centre of the ambient reality. Such a positioning of the human being at the centre of the reality which he or she is simultaneously at one with and distinct from is a premise of African humanism. The plausibility of such an interpretation of the way the boy Eseki encounters the Maupaneng setting – not as a revulsion against what most critics (among them Thuynsma) often stress to be the cruelty of "his tyrannical paternal grandmother" Mathebe (*Es'kia Continued* 404), but as a process of making sense of nature and its meaning for his own existence – is supported by a comment Mphahlele makes much later as a more critically mature adult in the biography *Exiles and Homecomings:* that "[he] did not want to be crushed by the human and physical environment around [him]" (34). In other words, Eseki's reaction to the apparently hostile environment of Maupaneng is an assertion of his subjectivity and centrality to reality – as Mphahlele's theory on African humanism requires.

Another point that confirms the above reading is Mphahlele's view that to the African, the Supreme Being exists as an all-pervading vital force in the mountains, the rivers, valleys, the plant and animal kingdom ("Social Work" 240). This description of a pantheistic aspect of African humanism agrees with the philosophies of writers like Tempels, who noted that the idea of a 'vital force' expresses the belief among Africans that all that exists shares in the one life force (see Okolo 1993, 15). The way Mphahlele describes the frightful hue of the mountains that skirt Maupaneng village exposes his awareness of the vital force informing all matter: "the mountain darkness, so solid and dense" (*Down Second Avenue* 11). A solid and dense kind of darkness suggests here the idea that the particles of the darkness are glued together by some living spirit, some innate power. Similarly, the description of the raging Leshoana river as evincing "a long wailing cry [across] the ugly waters [where] big rocks rolled … thundering as they hit and bounced on their track" points to the presence inside the waters of a vital force. The awe which the description inspires in the reader is reminiscent of the awe with which Africans regard nature, as in every aspect of nature they detect the presence of God or the Supreme Being. That the African humanist conception of the presence of the Supreme Being in all matter coincides with the views of some of the European writers who are known for their pantheism (such as William Wordsworth) is perfectly understandable. African humanist societies do not deny similarity or dissimilarity with any other community whose existence may be based on similar principles. Their immediate

concern is self-definition, however, as is evident in Mphahlele's declaration analysed earlier in this study, that in asserting African humanism in the 1950s and calling for a suspension of focus on the racist consciousness in South Africa, that defined other sectors of mankind maliciously, he was educating fellow Africans to ignore (for the time being) whatever similarities or dissimilarities might exist between European and African humanisms. It should also be remembered that according to Mphahlele's reasoning, whatever similarities may exist result from the universal features shared between the humanisms of Europe and of Africa, which he has attributed to our common humanity. At the deeper level, the non-exclusivism of African humanism is an acknowledgement of such similarities between European and African consciousnesses that might have been diminished or obliterated along the passage of time by geo-political and other factors. What Mphahlele does not call for in his description of the African humanist consciousness is pre-occupation with the ravages of apartheid, which he sees as standing in the way of self-definition.

According to the Africanist world view Mphahlele portrays in the autobiographies, man can live in harmony with the universe because he or she is informed by the same vital force which pervades nature. The vital force in man has been referred to by writers like Kofi Awoonor and Donatus Nwoga as the *chi* or personal god. It can be a bad or good *chi* which an individual chooses to follow, according to Donatus Nwoga (as cited by Mphahlele – "Notes Towards" 140). According to Kofi Awoonor (as quoted by Mphahlele), whether one follows a bad or good *chi* is determined by whether the person's role enhances or diminishes his or her position in the scale of values which are consonant with their society's ultimate goal ("Notes Towards" 140). Acceptance and encouragement of culture-specific individualism is a constituent of African humanism. It is in order to alert the readers to this that Mphahlele writes in the following words in a 1975 essay "The African Critic":

> I am saying here that the individual vision and private concerns have a place in our lives, unless there is an utterly monstrous falsification of life through and through. The African sage, elder, doctor, high priest and so many other people in traditional life took time to be alone in order to contemplate experience. It is like the sick kind of loneliness we do not yet share with the Western world. (*Es'kia* 387)

Mphahlele's reference in the above quotation to the "sick kind of loneliness" found in the Western world is caution against mistaking apparent similarities between forms of African and European existence for real, profound ones. By indicating that Africans do not yet share the "sick kind of loneliness", Mphahlele is pointing to the danger of elimination of African humanism by westernisation if Africans do not consciously make efforts to preserve it. The churchgoing character Old Segone in *Down Second Avenue* testifies to the African humanist belief in the idea of the *chi*, recognising a community-inclined personal vital force or *chi* when he utters the following words orature-style as he is sitting among other men at the communal fire-place: "Let them; what right have we to see other people in their naked selves when we wouldn't be caught with our pants down! And besides, we all have our *secret little gods*, Christian or none" (14, emphasis added).

The words Old Segone utters at the village fire-place are prompted by implied recountings by the other residents of Maupaneng who, like Old Segone, stay in the 'Christian' zone of the village. The stories shared at the fire-place tell of the supposedly 'heathen' practices of residents occupying the section of the village Mphahlele describes (inferring absence of western Christian civilization) as "tribal kraal communities" (14). It is the tales of speculation on the mysteries of the initiation school belonging to the "tribal kraal communities" that prompt Old Segone's reference to "our secret little gods". The colonised consciousness of the villagers residing in the Christian zone of Maupaneng leads them to denigrate the traditional practices of the villagers on the other side, as these are interpreted as heathen abominations. The rift that exists between the Maupaneng 'Christians' and 'heathens' is as ludicrous as that which divides villagers living on either side of the Honia River in Ngugi's *The River Between*. The prejudice with which Old Segone's neighbours view the 'heathens' is no less acute than the way (in *The River Between*) the girl Nyambura's father Joshua despises the 'heathens' who in his opinion are as uncouth as the boy Waiyaki in what he sees as his 'heathen' temperament. Joshua justifies his self-important condemnation of the boy who is in love with Nyambura in the following words: "Do not think I am blind. I am not that old. And don't you cheat yourself I have not heard things. If I hear that you have been seen with that young devil again you will no longer live in this house … And don't you remember how they burnt the hut of a man of God?" (116). The irony of the words "do not think I am blind" lies in the fact that Joshua and fellow 'Christians' in *The River Between* are blind to the underlying Africanness that binds together villagers lying on both sides of the Honia River, despite the veneer of difference brought about by the advent of western Christianity.

The significance of Old Segone's comment lies in his ironic meaning, which is that, irrespective of whether one is on the 'Christian' or 'heathen' side of Maupaneng, the 'chi' or "secret little god" or individualism of each community member is the one that should be the focus. Because each community member has his or her distinctive individuality which allows them to choose between good or evil (or between a good and bad 'chi'), Old Segone is exhorting villagers on the Christian side to refrain from blaming the 'heathens' they intrude upon, for the traditional customs the 'heathens' are privately practising. Even in cases when untoward conduct reveals itself among the heathens it should be blamed on the individuals' private option for evil. One such inhuman practice under the spotlight in the traditional fire-place meeting at which Old Segone is speaking, is the disposition of the 'heathen' initiates who chase and whip any member from the 'Christian' side venturing into the vicinity of the initiation school. In fact, Old Segone's remarks reveal his awareness of the irony in the callousness of the Christians who fail to realise that the actions of the heathens are a sign of collective cultural self-preservation – a quality which they (the Christians) lack.

On a profound plane, Old Segone's dialogue satirises the ironic blindness of the 'Christians' to their own persisting African humanist values despite their superficial view of such notions as 'heathen' or backward. Such an ironic contradiction is captured in the image of the village fire-place around which the men sit each evening, for basking in the warmth of such a fire is still a sign of basking in the warmth of the African traditional

cultures that the fire-place symbolises. Mphahlele confirms this function of the village fire-place by describing it as "a place where I learnt a great deal about the history of the area, African traditions and customs, communal responsibility and the limits of personal conduct" (*Exiles and Homecomings* 35).

It is African humanist consciousness that equips Mphahlele and Rebecca (in *Afrika My Music*) during their stay in Philadelphia with the sensitivity to feel the contrast between Africanism and American cultures. Mphahlele exposes the pain of exile that is exacerbated by the awkward juxtaposition between his and his wife's African personalities and their American context in *Afrika My Music.* By recounting in the same book the mixed feelings he has when he perceives the freedom with which Africans function in post-colonial Nigeria and Kenya, Mphahlele enables the reader to appreciate the difference between African humanist experience that is not repressed (as shown in his description of the admirable abandon among the Africans resident in Kenya and Nigeria) and that which is repressed (recalled by Mphahlele's memories of confined life in Marabastad and other black domicilia back home in South Africa). The narrator's repeated expressions (in *Afrika My Music*) of a longing for life in Marabastad – without wanting to return to its slum condition – is Mphahlele's way of emphasising that ghetto conditions are not an organic part of African humanist existence, but have been grafted onto it by westernisation. It is also a statement by Mphahlele that the influence westernisation has on African cultures is irreversible and that the best Africans can do is to accommodate themselves to it provided they do so in a self-constituting manner.

Exemplification in *Down Second Avenue* of a regard for human life as central to African humanism as illustrated by Grandma's remark about the beer trade achieves its indictment of apartheid in much the same way as it reaffirms the place of a woman as a pillar of the home and community. The African humanist view of man's place as the centre of the universe is illustrated in the vivid descriptions of the opening parts of *Down Second Avenue* which evoke Eseki's interaction with his paternal grandmother and with nature in Maupaneng.

The Africanist definition of culturally-appropriate individualism can be deduced by the reader from Mphahlele's use of the dialogue by Old Segone and the other men residing on the 'Christian' side of Maupaneng. The clash of consciousnesses that expresses itself through Rebecca and Mphahlele's rejection of American values, in *Afrika My Music*, depicts Africanist individualism with its granting of freedom of choice between either following good or bad 'chi'. Mphahlele and Rebecca choose the 'proper' individualism of adapting to an American lifestyle only to the extent to which such an accommodation does not strip them of their distinctive African consciousness.

It can therefore be seen that the two autobiographical works of Mphahlele advance the readers' comprehension of the concept of African humanism. Characterisation, dialogue and symbolically potent images are the tools that Mphahlele uses to achieve the above results in the two autobiographies. In his demonstration of the similarity between the Igbo idea of the *chi* and the way a character like Old Segone emphasises the kind of individualism assumed by the members of the African community of Maupaneng,

Mphahlele is indicating that in this aspect of African cultures the Igbo and the Northern Sotho are similar. This position of Mphahlele's should not be mistaken as suggesting that African cultures are identical or similar in all respects.

3.2.2 OTHER REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN CULTURES

The nuanced use of transliterations of Sotho idiom (in English) that was pointed out in the analysis of Mphahlele's short stories, is interspersed throughout *Down Second Avenue.* For example, shortly after Eseki and his siblings have joined their father and mother in Marabastad and the mother rails against the father's penchant for spending all his wages on liquor, she protests in the following terms: "What are you standing up for?" (25) or (on the traumatic day when the hot curried vegetable stew is thrown into Eva's face) by saying: "What are you standing up to do?" (28). This is a literal translation of the popular Northern Sotho accusation "O ikemišeditše eng/go dirang?" meaning *What are you up to*? Similarly, when Dora gossips with a friend about Ma-Lebona's failure to retain husbands, she states that Ma-Lebona "kept a rough twig between the husband's buttocks long enough to drive him mad…" (61). This is a direct translation of the Sotho idiomatic expression "go tsentšha motho legonyana ka maragong" meaning *to nag a person*. When Dokie and other women of Marabstad gossip at the communal water tap about the tortoise that was found in Ma-Legodi's yard, the bearer of the news only reveals Dora to be the source of the story after much persuasion, and to protect the source she pleads with the enquirer (Dokie) that when asked by other people about the source of the gossip she should evasively answer that she "got it from a goat by the roadside". The original Northern Sotho expression is "ka pudi ya tsela", meaning *a little bird told me* (29-30). The gallant Dora's repeated words about men are that she is not afraid of them and can always beat up a "thing in trousers", "until its price had gone down": this derives from "ka mo tšhiphiša" in Sotho, meaning *mortify him* (79). When the boys tease one another about their timidity in proposing love to the now pregnant girl Maisie, one of the boys confesses his fear of the latter's boldness to the incredulous mates by using the words "by your ma", which derives from a Sotho idiomatic expression "ka mmago" – meaning that he was no longer trifling about an ordinary girl but was now talking apprehensively about a girl of an outstandingly self-assertive temperament (112). In one of the "Interludes", Mphahlele mulls over a conversation he once had with his Jewish friend Sasha about the possibility of the living conditions of blacks being improved to be equal to that of whites, and in the face of hopelessness the two reassure each other by repeating to themselves the heartening proverb "what has no end is a miracle" – derived from "se se sa felego se a hlola" in the language Sesotho sa Leboa/Northern Sotho, meaning *there is an end to everything* (204); and so forth.

On the South African scene, other *Drum* writers such as Can Themba share such a use of indigenous languages or their syntactic forms, albeit in their own distinctive ways. For example, in "Mob Passion" the Basotho vigilantes affirm that they believe in the Xhosa young man Linga's pretence of being a Mosotho from Teyateyaneng by saying, "*Che*! It is no Letebele this; this is a child of at home", a literal translation from Sesotho meaning *No! …*; *this is one of our own and he hails from our hometown back in the countryside* (18). Another example occurs when (in "Marta") the drunk Marta is about to leave for

home with the boy she has lured from a shebeen for erotic satisfaction. Sophia objects to their departure by saying that it is too early for them to leave as "we stand right" – this is a literal translation of the Sesotho idiomatic expression *re eme hantle* meaning that their pockets are fleeced with money which they still need to use to buy more liquor (80). In a similar way, when the gangster Macala (in "The Urchin") greets his mates after a rampage that leaves some Ndebele vendor with the toppled container of her street-stall merchandise, the mates return his greeting with the words "It's how there?", translated literally from the Sotho way of greeting *Go bjang mouwe?* which means (in unappropriated English) *How do you do?* (99-100). What sets Mphahlele apart from such *Drum* writers as Can Themba in the dialogic use of indigenous languages is his anchoring of such utterances in a clearly defined, enduring variety of African culture while the other writers use the same device to point to the transient township sub-culture that will probably disappear with the disappearance of apartheid conditions. This aspect (of recovering and asserting the cultures of Africans by formulating the concept of African humanism that delineates the distinctive cultural identity of the African as a building block) makes Mphahlele a more significant postcolonial writer than his contemporaries, if the role of culture is understood properly in the way Cabral describes it (in the following words):

> A people who free themselves from foreign domination will not be culturally free unless, without underestimating the importance of positive contributions from the oppressor's culture and other cultures, they return to the upward paths of their own culture … We see therefore that, if imperialist domination has the vital need to practice cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an *act of culture*. (143)

The practice of a writer like Can Themba who depicts in fiction only the hybrid culture of the township dwellers without any conscious recreation of the unhybridised African cultures that underpin the behaviour of the township Africans, neglects the duty of the postcolonial writer to make sound meaning of the historical meeting of Africa with imperialists. Apparently Mphahlele is expressing dissatisfaction with this defect of Can Themba's fiction (mentioned above) as well a similar cultural superficiality in the fiction of some *Drum* writers in his 1960 remark (which Michael Chapman describes as follows): "Mphahlele could see in *Drum* only a trivialisation of black experience" ("Can Themba: Storyteller and Journalist of the 1950s" 269). Mphahlele's awareness (shown in the quotation above) of aspects in which his vision differs from his contemporaries agrees with the observation of some critics. In a comparison of Mphahlele with Can Themba, for example, the critic Dorothy Driver remarks that "Es'kia Mphahlele [was] writing during the same time as Themba but generally [provided] more complex and submerged commentary regarding black/white relations" ("Women and Nature" 463).

Other *Drum* writers like Casey Motsisi fail to rise above the flaws mentioned, inter alia, by the critics Chapman and Driver above. In Motsisi's short story "Mita" the boyfriend Thomas loses money following his flirting with a former girlfriend (Sponono) and drinking exessively (due to addiction to European spirits) – the illustration of which is when he is told of Mita's having given birth to his son and stops as usual "to buy a nip of brandy" (73, 76). This addiction to strong drink produced in the West is described also in "Riot" when Maria habitually "pulls out the ashtin" to quaff whole bottles of brandy (80),

and in "Boyboy", where Esther's son loses his sanity probably due to continual stealing of the concoction *skokiaan/Barberton* (87), already mentioned in the discussion of Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and Can Themba's "The Will to Die". Yet such township sub-culture is depicted with transient shallowness that lacks anchorage within an alternative consciousness against which the improper manners of the actors can be measured. Such baseless characterisation is symptomatic also of the author lacking the definite aesthetic stand one finds in Mphahlele, as in his description of a writer as "the sensitive point of [his or her] community [to whom] the social impact about you must, if you are a true artist, help you define and redefine the African personality, to explore it without flinching at the social realities of your time" (*African Image - Revised Edition* 77). Writers such as Themba and Motsisi clearly reproduce the daily drama of African life in the townships without any signs of theorising about it (as the words "define and redefine the African personality" imply), in the way Mphahlele expects "a true artist" to do (*African Image - Revised Edition* 77). Failure to satirise the Africans' uncritical mimicry and their lack of attempts at self-discovery is evident in Motsisi's "Mita" when the traditional custom forbidding a father to come close to a newly-born baby before it is at least ten days old is "cursed" by the acculturated father Thomas and referred to as "that old and stupid African custom" (74). The implication that risks being censured as elitist from the perspective of Afrocentric theorists such as Mphahlele and Ndebele here, as in Can Themba's stories, is that the white people's culture in these aspects is better or superior. This is strongly reminiscent of a similarly superficial dismissal of the African institution of *lobola* in Can Themba's "The Will to Die" (discussed earlier in this study). Remarks such as these are made without the suggestion of modernised African customs that have been creatively hybridised to tackle urbanisation and westernisation effectively. In these ways, Motsisi displays a failure to bolster criticism with suggestion of a well-thought-out alternative to the cultural eradication with which the urbanised Africans of the 1950 were faced.

Mphahlele does not only counterbalance the void in the fiction of contemporaries like Can Themba and Casey Motsisi demonstrated above by means of judicious, transposed use of African language proverbs and idiomatic expressions in the dialogue of his characters. In addition to his practice of using Sotho idiomatic expressions and proverbs (examples of which are given above) the Sotho linguistic formula – exemplified by means of phrases now made recognisable to Mphahlele's readers by the short stories – makes a predictable reappearance in *Down Second Avenue*. One example is Mphahlele's evocation of the old woman Ma-Lebona's dying days: "She fought with death six months and one day *she said to Joel she said* Joel I saw death last night and he was ugly so I know more than ever before …" (*Down Second Avenue* 158, emphasis added).

Mphahlele does not only share with the writers cited above in the stylistic use of transliterated proverbs and idiomatic expressions from the indigenous African languages that are the mother tongues of some of his potential and probable readers. In a statement cited in *A Vision of Order*, he observes that the object-driven use of African language idiom in South African black writing "is incidentally part of a whole pattern of African literature throughout the continent" (in *A Vision of Order* 36). The dimension not to be

ignored in African writers using African language-inflected English is that such a practice is not gratuitous. The African outlook invariably accompanies such use of language – in the same way as this style is a vehicle for conveying and asserting an African humanist consciousness in the case of Mphahlele. The profundity with which transliterations of African language idioms are employed by Mphahlele and other African writers like Okara and Achebe to measure individual action against the backdrop of cultural consciousness reveals culturally significant meaning. Being oblivious to the presence of such transliterated meanings weakens what would otherwise be a richer, more complete understanding of such writers' narratives.

Because most characters in *Afrika My Music* are exiled academics, artists and political activists and thus communicate through the medium of English, this particular device is scant in Mphahlele's latter-year autobiography. The tendency of the author in this text to focus on his memories of exile prompts critics Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma to describe it as a "memoir … [which] excavates the condition of exile" yet is elevated into an art form by "ironies" (*Es'kia* 457). What the critics describe as "ironies" are instances in the lives of Mphahlele and the other African exiles whose memories of friction between their African humanist sensibilities and the strange conditions they come in contact with in host countries he conveys. One way to symbolise these conflicts is Mphahlele's more diffuse use of African language in *Afrika My Music*. Despite Mphahlele's use of the English language to serve the purpose of articulating the unEnglish concept of African humanism, the resulting tension is mediated by his distinctive style of abrogation that domesticates the foreign language – a practice which Edward Said describes as a general pattern among postcolonial writers in his remarks that "along with … nationalistic adumbrations of the decolonized identity, there always goes an almost magically inspired, quasi-alchemical redevelopment of the native language" ("Yeats and" 79). In the hands of Mphahlele, English becomes a native language due to the extent that he reconstructs it in addressing his fellow Africans rather than a foreign audience. To a critic like Edward Said, the phenomenon of taming a foreign language into a "native" language is an integral part of postcolonial theorising.

From the examples above of African language functioning in abrogating the English language, it is evident that Mphahlele still stands apart because of his unique way of implementing this same technique (that he shares with fellow African writers). While Mphahlele and other African writers similarly make use of this kind of English-African language dialogue, it is in Mphahlele that one discerns an intensification of such a device when the characters of his short stories, autobiographies and novels go further to speak even by means of the Sotho syntactical formulae such as "he/she says to me he/she says". Gabriel Okara (in *The Voice*) does abrogate the English language in a more marked and even egregious way than most other African writers for reasons different from Mphahlele's assertion of the African humanist consciousness and its connectedness to the African languages spoken by the people; Mphahlele's expressions also limit their deviation from conventional English – as the many examples of terms and sentences given above testify.

Apart from the use of Sotho syntactical formulae that deepens his abrogation of the English language, Mphahlele's use of dramatic colloquial forms of conversation (such as the interspersing of phrases like "Bathong", "Strue's God" and "Jealous down" that have already been illustrated in this study in critical support of Gaylard) intensifies the appropriation of English not only to carry African expressions but also to evoke – in a manner other varieties of English would probably fail to achieve – conditions unique to the Africans' cultural resilience in the face of apartheid. Because Mphahlele and his contemporaries of the 1950s working for *Drum* were writing on conditions in the same group of townships – such as Bantule, Newclare, Sophiatown, Noordgesig, Orlando and Marabastad – similar colloquial phrases typical of black township communication heighten dramatic effect in the dialogue of (for example) Can Themba's short stories collected in *The World of Can Themba*.

3.2.3 AFRICAN RELIGION

The communal water tap of *Down Second Avenue*'s Marabastad is where the women of the township are accorded the opportunity of acting out the tradition of oral storytelling. The oral tales from characters like Dokie and Ma-Janaware are presented in the autobiography as cheap gossip (similarly to the way a character like the woman Keledi in the short story "Down the Quiet Street" is outwardly portrayed as a worthless chatterbox). A closer look at the rumours the women exchange at the Marabastad communal tap (like the rumour in "Down the Quiet Street" about the policeman Tefo and the shebeen queen Manyeu) reveals that they are authentic accounts with a moral about real men and women in the township. What sets them apart from traditional orature is the fact that their imagery takes on a cautious modernity. This should be seen as yet another way in which Mphahlele stresses that while customs, values and traditions that constitute an African humanist consciousness endure a total uprooting, they cannot but survive in forms that have been affected by colonisation. The world of the African characters in *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music* is one in which the image of a tortoise (which is a metaphor of belief in witchcraft and traditional healing) mixes with that of a police van (which is a metaphor of police brutality during the period of apartheid); the image of nutritious sorghum beer cohabits in symbolic contrast with that of alcoholic spirits of the Western world; and the image of a cemetery for humans uneasily tolerates that of a cemetery for pets.

Mphahlele's demonstration (in *Down Second Avenue* 30) of the hybrid existence of the African characters does not stop with the women recounting with relish to each other how a tortoise used for the dark practices of witchcraft has been sighted in Ma-Legodi's yard. It is important to Mphahlele to show that all the women agree that this creature is part of Ma-Legodi's hidden possessions – as sure as witchcraft is real. For the same purpose, when the chance arises for men also to mix in the Marabastad real-life oral theatre, male characters like Old Rameetse use the opportunity to remark on the communally unacceptable temperament of the rogue Boeta Lem. Intimidated by Boeta Lem's criminal acts, the community remarks – through the mouth of Old Rameetse – that the dead man's blood is going to make Boeta Lem so mad that "he will jump one day on

everybody in the village" (31). The action of "jump[ing] on" someone (which Mphahlele derives literally from the Sotho "fofela") is to go beserk and dive on someone in (unprovoked) fight. In a communal piece of dialogue uttered by Mphahlele's grandmother, the village verdict is that if one kills a human being made in the image of God, one can never wash off the blood (31).

In African religion (as a component of the outlook Mphahlele calls African humanism) life continues after death. People join the happy realm of their immediate ancestors when they die ("Notes Towards" 138). That is why Africans hold that human life is sacred – for the ancestors, who are the living dead, still have the capacity to take revenge on and generally punish those who violate the social code. It is for this very reason that a character like the exile Dineo, in remonstrating with her husband in London for yielding to drug addiction, keeps punctuating her tirade with the words "… me, the daughter of Mabiletsa who's sleeping at Croesus" (*Afrika My Music* 117). Instead of writing off her father who has since died, Dineo speaks in words that express her belief that Mabiletsa is watching and still has the capacity to intercede between quarreling spouses, hence her reference to him as only "sleeping" in the graveyard of Croesus. It is the same Africanist belief in the eternal existence of man beyond physical death which makes Mphahlele's grandmother always punctuate her serious talk with the words "by Titus who lies in his grave" (one example features in *Down Second Avenue*, on page 91). This occurs on the occasion when grandmother exhorts the boy Eseki never to listen to Boeta Lem again when the latter tells his stories (which glorify the life of the riffraff) in the streets. In gossiping to grandmother about Rebone and her father who have just arrived from Johannesburg, Ma-Lebona emphasises that in her judgement Rebone is a thug, swearing "by my Father Elisha and my Mother Rabeka who are sleeping quietly in their graves – bless their souls – in the Free State …" (56). On another occasion, an unnamed character recounts the ghastly poisoning by brazier smoke of some Marabastad residents one very cold winter night. To articulate his agitation, the character says that the people were discovered dead as his/her father who lies at Bantule cemetery. This Africanist eschatological belief is particulary clearly expressed by Old Segone as he muses on the cyclical nature of life, referring to the four seasons of the year: "and then you know you're part of that which dies and yet doesn't die" (*Down Second Avenue* 16).

This respect for the departed takes on a more profound intensity when the older Mphahlele writes *Afrika My Music*, the second autobiography. The stylistic aspect of talking directly to the dead in supplicating fashion emerges with authorial maturity in instances such as: "You pulled the strands together in *Drum*, Can" (123) where the narrator addresses his former colleague Can Themba (now dead). Again, thinking about the *Drum* years while in Denver, Colorado, Mphahlele addresses the late Gwigwi Mrwebi directly: "You used to say to me, *Kyk hierso, nefie*, you'd say, *jy's a teacher nie a reporter nie*" (124). But more importantly, the way Africans interpret death is supportive of the survivalist aspect of African humanism that stresses continuity of individual and community life beyond death, as the following description of Aunt Dora's burial service illustrates:

> Khabi and I had to leave for Pretoria where [Aunt Dora] was to be buried. I had failed to see her alive but the occasion gave me a chance to see old acquaintances

and visit family graves. In the lengthy funeral rituals that followed, *I was back in the rhetoric of death-and-life during the nights of the wake: words, words, words, poetry as ritual, ritual as poetry, death as the poetry of life, life as the poetry of death …That is how the Black man can soak himself in grief, until he can endure the sense of loss and its pain and not break*. (*Exiles and Homecomings* 21)

Mphahlele's references in the above passage to human existence in conjoining terms like "death-and-life", "poetry as ritual, ritual as poetry" and "death as the poetry of life, life as the poetry of death" signify his African humanist view of life as an "unbroken song"– the import of such a description is that, according to African world-views, there is no existential division between physical and spiritual life. This explains why Mphahlele typographically emphasises the line that explains "the rhetoric" during the funeral service, while parts of the passage that focus merely on Aunt Dora's physical death are not stressed.

Of course one more Afrocentric aspect Mphahlele is displaying by extolling the heroic stature of the deceased (whose memory he is reviving), is that of praising deeds by fellow Africans as a way of depicting Africans as equal in intellectual excellence to people from any other group. Writing of the same tactic used by African writers from parts of Africa other than South Africa, Fanon has remarked that: "Because the New Guinean or Kenyan intellectuals found themselves above all up against a general ostracism and delivered to the combined contempt of their overlords, their reaction was to sing praises in admiration of each other" (*Wretched* 171). It is important to perceive that Mphahlele "[sings] praises in admiration of [his fellow Africans]" (as the above citation from *Afrika My Music* demonstrates) not merely to counter the colonisers' contemptuous disregard of Africans at the social level. His is a way of leading by the example as the protagonist of the autobiography, by instancing the African humanist living mode in which individual efforts are lauded in so far as their behaviour is seen to have advanced the image or lot of his or her fellow humans. Can Themba and Gwigwi Mrwebi are lauded respectively for asserting an African humanist lifestyle, and for appreciating Mphahlele's attempts to resist alienation by fighting on to survive despite having been banned from his real job of teaching, during the *Drum* years. These are the meanings of the ascription to Themba as having "pulled the strings together in *Drum*" and Mrwebi's message behind the expression "*jy's a teacher nie a reporter nie*" (*Afrika My Music* 123, 124).

Another social phenomenon that is never far from Mphahlele's awareness is the practice of the Zionist Christians in African communities. Mphahlele is unequivocal about his sanction of religious practice displayed by Africans who have broken away from churches that practice orthodox Christianity, as expressed in the following statement: "Let us not despise the followers of Lekganyane, Modise, Shembe and their kind … [because] the kind of self-abandon and joy they can express in their groups fulfill a hunger for contact with the Higher Power through direct contact with the ancestors, through their own body language and song; through a communally-shared religious experience free of intellectual sermonizing" ("Colonial Conquest" 255). The AICs meet his approval because their mode of worship is African humanist.

The existence of the Zionist black churches in places Mphahlele saunters through from primary, high school and college days appears to inject vigour into the way he grapples with making meaning out of life. A passage in *Down Second Avenue* (99–100) describes the innovative handling of western Christianity by breakaway leaders in Marabastad like the "prophet" in the Donkey Church. The activities of such religious leaders appear to excite Mphahlele due to their abrogation of the white man's religion in such a fashion that it actually promotes and ensures economic and spiritual survival. After studying at Adams College and joining the Ezenzeleni institute for the blind, Mphahlele's lonely isolation (while studying privately for matric at night) is broken by the singing, far away in black residences, of the Zionist sect he describes as "half-pagan, half Christian" (150). During such nights, the narrator appears to gravitate mentally towards these noises, the communal spirit of which dispels the solitude of the otherwise individualistic occupation he finds himself in as a result of the ambivalent existence westernisation has thrust on him.

In African humanism as a way of life a person always gravitates towards other people. That is why Mphahlele writes in a 1994 essay ("African Humanism and the Corporate World") as follows: "The communal spirit – sense of community, the compulsion to gravitate towards people – is the attribute that has proved to be the most resilient" (133). One point that communal existence is one of the ways through which Mphahlele's Africanism shapes reality is borne out by the above-mentioned example and some others. That is why there is such frequent use, in the dialogue of *Down Second Avenue*, for instance, of the plural pronoun forms instead of singular forms – in phrases like "Let them", "have we", "their naked selves", "we wouldn't" and "with our pants down". These examples point to the fact that Old Modise, for instance, speaks as a "community self" and not an individual self. According to Craffert, an individual self is seen as a distinct entity isolated not only from other individuals but also from the outside world (206). On the other hand, a community self has his/her self-definition closely connected to that of a social group (206). As a community self, Old Modise is an individual whose "face" or politeness wants are defined in African cultural terms, according to which one defers to the expression of community feeling or opinion. "Face" refers to the public self-image that every member of the community claims for himself or herself (Matsumoto 404).

One remarkable strand in Pan Africanist religious conceptions is the recognition of the power of religious leaders to heal and/or perform miracles. Mphahlele predictably does not overlook this aspect of African life. Nzama, the leader of a breakaway African Initiated Church called the Gaza Church is depicted as a faith healer. Mphahlele tells of an occasion when a woman takes a paralysed son to Nzama for faith healing (*Down Second Avenue* 100). That Nzama rashly cuts the stiff joints of the patient with fatal results could indicate Mphahlele's perception that the meeting in his consciousness of traditional Africanness and alien forms of religion has not been negotiated soundly, hence the degenerate nature of the hybridity he displays. Nzama is almost like Chimba in *Chirundu* – with the difference between the two being the fact that with the latter it is his failure to negotiate the confluence of African consciousness with Western politics (and not with Western Christianity) that leads to a ridiculously botched abrogation of

European political modes of ruling. By portraying the kind of lopsided hybridity driving Nzama's religious practice, Mphahlele is in no way pointing to being sceptical of the efficacy of African faith healing practices. This probably resembles attitudes towards the efficacy of Zionist performance of miracles one finds in other Afrocentric writers such as Todd Matshikiza when he describes an incident in which a sect led by Mgijima believes that "bullets would turn into water" if state forces led by General Smuts were to attack them, which of course does not happen (and leads to casualties) (*Chocolates for My Wife* 26). It is unlikely that Mphahlele makes an outright denunciation of Zionist brands of western Christianity as spurious (by examples such as Nzama's disgraceful acts of faith). This cannot be the case if he affirms the religious aspect of African humanism as follows:

> But we need to acknowledge that African Humanism was originally a religious state of mind producing moral action; attachment to the soil; social relationships; the art of healing; the sense of community and its welfare; and a sense of organic unity or oneness in the universe in which man is the principal participant, and which is a process permeated by the Supreme Being. All these and other qualities are basically religion at work. So they are firmly rooted in the personality and determine the extent to which adoption of or adaptation to Western ways can go … The Western mind [was originally] Christian, but of itself the interest in the classics was not religiously inspired. The Western mind was later to draw a line between the intellect and God … [whereas] African humanism still has a religious base. ("The Fabric" 154-55)

According to the passage above, African humanism does not make a distinction between religious and intellectual life. As such, African humanism without genuine religious practice is unthinkable, and communal living is spiritually sanctioned.

For this reason – I would contend – the South African writer Nat Nakasa does not end his visit to Harlem during exile from apartheid before participating in a religious gathering of the African Americans, in which:

> The handclapping took on a faster pace and more people said 'Amen, praise the Lord, Sister'. Then, as if in a trance, the girl let out some gibberish and moaned and twisted her body and contorted her face until I thought she would smash her head on the floor. Finally, the congregation switched to a new, cheerful tune and the girl began to swing and sing the gospel blues like Mahalia Jackson. (*The World of Nat Nakasa* 124)

Clearly this is not conventional worship in western Christianity. Healing follows this appropriated mode of Christian worship as "the congregation [switches] to a new, cheerful tune and the girl [begins] to swing and sing the gospel blues" (124). Yet despite this affirmation of the African Americans' appropriation of western Christianity (and in a similar way to Mphahlele), Nakasa harshly satirises charlatan messianic leaders. He does so, for instance, when in a journalistic piece "Beware the Swindling Beeshops" he parodies a Zulu nightwatchman who enters a newsroom announcing that he is "the Arsh beeshop of the Zion African Shesh of Saud Afrika and Zoolulend" and that the joining fee to his church "is only one shilling" (75-6).

Nakasa displays respect for adapted traditional African worship by contrasting the two types of religious leaders above. His message is equivalent to that which Mphahlele

transmits by relating incidents of spurious religious practice such as Nzama's bizarre healing act in which he cuts the stiff joints of a boy who later dies (*Down Second Avenue* 100). What Mphahlele and Nakasa are demonstrating is not a rejection of the healing aspect of African humanist appropriation of western Christianity. They are pointing either to personal failure of some individuals to preserve the wholeness of African humanist consciousness when faced with existential challenges or to the personal choice of an African individual evilly to impersonate a power he or she is not capable of wielding. In the same way that he does not spare charlatan traditional healers in his satirical portrayals, Mphahlele does not spare corrupted Africans who masquerade as messianic faith healers while they do not possess this specialist art. He stresses that one has to be gifted in order to perform the role of the traditional healer when he states that "he invokes the presence of his ancestors and that of the patient to strengthen the healing medium [and the] power of the spoken word is right there in the healing process, in the poetic incantation" ("Notes Towards" 139).

Mphahlele's reference to the "power of the spoken word" derives from an elided transliteration of the Northern Sotho proverb "melomo ke dithunya", literally meaning *mouths are guns*. What the proverb means is that words spoken by humans have power comparable to those spoken by a god, with the effect that nature heeds what is uttered in earnest through the mouth. This view of the mystical power of the spoken word is linked to the ontological aspect of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism whereby the Vital Force or Supreme Being informs all of nature, including humans. It follows then that man can vicariously speak and then cause what the word expresses to materialise, with the same powers the Supreme Being is believed to possess. Recognition of giftedness as in traditional healers is widely accepted as an aspect of African cultures, although people with such special gifts are regarded as ordinary humans who derive their elevated powers through constant interrogation of communal mores and consensus. Soyinka, for instance, distinguishes between the communal inclination of traditional African priesthood and the "dogmatic finality of [priests] in Christianity or Islam" – without denying that there exists in African religions "the monopolistic orbit of the priesthood" (*Myth, Literature and the African World* 54). This means that people gifted to commune with the spirit world do not impose their verdicts from a position of detached authority, but rather democratically through consultation with and involvement of the community.

In its pure African form, faith healing is represented in the first Mphahlele autobiography by the "witch doctor" character, Mathebula. Mathebula is the MuTsonga tenant in Eseki's township home. The writer creates a lasting image of Mathebula the traditional healer in the description conveying how awe-inspiring he is felt to be: "At one end of the backyard Mathebula could be seen any morning sitting on a mat, his bones scattered in front of him while he mumbled magic words in Shangana. All of us, visitors alike, tried, as much as room allowed, to move clear of Mathebula's sphere of influence" (*Down Second Avenue* 36). In order that the traditional institution symbolised by Mathebula should not be mistaken for an idiosyncracy of the Mphahlele household's, the writer broadens our perception of the cultural atmosphere of the entire narrative when he relates the incident of a young woman being hit by someone throwing a stone at her (37). The girl picks up the stone and, together with her parents, takes it to a 'witch doctor' for it to

be treated with some "medicine", in case the stone has been bewitched. In this way it is borne in on the perceptive reader that one of the ways in which the narrative creates cultural perspective is through depicting the dependence of the characters on the traditional healer for their wellbeing. The fact that the traditional healer (as cited above) mumbles "magic words in Shangana" (*Down Second Avenue* 36) signifies reliance on the part of the healer on a religion in which the ancestors and Supreme Being are invoked to intercede to ensure the well-being of man. Mphahlele notes the social role of the traditional healer as a building block of the consciousness he calls African humanism. Mention of the domestic situation in which everybody moves "clear of Mathebula's sphere of influence" reveals that it is a "positive face want" in African culture to respond with awe to the religious institution of faith healing.

"Positive face wants" have been described as the need to be accepted as a member of the group, while "negative face wants" comprise the basic claim to territories, personal preserves and rights to non-distraction ("Reexamination of the Universality of Face" 403). Cultures differ at the level of defining face wants, meaning that what is polite or desirable for some cultures may be perceived as impolite or undesirable for others ("Reexamination of the Universality of Face" 403; "Indirectness and politeness in requests: Same or different?" 142). Writers like Mphahlele ("Humanism and Corporate World" 127), Mbiti (1969) and Okolo (28-29) have remarked that in African cultures the definition of self is that of the self-in-community.

As a person striving to carve his Black Consiousness or African humanist meaning out of available reality, Mphahlele has grappled with the Western European orientation of conventional Christianity:

> In 1947 I decided not to go to church any more. The white press, the white radio, the white Parliament, the white employers, the white Church babbled their platitudes and their lies about 'Christian trusteeship', the 'native emerging from primitive barbarism', 'evangelizing the native', 'white guardianship'... Fellowship? Love? Obedience of the law? Suddenly I did not know what these meant in terms of my place in society, and I revolted against such preachments. (*Down Second Avenue* 163)

Mphahlele's suspicion of a hegemonic agenda in western Christianity (as this quotation shows) is consonant with the sensitivity of a critic like Said to the perils of cultural hegemony which have been even more devastating to colonised peoples than the preceding, direct political domination in the process of imperialism. Of the harm of imperialist cultural domination which subsumes the religious domain, Said has remarked that "entities such as races and nations, essences such as Englishness or Orientalism, modes of production such as the Asiatic or Occidental, all of these in my opionion testify to an ideology whose cultural correlatives well precede the actual accumulation of imperial territories worldwide" ("Overlapping" 68). Said, similarly to Mphahlele's preference for abrogated, Africanised forms of Christianity in his writings, emphasises that "cultural experience or indeed every cultural form is radically, quintessentially hybrid" ("Overlapping" 68).

Said criticises the idea of purity within his theory of beginnings, as when he remarks on "the dense interwoven strands of a history that mocks linear narrative, easily recuperated essences, and the dogmatic mimesis of pure representation" ("Resistance and Opposition" 333). Mphahlele's rejection of 'pure' Western Christianity is in line with this position. In other words, if we were to suppose that African cultures are "a history" while the existence of all mankind is a "narrative", such African cultures should be understood as discontinuities within the narrative in which African cultural essences unresponsive to the emprical present are not accommodated. Equally unwelcome are an imprisoning imitation of and struggle towards a reproduction of pure, traditional African culture. For similar self-constitutive reasons as Mphahlele, other African writers including Mphahlele's contemporaries such as Bloke Modisane, have expressed a rejection of western Christianity, as Modisane does below:

> … for so long as the the orthodox Church shall remain white, will continue to react white, for so long will black South Africa disrupt the perfect unity of the Church. This break-away from white orthodoxy is an accomplished fact: by 1957 there were 500,000 Africans in what was described by the Anglican Bishop of Pretoria as 'separatist churches'….The Church has become a symbol of everything that is white in a country where white is the symbol of political domination and racial superiority. There is a need for a Martin Luther. (*Blame Me* 185)

These remarks reveal an insistence on self-determining subjectivity among the Afrocentric theorists. The voice of Mphahlele the African humanist is evident in the statement that "In 1947 [he] decided not to go to church any more" (*Down Second Avenue* 163), in keeping with what he writes in 1994 (in "African Humanism and the Corporate World"), that one plane of African humanism is that in which it is "a social order, a possible option for a way of life, and a purposeful act of knowing and of behaving in a human context" ("Humanism and Corporate World" 128). What this means is that African humanism can be an intellectual tool which one uses to reach a specific goal, apart from believing in and living according to it. One implication of such a view of African humanism is that Mphahlele consciously uses it in writing autobiography, as a way of purposefully enabling his readers to look at life from the specific angle that is the African humanist consciousness. For this reason Mphahlele states that the two levels of African humanism are divided for the sake of convenience, but in reality they are "two aspects of an indivisible concept of thought and belief" (128). The former quotation from *Down Second Avenue* (163) and the latter from "African Humanism and the Corporate World" (128) are indicative of Mphahlele's consistent approach to life, in which he reconciles his personal outlook (that is, his unconscious African humanist belief and lifestyle) with his deliberate delineation of African humanism in his autobiographies and fiction (as a conscious intellectual activity).

3.2.4 BLACK WOMEN AS STRONG

It is the nature of African societies to respect the culturally-defined place of women in society. Jomo Kenyatta (1979), for example, has stated that in traditional Kikuyu homestead, visitors to the family are welcome but are received in the main hut belonging to the husband. It is taboo for the next of kin and strangers alike to tread in a hut belonging to any of the wives. This is because the woman, being the source of progeny due to her ability to give birth, has a sacred place in African society. Transmission of culture is closely tied to the ability of a people to reproduce itself by means of filiation. Emphasis within African cultures of the central role of women in filiative self-perpetuation explains why Mphahlele's concept of African humanism regards women as pillars of society.

Kenyatta is only one of a number of Afrocentric writers who have documented the traditional regard for women. Dr Chikunyere Kamalu of Nigeria (in *Foundations of African Thought)* explains the rationale behind the traditional respect and valuing of women in African cultures as the recognition that "the natural line of descent is through the mother" (quoted in Sesanti 6). Mphahlele himself, in an interview on his fiftieth anniversary of married life with Mrs Rebecca Mphahlele, was quick to acknowledge the positive contribution (to such a long and successful marriage) of the African humanist outlook commonly held by himself and his spouse:

> In African homes where conflict between the old and the modern has not yet blighted our ancient wisdom, women have much more power than white anthropologists imagine. And husband and children recognise this power, which was built into our culture. Economic and political forces have come in to shake these foundations. ("Half a century of HAPPINESS" 87)

Mphahlele being an African humanist and believing (along with other Afrocentric writers) in the powerful social stature of woman, it is predictable that the texture of his narratives should reflect this.

More instances of this awareness of the culturally-defined centralisation of women in African societies is evident in Mphahlele's depiction (in the 1959 autobiography) of economic and spritual survival in a black township, when he describes a Saturday night in Marabastad:

> My aunt was straining the last few pints of beer to pour into a gallon oil tin; and I was keeping watch outside in the yard. 'Dig the hole deep, my son'; 'Stamp hard on it, my son'; and so on. The same old cycle. Leave school, my daughter, and work. You cannot sit at home and have other people work for you; stand up and do the white man's washing and sell beer. That's right – that is how a woman does it; look at us, we do not sit and look up to our husbands or fathers to work alone; we have sent our children to school with money from beer selling … (*Down Second Avenue* 41)

It is Aunt Dora and the grandmother who are the hub of economic survival in the Mphahlele house, as are all other poverty-stricken wives, sisters and aunts in many more Marabastad families. This is in keeping with the African humanist view that women are

sacred in society (within the religiously-based outlook of Africans who associate recognition of social roles and harmonious relations with sacredness) due to their association with nutrition, fertility and birth which are a *sine qua non* for the healthy preservation of African humanist cultures and societies. This is not to deny that by coincidence the pivotal role of women in economic survival of the Mphahlele family emanates from the abuse and irresponsibility of the husband. It is to be acknowledged also that generally the arduous and debasing conditions of urban ghetto life in which these women find themselves (in contrast with relatively stable rural life in traditional communities) also sharpens the reality of the central role they play in the economic survival of the family unit. But the description of women's roles in more favourable situations attests that the role of women as pillars of the family is not necessarily the result of their husbands' failure, or the result only of urban hardships. For example, description in *Afrika My Music* of Mphahlele's wife Rebecca as "unsinkable" actually shows that she could take the punches of apartheid and exile far better than Mphahlele himself with his ever fragile identity (described in imagery as "man in a glasshouse" "Exile" 283). Aunt Dora, too, does not come across as a woman of indefatigable resourcefulness because her husband is abusive – in fact it is the husband who, though shown respect traditionally due to him by his wife, is rather meek. The same can be said of Grandma, whose fond memories of the male "Titus" who is resting at Bantule cemetery are not suggestive of any hard feelings that could have resulted from chauvinistic abuse or economic neglect.

Prior to his laudatory description of the fortitude in the woman characters of *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele has impressed upon the reader's mind the callous heartlessness of the state as manifest in the conduct of the police. This he achieves by effectively creating a hostile atmosphere through images such as "ominous scream", "pierced into the darkness of the night", and "kicking my legs about" (41). The morosely lyrical lines perfect the crescendo of the unbroken black song (of misery in the face of apartheid) of which the Marabastad cacophony is but a segment: "Saturday night and torchlights"; "Saturday night and police whistles"; "Saturday night and screams"; "Saturday night and cursing and swearing from the white man's lips" (41). That the economic activity of the woman characters takes place in this kind of atmosphere magnifies the image of the women (as Mphahlele depicts them) from that of mere economic pillars of their families to the more eminent one of spiritual pillars of the entire community. The immensity of the impact of apartheid on individuals within single families as well as individuals constituting whole communities (who have to contend with the destructive effects of apartheid while also having to cope with abusive husbands) is appreciated better when the role of women as the power sources of their respective families is extended into that of spiritual pillars of the entire community.

That Marabastad is only a microcosm of collective black slum life is attested to by a later relation of the incident in which one of the countrywomen selling sweet potatoes, peanuts and home-baked cakes on a patch of grass in Marabastad has her sickly boy child dying on her lap in the open (71–72). Significantly, the women in the mother's company have come from the countryside north of Pretoria by ox-wagon to outspan on open ground on the outskirts of the location. That one of them is compelled by circumstances to come to

the marketplace even though her child is seriously ill is indicative of the desperate poverty in which black families in general live at this time.

The woman's child dies just after the women have been rounded up by police who insist that they are "making the place dirty" where they are trading and that if they come one more time "all these things will be destroyed and you'll go to prison" (71). In this way Mphahlele creates a refrain about the circumstances of black women's economic activity as an enterprise that is invariably and cruelly disrupted by the instruments of the state and yet continues as a sign of resilience. Such an elasticity of spirit is symbolic of the cultural resilience associated with Mphahlele's African humanist propensity towards sanguinity rather than capitulation. The refrain punctuates the unbroken black song that maintains black existence, complicating and deepening the reader's understanding of that reality of the texture of African lives under apartheid.

In the desolate circumstances of the woman who loses her child, the men in black society occupy the background. It is grandmother and Aunt Dora whom the young Eseki finds bending over the bereaved woman. The African humanist in Grandmother and Aunt Dora makes Grandmother take the dead boy from the lap of its mother with Aunt Dora trying hard to console the devastated woman. In this way their African humanism crowns the women in black society, in much the same way as they carry the mantle of custodians of economic survival and spiritual resilience in their communities. The more powerful position of women relative to that of men in African society is re-emphasised by Mphahlele when he writes in the 1987 article, "Social Work and the Politics of Dispossession" that "Marriage, the bride price, succession and inheritance, residence, erection of a place of abode, ancestral rituals related to the fertility of the soil and woman – all these and other activities are part of the rhythm of life. It is a rhythm controlled by the Life Force or Vital Force that has established a chain linking all beings" (240). That ancestral rituals performed to ensure the fertility of the soil invariably include supplication for the fertility of women is an indication that women, more than men, are crucial in the African humanist way of life. The above quotation also explains why women, and not men, are married through a paying of the bride price as ritualistic reverence and acknowledgement that without women the rhythm of life (without which there would be no survival of the entire community and its consciousness) would stop. Ritual activities described in the above quotation indicate that women, the Supreme Being, the life of the whole tribe and survival are inseparably linked.

It is against this social backdrop that the courage and assertiveness of Aunt Dora is best understood. Mphahlele describes Aunt Dora as a woman with a sharp tongue, who could literally fling a man who took too long to pay a debt for beer out of the house; she is known as Aunt Dora of Second Avenue, that woman who throws a man over a fence; as the woman famed for habitually saying "What's a thing in trousers to me! I could toss it on my little finger and fling it in the dust and roll it around until its price had gone down" (*Down Second Avenue* 76, 77 and 79). In one instance the Indian shopkeeper Abdool cheats the young Eseki. It is the woman Aunt Dora who stands up against this injustice. She drags Eseki to Abdool's shop, demands justice and extracts it from the businessman by knocking him out in a fist-fight watched by a mainly cheering audience, after which

the communal voice in Marabastad proudly pronounces, "Trust Dora of Second Avenue to beat up a man" (107–110). Mphahlele does not describe Aunt Dora in a manner that portrays her as an indiscriminate man-hater or an amazon, though. He explains that Dora "obeyed" her husband, "to the amazement of many" (79). Aunt Dora's husband is described as someone "who spoke quietly and couldn't be rushed [and yet] exasperated, because he disarmed, anyone who came to him like a steam-roller" (79). The dignified manner of Dora's husband contrasts with the terrifying noisiness of Eseki's father Moses. To portray Dora as respectful to her husband is to lend some honour to Dora's way of relating to men. It is an honourable thing for a woman to accord her husband his rightful position of head of the family provided that he deserves it in a way similar to Dora's husband (being an antithesis of the abusive Moses). Such a rounded description of Dora enables the reader to understand her fierce stand against any male who is guilty of any kind of woman or child abuse as the justifiable reaction of a woman who is otherwise obedient to the social code that demands of women to respect their husbands as heads of the family. In this way, Abdool's abuse of the boy Eseki can be said to revive memories of Eva's abusive husband Moses which Aunt Dora witnessed – hence Dora's emotional manhandling of the shopkeeper. The possibility that Moses' boisterous deportment may have traumatised Dora is strengthened when Dora always confirms the indelible memories of Moses's behaviour in the following words: "If that limping hyena called Moses had married me instead of you … he'd see trams for flying vultures by the time I'd done with him", meaning that she would beat Moses up to the point of his losing his mind (80).

In the scene of *Afrika My Music* describing the narrator's friend Khabi Mngoma's near-fatal car accident in the region then called Zululand, Mphahlele characteristically connects the presence of Khabi's wife Grace at the hospital bedside to the miracle of his healing (221). Miraculously, Khabi survives "weakening kidneys, hypertension and other enemies" because of his wife "waiting at his bedside" (221). The silver oak Grace gives to Mphahlele and his wife Rebecca during their first visit to the hospital is now a towering tree back home in Lebowakgomo. Conjuring up an idea of the woman Grace as a fountain of life, Mphahlele writes: "The silver oak has now become for us a symbol of that vital force by which a man's body clawed its way up out of a dark pit … reaching for air and sun" (221). More instances of woman characters as touched with quasi-divine grace and as stronger than men are found elsewhere in the autobiography of 1984. What is important to bear in mind is the communal, African humanist context in which women are thus centralised, signified in the quotation above by reference to a "vital force".

3.2.5 Mphahlele's Extraordinary Description of the Setting

Concerning the night he celebrated obtaining his M.A. degree in his Orlando house, Mphahlele writes: "There were the inevitable gate-crashers, among them a local woman with a large bosom, rather tipsy, who insisted on kissing me because 'you're so great, Zeke,' as she said. She was fond of playing younger than her reputed age of fifty" (*Down Second Avenue* 199).

It is significant that this woman is on the fringes of the main event of celebrating a graduation, as she is not a fully outlined character. Leaving the woman unnamed decreases her role even from the relative status of a caricature and actually marginalises her on the outskirts of the action. Phrases like "a *local* woman" and "with a large bosom" in the quoted passage (above) manipulate the reader to see the gate-crasher as a mere part of the locale (99, emphasis added). In the stereotypical fashion of the streetwise township woman who has succumbed to the vulgarisation of courtesies caused by the stresses of urban economic survival, she insists on kissing the celebrity Zeke, with whom she is not acquainted. Moreover, the writer describes her as pretending to be younger than her actual age. These attributes, coupled with the foregrounding of the anonymous woman's "large bosom", suggest that this is a socially aberrant woman who will not stop at anything to generate income, including selling her own body. Mphahlele's stylistic technique of depicting the woman as a mere constituent item of the setting shifts the blame from her as individual, however, instead soliciting sympathy for her as a victim of the township setting. The woman is merely another creation of the ghetto influence of Marabastad and other inner city dwellings of blacks the world over, like Boeta Lem and the women who (unlike Aunt Dora and Grandmother) brew deadly concoctions with untraditional ingredients, passing off these dangerous drinks as supposedly nutritious traditional home beer.

In *Afrika My Music* Mphahlele writes:

> In fiction … you need an intimate familiarity with the world you depict. You need a locale, its smell, its taste, its texture … in the process of composition, you are tied to the place that contains the experience, however fictional it may be. Some people say they can write novels in which place does not matter, in which place and time do not need physical and temporal qualities. They can create a theatre in the mind. This kind of experiment goes against everything I hold sacred in the composition of fiction. (*Afrika My Music* 168)

Mphahlele has consistently reiterated this position in his other works (along with *The African Image)*, detailing the relationship between himself as a writer and the locale he is writing about, and within.

In his concern as writer with blacks as a people with the distinct psyche and way of life he calls African humanism, it is not surprising that Mphahlele should choose to utilise the locale to extract symbols of African humanism (on the one hand) and those indicative of western hegemony (on the other). Contrasting these two kinds of symbols could be said to crystallise his characterisation of African humanism, for by contrasting what one desires to describe with its converse or antithesis, one etches the essence and scope of

one's actual subject in unmistakable relief. Mphahlele's poetry, short stories and longer narratives all contribute to the pursuit of this goal that he has set for himself. It is understandable that Orlando — as he describes this township (in *Down Second Avenue*) subsequent to his marriage — has features very similar to the Newclare setting of the "Lesane" short stories, or the Marabastad of his youth:

> Below us, along the railway line and a small river carrying water from the mines, was Shanty Town. It was then a three-year-old squalid little settlement. Breeze blocks had taken the place of the first tin-and-shack huts that 8,000 squatters had put up after their mighty exodus from the small overcrowded houses of Orlando East. It was an act of protest against the city council for not building more houses for Africans. The Council had then built the breeze blocks, cut them up into single rooms, each to hold a family. Corrugated asbestos had been placed on top and stones used to hold it down. Occupants had to transform raw ground into something like a floor.
>
> The squalor and poverty here touched me deeply. I was back in Second Avenue. I tossed and turned in my waking and sleeping hours, and I saw no way out of the mental and spiritual conflicts that were harassing me … (*Down Second Avenue* 162–163)

The congruity of this specific description of Orlando with Mphahlele's impression of the physical and spiritual atmosphere of the urban black slum in general is unmistakable. If one remembers poignant paintings of a 'street' in a black location like Marabastad (among others) in terms identifying the concept of a 'street' with "dirty water and flies and dead cats and dogs and children's stools" (*Down Second Avenue* 33), it is clear why at this point Mphahlele considers going into exile.

The examples above from *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music* testify to Mphahlele's unique use of the setting of his stories in the form of vivid memories (while in exile) of the squalid township environment, memorable descriptions of the squalor in his portrayal of places where his characters live, and vivid portrayals of the wayward behaviour of some characters as products of the inhuman conditions under which they live (in the locations). This should be understood as Mphahlele's way of emphasising that one way apartheid achieves the dehumanisation and thus distortion of the consciousness of a people is by manipulating residential conditions to destroy the identity of blacks under apartheid. African humanism (as Mphahlele delineates it) highlights a mystical relation between man and place, to the extent of viewing land the umbilical cord bonding humankind with the ancestors whose mortal remains lie buried in it. This is mentioned to remind the reader that Mphahlele emphasises the need for an Africanist writer to merge place, characterisation and action in a markedly intense manner because such an approach is a scale of such a writer's awareness of African humanism as the consciousness moving the human actors (in the depicted drama) to action in ways consonant with African humanist consciousness.

Focusing on the depth of spiritual damage that such a manipulation of residential conditions causes in migrant labourers – whom the apartheid system concentrated (for example) in mine compounds – Manganyi writes that "there is a certain psychological

ecology to living-space and that the character of this space has much to do with whether an individual experiences a mortification and invasion of selfhood or not" (*Looking Through the Keyhole* 129). The lot of the township resident is not much better than that of the migrant mineworker living in the mine compound, considering Mphahlele's emphasis on the squalor of the townships. The "psychological ecology to living-space" (in Manganyi's formulation) leads to "a mortification and invasion of selfhood" of characters in Mphahlele's poems, short stories and autobiographies. Selfhood in Mphahlele's terms is the African personality or an individual's African humanist consciousness. Because the township living space seeks to hollow the African's identity and sense of purpose, it is understandable that Mphahlele's characters engage in self-constituting identity formation that manifests itself in the many modes of economic, social and political survival that his fiction depicts – such as the example of the gate-crasher at Mphahlele's graduation party in Orlando (*Down Second Avenue* 199).

3.2.6 Effacement of the Apartheid Theme in the Longer Narratives

In the Epilogue to *Down Second Avenue* (occurring, one learns, just as he prepares to leave for exile in Nigeria), Mphahlele explains that in the ten years prior to writing the autobiography his intentions have changed from wanting to produce escapist writing, to the decision to write protest writing, and then into a desire for something of a higher order, which he describes as "the ironic meeting between protest and acceptance in their widest terms" (217).

Since he matured artistically beyond the aim of producing protest literature even in the shorter writings (considered earlier on in this study), it is not surprising that Mphahlele replies to friends' questions and doubts in the manner he does – friends who insist that he should not leave for exile, as the inspiration to write is abundant in apartheid South Africa. He replies that the spur in apartheid South Africa is a paralysing one because it allows no moment to think of human beings as human beings and not as victims of political circumstance (*Down Second Avenue* 210). The way he has been wanting to justify himself and his fellow blacks to the white man in the protest literary mode has given way to the desire to justify himself to himself and his kind (218). It is the collective consciousness and memory of a people that he has now turned to, rather than focusing only on incidents on the surface of day to day living (219). In this way, Mphahlele acknowledges that defining the consciousness of Africans is a more worthwhile cause than describing the impact of apartheid on their lives and describing their reaction to apartheid conditions. In the words quoted above Mphahlele is also acknowledging that he once wrote his fiction in the protest mode. The interesting thing is that even as he joined his contemporaries and wrote protest literature, his style diverged from those of his contemporaries who dwelt purely on the surface of the lives of black South Africans in the way they reacted to apartheid's atttempts to order their lives. While apparently writing protest literature, Mphahlele simultaneously delved deeper to search for and define the underlying cause of the topography of the lives of the Africans in the face of apartheid. And what he found deep down in the souls of his people was a distinctive perception of reality which he calls African humanism. It is this African

humanism he is clarifying by means of characterisation, setting, dialogue and imagery in his works.

The same idea is expressed when he is taking stock of the Colorado exile experience, in his statement that a writer has to use the prose of everyday life if he is to engage successfully in creative writing that justifies the African to his/her own conscience (*Afrika My Music* 131). It is the same point expressed by Ndebele when he calls upon black South African writers to transcend preoccupation with the spectacular presence of apartheid by "rediscovering the ordinary" in their writing ("The Rediscovery" 55). A writer who wants to promote political revolution, Mphahlele writes, must go out among the crowds as a mere citizen and go into action and not fool him- or herself that writing will produce such a revolution (*Afrika My Music* 131).

It is not surprising then, that the apartheid setting of *Down Second Avenue* is a mere backdrop to the unmistakable, towering heroism of ordinary men and women in Maupaneng, Marabastad and other black ghettoes. *Afrika My Music* sets out to paint black characters in their completeness on a global plane, as if to wave in the eye of the sceptic the fact that the unbroken black song resounds beyond the South African borders to African states and over the whole reach of the diaspora in the Americas and Europe. The vividness and intensity with which Mphahlele recounts interaction with notable African figures like Nkrumah, Gerard Sekoto, Breyten Breytenbach andLéopold Senghor cannot be mistaken for anything less than the creation of a black perspective on a global scale. This is commensurate with Mphahlele's conception of African humanism as more than PanAfricanist, for, similarly to African writers like Ngugi (1986) and Achebe (1988), he holds that all blacks the world over live from a common black-consciousness perspective. It is for this reason that Mphahlele states that Africans are a collective of clusters of people on the African continent "that displays features suggesting a unity of its cultures [and this] confers upon us the right to claim an identity that distinguishes us and the African diaspora from other cultural clusters" ("Notes Towards" 135). Achebe is highlighting the same point, that people with an African humanist consciousnesses include all of those on the continent and in other parts of the globe who were tied to Africa before historical periods that brought displacement or are now identifying with Africanness irrespective of their past origins, when he writes that "Africa is not only a geographical expression; it is also a metaphysical landscape – it is in fact a view of the world and of the whole cosmos perceived from a particular position" (*Hopes* 63).

It is a feat indeed for Mphahlele to have succeeded in making plausible, notable characters out of ordinary aunts, fathers, grandmothers, boys, girls, old men and old women in *Down Second Avenue* and in *Afrika My Music* in order to characterise black achievers as world achievers equal to any other on a world scale. The organisation of both *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music,* as well as the characters' stories, derive from everyday attempts at economic, cultural, religious, historical and political survival. Due to the inclusion of encounters with luminaries like Nkrumah and Senghor, *Afrika My Music* goes further than personifying black survival in eulogising black excellence. This became possible because of Mphahlele's characteristic literary invention of African humanist devices such as "resonances" which collectively culminate in the creation of

"perspective", coupled with his uniquely intimate painting of the locale which intensifies such "resonances" and "perspective" in his narratives. Through these autobiographies and other writings Mphahlele indulges his life-long wish to produce creative writing in which black characters are drawn in their completeness as human beings with a cultural depth and a distinct identity.

3.2.7 Mphahlele as a Postcolonial Writer and Theorist

It is important to bear in mind that Mphahlele's personal stance on modern sociological conditions of Africans as well as his distinctive use of literary devices in the manner explained in the preceding section are not only as a result of his being Afrocentric. Afrocentrism is a way of correcting distorted views of the African. Displaying such an attitude does not preclude an African from commonly sharing on the global level attitudes that are not poised merely to oppose demeaning inventions about Africanness, but also to counter belittling fictions also about other distinctive cultural clusters constituting the oppressed of the world. This happens in a confederally concerted effort manifested by an attitude that is postcolonial in a culturally heterogeneous sense.

It can thus be argued that Afrocentrism in an endemically African attitude which is a tributary of the all-sweeping river of postcoloniality. Postcolonialism becomes relevant and occurs initially for the African within the context of colonisation and during the era in which African states and those of the diaspora have just gained independence. But as the impact of the historical phenomena of colonisation and imperialism reverberates across geographical boundaries and at the global level, postcolonial attitudes within Africans are in concert with broadly similar attitudes all over the world in a sense that diminishes such geographically defined behaviour as oriental sensibility, African Americanism, Arab cultural cohesion, etc. It is proper, therefore, to proceed from identifying African humanist consciousness among Afrocentric theorists, to identifying it in relation with postcolonial theory. To use Mphahlele's literary texts as our vehicle towards making such a comparison, it can be demonstrated that the two autobiographies succeed in unfurling representations of postcolonial modes of behaviour such as mimicry, hybridity, ambivalence, counterdiscourse and reconstitution on a broader canvas than the shorter texts discussed in earlier chapters could achieve. Writers like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989; 1998) have described mimicry (found among people that have been marginalised by population groups occupying the Western and Northern hemispheres) as the imitation of the manners, values and traditions of the people occupying such a domineering position. Such powerful people from the "centre" use discourse to dominate the thinking of the subaltern or marginalised peoples of the world. It is by means of counterdiscourse that the subaltern will mediate the inevitable hybdrity that is brought about by social interaction between people from the "centre" and those from the "orient" or "periphery" (or otherwise marginalised peoples). Hybridity is the consciousness within the people who have undergone "alterity", the source of which is contact between the "centre" and the "periphery" or "orient". Ambivalence is the resultant behaviour of both the peoples occupying the "centre" and those peoples whose lifestyle and thinking they seek to alter, which is a sign of the mutual hybridisation of both parties involved in the colonising act.

As already indicated in the Introduction, awareness and countering of the hegemonic discourse of the "centre" is the lifework of postcolonial writers, irrespective of whether they themselves write from the "centre" or the "periphery". Mphahlele as one of them, has for instance written counterdiscursively of his attitude towards *Drum* magazine (*Down Second Avenue* 187). He was forced by circumstances to join *Drum* in 1956 as sub-editor, fiction editor and political reporter (see Woeber and Read, 6). He had to work for *Drum* after being banned from teaching in 1952 for opposing the introduction of Bantu Education, and also after teaching in Lesotho in 1954 for six months and at St. Peter's school in 1955 before the government closed the school for being oppositional in its teaching practices (to the South African government's Education legislation and rules).

On *Drum* itself, Mphahlele has written:

> My whole outlook resisted journalism: my attitude towards the white press; towards the double stream of newspaper policy in South Africa where there is a press for whites and a press for non-whites; towards *Drum*'s arbitrary standard of what the urban African wants to read: sex, crime and love stories; its use of Sophiatown as the yardstick of what the South African non-white should read. (*Down Second Avenue* 187–188)

The above quotation fits Mphahlele into the category of postcolonial writers such as Minh-ha when she writes that "otherness becomes empowerment, critical difference, when it is not given but re-created" ("Not You/Like You" 417). Mphahlele and Minh-ha display a similar postcolonial attitude, for Mphahlele in the above quotation is rejecting his ascribed otherness and that of his people in order that he may recreate it, using African humanism as the tool to achieve such a recreation of identity.

Brooding on his early years as a writer of short stories, Mphahlele admits that there was an element of escapism in 1940s and 1950s black South African writing. Such an escapism bordered on snobbery, which Mphahlele imagines is the most ridiculous perspective that could be adopted by a black writer purporting to be the voice of township folks (*Afrika My Music* 17). This reveals Mphahlele's postcolonialist, Black Conscious frowning on the mimicry naturally informing such snobbish or pretentious behaviour.

A scrutiny of works by *Drum* writers like Can Themba reveals some kind of cynicism towards the 'low' subculture of the majority of township dwellers. In "The Suit", for example, Matilda transforms herself into a more attractive woman in the midst of the psychological torture she is suffering because of her husband's insistence that the suit of the secret lover who has fled through the bedroom window should be treated like an important visitor to the house (89-90). Interestingly, the commendable improvement by Matilda is not compared only to her former disenchanted attitude towards the husband Philemon. It is ascribed further to Matilda's discarding of the appearance of a traditional African woman, as revealed by Can Themba's explanation that "the dress she wore brought out all the girlishness of her, hidden so long beneath German print" (90). Since "German print", (called *motoitšhi* in a language like Northern Sotho), refers to the traditional dress worn by African women in modern times (as opposed to times when

Africans wore animal skins), for Can Themba to state that Matilda's resplendent beauty has been "hidden so long beneath German print" is the same as saying that Matilda is more attractive to her husband because she has left behind her (backward) traditional dress style. Such a snobbish view by Can Themba of the average modernised African (who adheres to his or her traditional consciousness albeit in ways that accommodate present times) is evident also in the short story "The Urchin", when the central character Macala (complacent after maltreating a traditionally-dressed Ndebele hawker) boasts that the bullying of the woman "proves the superiority of the townsman over these odd creatures from the country" (99). This statement cannot pass for a satirising of the general behaviour of the gangster and his mates (which is tied to the central theme of the story in which the writer undoubtedly condemns township gangsterism of the time), considering that Can Themba refers to the disgusted audience who are watching such disrespectful sauciness as the "passing generations' men and women" (99). In this way, the *Drum* writer's assumption is revealed by the sub-theme, which is that African traditional culture (in which behaviour such as that of Macala provokes popular abhorrence) should be accorded the status of a relic of the past. Such an attitude towards Africans who still adhere to traditional values is a revelation of a type of elitist snobbery on the part of Can Themba, an attitude which Mphahlele accuses the *Drum* writers of in the above quotation.

Consistently with Mphahlele's valuing of behaviour that stems from adherence to African humanist consciousness (of which traditional customs are an aspect) he later in *Afrika My Music* contrasts Nigerian and Kenyan cultural freedom with the quality of South African ghetto life, pervaded by hegemonic culture, that he and his compatriots had to survive (28). This he refers to as a civilisation (i.e "white" or "western" civilisation) that beckoned to him and his people from across the colour line, but that at the same time resisted the Africans and denied them full participation in its life. Sensitivity to this kind of humiliating hybridity brought about by interaction with the "centre" is typical of the perceptions and insights of postcolonial thinking and writing. Pronouncing on the inevitable ambivalence of Africans within the apartheid milieu, Mphahlele indicates that the Africans back home lived within a bricolage containing some appropriated western cultural elements as well as dregs of an African humanist consciousness buried deep in their resilient collective personality, in the following words:

> And we flourished in Nigerian freedom, even while it was still a colony. And we were drawn into its life by the people, who were at ease with themselves … Nigeria restored Africa to us. We had come to think of ourselves as urbanised in South Africa – those of us who were located in ghettos on the fringes of towns and cities as a work force to serve the white man. Of course we had been uprooted from our traditions: we used modern means of travel; our eating habits had changed; families had been broken up and discovered new arrangements permitting the extended family to survive, commerce and industy had created new desires and wants in us, and our modes of dress had changed accordingly. (*Afrika My Music* 28)

In the section recording exile experiences in Philadelphia from 1974 to 1977, Mphahlele recognises his having matured from formerly writing in order to express his hatred of

racism to the more positive orientation of asserting the worth and life of the oppressed as those of a profound, rounded people. Before the mellowing of sensibility afforded him by exiled life in America, the dominant feeling of hate for the white oppressor obstructed the greater goal of writing of Africans as a whole people beyond their homogenisation and of writing beyond reflexively jaundiced opinions dividing blacks and whites, caused by the distance between them engendered by apartheid – in which the blacks were "defined only by work situations and by a counter or window frame between the server and the served" (156). A stand against the homogenisation of the "periphery" or the "orient" by the "centre" is one trait of the writing of postcolonial writers and thinkers. Mphahlele's attempt to portray African characters in his fiction should thus be understood to be an assertion of the complete humanity of Africans both as individuals and as a group, as well as a clarification of his postcolonialist standpoint meant to counter any homogenising conceptions of people found in the "periphery".

Of course, with an encounter between the "centre" and the "orient" bound to have an effect on both sides, the exiled Mphahlele now no longer sees the oppressor race in homogenised terms, either. That is why a 31 May 1975 visit by an old friend (the musician Khabi Mngoma) to the Mphahlele family in Wayne reminds Mphahlele of the African humanist white woman named Norah Taylor back in South Africa. In true African humanist sense the white woman mentors and shapes talent in Mphahlele, Khabi Mngoma and the Syndicate of African Artists while Mphahlele teaches at Orlando High school; she supports the Mphahlele family financially after Mphahlele has been banned from teaching; she also voluntarily offers lessons in speech and drama in African schools and teacher-training colleges to try and water down some of the worst effects of Bantu Education on the black mind (158). It is due to emotional and intellectual growth during exile that Mphahlele now refines and adapts aspects of his new attitude as "an African" with a cultural identity cutting across the racial divide. This new attitude of his can be contrasted with his earlier convictions (held back in South Africa after the African National Congress had been formed in 1912) that belief in non-racialism was a mere strategic compromise (with white power), while the radical black consciousness in the Pan Africanist Congress camp would have been the more appropriate attitude for a black South African political opposition group (157).

In a manner more poetic than prosaic – because it is integral to the lyrical prose and plot of the narrative – *Down Second Avenue* tackles the concerns of the postcolonial writer even more subtly than his shorter texts do. *Down Second Avenue* depicts two apparently conflicting world views, those of western Christians and of believers in traditional African religion. This 'clash' is shown up as being merely superficial, if contrasted with the evidence of the two groups' deeper connectedness. The communal voice in *Down Second Avenue* in the form of Old Modise's dialogue expresses the profound and enduring notion of a common African religion cutting across the two sections of the black community and indissolubly connecting them. That is why he speaks in favour of the 'heathen' circumcision practitioners deserving to be left alone, for instance. As P.H.D. Mashabela has observed (quoted by Teffo), some places in traditional Pedi/African religion were "endowed with an aura of sacrosanctity" ("Science, Religious Pluralism and the African Experience" 102). Circumcision ground is one such place. African

thinkers, including Mphahlele himself (1974) and Mbiti (1969), have stated that traditional religions are by no means extinct despite adaptation of African cultures to modernisation (including proselytization). One of the many aspects of traditional religious practices is initiation by means of the circumcision school.

Negation of mimicry in the religious sphere as illustrated in *Down Second Avenue* is evident again in the same book in the depiction of Mphahlele's maternal grandmother. The grandmother bans the children from being in the Marabstad streets after dark unless they go to evening church service (*Down Second Avenue* 78). The social sanction prevailing here is an African humanist one of respect for the ancestors, as the sacrosanct reason she advances for this family rule is simply that it was their late grandfather's law before he died. As indicated elsewhere in this chapter, the grandmother punctuates her earnest talk throughout *Down Second Avenue* with the phrase "as sure as Titus sleeps in his grave", thus invoking the continued presence of the departed in the affairs of the family. The social attribute of letting the ancestors remain part of the family is a feature of African religion (see Kudadjie and Osei, 40) and expressive of the African humanist ability to continue to honour and evoke elders even after they have passed away, a practice Mphahlele evidently treasures.

The older Mphahlele in Marabastad takes advantage of the proliferation of breakaway African churches and starts roaming from one denomination to the other on different Sundays (*Down Second Avenue* 99). When after such exploits he relates to his grandmother how an A.M.E. pastor amusingly mixes English and Sotho in his sermons, the grandmother retorts that one day the pastor will face retribution when his ancestors descend upon him and ask him where he has thrown his mother tongue (99). Though a devout Christian and despite the above conversation relating to the action of a Christian preacher that takes place in a Christian church building, Grandma can still not think in terms of moral judgement without making reference to the superior guardianship of the ancestors rather than punishment in hell. The irony of such utterances by Grandma lies in the dogmatic forbidding of 'ancestor worship' within the Christian church establishment. By means of dialogue such as Grandma's, Mphahlele wants to show that African humanist belief in the ubiquitous presence of ancestral spirits among the lives of the living persists in the face of a modernisation process that seeks to outlaw it.

If the apparent divergence of world views in the two sections of the Maupaneng community as well as apparently firm western Christianity in the urban characters like the grandmother were not relatively superficial, African values like respect for ancestors and perception of the Supreme Being in things like a piece of ground would not be portrayed in the autobiography. It is clear that beneath the apparent cultural-religious heterogeneity there is an underlying homogeneity.

With the teenager Mphahlele living on the "Christian" side of the Maupaneng village, he is among those fed on stories depicting the "heathens" as witches with whose footprints and shadows one had to avoid contact. Boys being boys, Eseki and his fellow goatherds and cattleherds constantly cross over to the "heathen" side, where one day they even naughtily explore the taste of baboon meat at the communal fireplace. The remarkable

fact is that the boys are received warmly. The warm hospitality of the traditionalist section of the Maupaneng community evinces a conviction of affinity that defies the supposedly insurmountable differences between the two sections.

Apart from the modification and reshaping of religious practice evinced in the examples we have just mentioned, *Down Second Avenue* also contains instances of mimicry. For example, in describing the Mphahlele house facing Barber Street in Marabastad, the author mentions that in addition to the spectacular *malaeta* barefist boxers herded by mounted police on Sunday afternoons, women strolling past (as the family habitually sat on the verandah) particularly fascinated the Mphahlele family with their various styles of dress (35). While some of the black women were truly smart in their dress, others "hobbled past in awkward high heels, evidently feeling the pinch" (35). The tone here works counterdiscursively to ridicule their inept mimicry, for the latter category of black women is clearly at pains to imbibe supposedly superior western culture.

As indicated earlier on in the Introduction, PanAfricanist writers of the "Black Consciousness" persuasion interrogate the nature of the post-independence nation-state. Although not denying the role of politicians, Mphahlele stresses the important role artists have to play in the state in forging an appropriate national consciousness. In this connection he has stated that imaginative literature should revitalise or keep alive a language and experience, and should increase a people's capacity to feel (*Afrika My Music* 131). These two aims he sees as "perennial revolutionary imperatives". The self-constituting psyche of a nation freed from a hegemonic onslaught from the "centre" has been a central concern of all postcolonial writers, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989; 1998), Edward Said (1978) and Homi Bhabha (1981) have indicated .

Appropriation of western Christianity (as in the example shown above of linking religious activity with reverence of the ancestors) is one aspect of the African humanist consciousness Mphahlele intends to see ordering the behaviour of the postcolonial African. The postcolonial theorist Pieterse has stressed the need for colonised people to appropriate Christianity in the following words:

> Empire is an ideology as well as a practice, a discipline and also a conscience. One of the strategies of emancipation … for the oppressed is a strategic necessity to address the oppressor in its own language, the language which it knows and understands … In the world of Western imperialism this has largely been the language of Christianity and accordingly the history of emancipation from Western imperialism has also been a history of the recovery and mobilization of the revolutionizing aspect of Christianity. (368)

Mphahlele as a postcolonialist writer (as in the above examples from *Down Second Avenue)* uses African humanist practices such as invocation of the ancestors to revolutionise Christian precepts and dogmas (that forbid 'ancestor worship' and initiation), and this is clearly consistent with what Pieterse states above.

3.2.8 Mphahlele's Way of Making Meaning

Down Second Avenue relates how after completing the junior certificate at St. Peter's School Mphahlele as a young man goes for teacher training at Adams College in Amanzimtoti, Natal. After completing the teacher's certificate in 1940, he is employed as a clerk, short-hand typist and teacher at Ezenzeleni Institute for the Blind in Roodepoort. After completing the Matriculation Certificate in 1942, he leaves Ezenzeleni in 1945 for a teaching post at Orlando High School in present-day Soweto. In the same year Eva, his mother, dies of a diabetic coma shortly before Mphahlele's marriage to Rebecca on 29 August 1945.

While Mphahlele was still studying at Adams College, Marabastad had been moved to Atteridgeville by the Smuts government. An uncle of Mphahlele's had used his savings as a bus driver to buy a stand and build a home in the neighbouring township of Lady Selborne where he went to live with the author's maternal grandmother. Aunt Dora and her children, too, had gone to live in Lady Selborne where Aunt Dora had bought a stand and a house. Mphahlele's mother had had to leave her washing job to work at the Pretoria mint, so as to be able to live in Atteridgeville with her other two children.

After describing all the sad uprootings following the forced removal of Marabastad after it was declared by government to be located in an area earmarked for exclusive occupation by whites, the next chapter of *Down Second Avenue* is an "Interlude" in which Mphahlele muses about all these events. In the typically pensive mood of an "Interlude" the writer thinks:

> Marabastad is gone but there will always be Marabastads that will be going until the screw of the vice breaks … And the Black man keeps moving on, as he has always done the last three centuries, moving with baggage and all, for ever tramping with bent backs to give way for the one who says he is stronger … Before the house came down in which he had hired a room, Siki the tubercular guitarist, coughed, coughed and coughed until the blood came out and he died. Many Sikis will be born yet but few will die the way he did with his fingers entangled in the broken strings of his instrument. (*Down Second Avenue* 157)

Mphahlele's aesthetic belief in the literary artist's ability to create resonance comes to the fore in this excerpt. The image of Siki the guitarist dying while playing music on his guitar symbolises what Mphahlele has chosen to call "the unbroken song" (1974, 1981). The opening statement itself (above), that there will always be Marabastads, reinforces the notion of an "unbroken song" as symbolised by the singing of the Marabastad musician that is described as surviving the physical death of the character Siki himself. Mphahlele's preoccupation with the need for a cultural connection of the present to the past and the future has been articulated in many instances in his essays, such as "Educating the Imagination", when he writes that in literature myth must be created to highlight "that never-ending story of life: children are still being born, women still wait and endure, men still betray one another, we still dream both idle and meaningful dreams … and we must keep trying to negotiate the meeting point between art and history" (182). Siki's perpetual coughing signposts the crushing conditions under which blacks have perpetually been forced to live. The statement in the quotation, that the black man keeps moving on as he has always done in the last three centuries, is yet another

disclosure of the theme of distinctive historical perspective from which a people should always make their own distinctive meaning out of what life offers them. The deeper meaning of the term "moving on" should not escape the reader undetected. It refers to the resilient African ability of continuing to be who they are as a cultural entity despite being forced to contend with an adverse environment, while it refers simultaneously and more obviously to the physical act of continually being torn from the pieces of land that belong to them and to which they belong.

The importance of learning the history of one's own people as a way of creating resonance has been emphasised by Mphahlele, for instance when he writes the following in *Afrika My Music*: "So we think history began when we were born and we don't bother to study the available history of our political struggle and that of our writers and artists, of our achievers" (254). To stress that one's history is the resonance of one's people, Mphahlele goes on to chronicle black South African history together with the meaning he makes of it, as when he writes:

> Soweto, place of the grinning skull, / -- Death in life, life in death --/ What are They doing to us? … When my dream of a non-racial society was shattered, dating from Sharpeville, I realised that the white ruling class and its electorate were in effect rejecting African humanism, which is traditionally inclusive … Away from home it dawned on me that our immediate need was not to try and win over whites to the side of non-racialism but to strengthen our sense of an African identity. Our African consciousness at the deeper levels of culture where it is felt as a spiritual necessity. We would need to defer for now the ideal of non-racialism as a political slogan. (254-55)

The passage above demonstrates that Mphahlele's polemical and narrative writings have been shaped by his interpretation of the explosive slum conditions of Soweto and elsewhere that erupted in the form of June 1976 student riots. His narrative writings and his consolidation in the expository sphere of the concept of African humanism have been influenced also by the Sharpeville massacre of black people marching against the broadening of apartheid pass laws that sought to include black women. These historical events and his interrogation of them are the resonances that give perspective to Mphahlele's own life, to his concept of African humanism and to the lives of African characters in his narrative writings that aim to highlight the very African humanist perspective and resonances of black existence during apartheid. It is this very self-constituting facet of the history of one's people that Spivak recognises as a necessary practice of the postcolonial writer when she writes that " "Reified history" is in this case our monumentalized national-cultural history of origin combined with ideas of a miraculated resistant hybridity; "embodied history" our disavowed articulation within the history of the present of our chosen new nation-state" (471). Congruously with the way the postcolonial thinker Spivak defines the role of historical awareness in the quotation above, Mphahlele uses the history of survival of Africans under apartheid to outline a perspective that serves to strengthen the versatility of African humanism to make meaning of past history while at the same time using African humanism to regulate the responses of his people to experiences of the present moment. He cannot ignore the important role historical events have played in shaping the African humanist

consciousness to its present-day model, because (as he has stated) "history has been the paramount agent of change in Africa this far" ("Function of Literature" 421).

One more example of Mphahlele's uniqueness in wielding metaphors, symbols and dialogue in his narrative writings is mythmaking which is the deliberate creation of the impression of repeated patterns of life, or an explanation of such repeated patterns, which according to Mphahlele is another way of creating the resonance that forms part of African humanist consciousness ("Educating the Imagination" 182-83; *Es'kia* 33). In *Down Second Avenue*, for example, Mphahlele tells a legend of how a cluster of disgraced stars were dismissed from heaven and were during their fall towards earth changed to white sand. After heaping up, the sand was washed into the Leshoana river (13, 14). In this way, the continued washing away of sand by water in the Leshoana river and the explanation of how this has come about have the effect of myth which reassures the people living around the river that life continues even beyond their and their countrymen's physical death. Such a hope for survival is one of the features of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism.

In addition to the employment of resonance by means of a critical revival of the historical events and the impact of such historical events on the lives of his people, as well as by means of mythmaking, Mphahlele's impeachment of liberalism, his conception of the "tyranny of place" and his formulation of the "tyranny of time" are among his key discoveries as a postcolonial writer and thinker. The following statements by him clarify what he means by "the tyranny of place" and the "tyranny of time":

> The tyranny of time. The tyranny of place. The muck, the smell of it, the fever and the fight, the cycles of decay and survival. And 'the sounds begin again'; I want daytime, I want place, I want a sense of history. Even though place will never be the same again for me – because its lights and shadows may change – I want to be there when it happens. ("Exile" 278)

In the above passage indicating Mphahlele's longing for a return home while in exile, he compares the inconvenience of suffering on home soil under apartheid rule (that is, the tyranny of time, of the time in South African history when life happens to be subjected to apartheid) with that of suffering in exile (which is the tyranny of place, of living in a place which alienates you because you are missing the familiarity of home ground to which you are spiritually attached). That the second line in the passage above concentrates nostalgically on a sensuous description of apartheid South African life in the black ghettos indicates that at this point of his exile life Mphahlele has started to resolve to go back home to South Africa "even though place will never be the same again for me" – he aims to go home despite the fact that the apartheid system remains in power together with the tyranny of time that goes with it. That is why after his return in 1977 to South Africa (as described in *Afrika My Music*) Mphahlele explains that he "must submit to the pull of place" and deal with "the tyranny of time", i.e. he must deal with life under apartheid in as much as he cannot resist the pull of spiritual attachment to home soil (11). For him "the sounds begin again" because the apartheid experiences he had before going into exile are now again happening to him (11). In true postcolonial spirit, Mphahlele chooses rather to come home and counter hegemonic suppression as a living

example so that he may appropriate life under apartheid to suit himself and his project of cultural reclamation for his people.

Reflecting on the years during which the politics of South Africa were dominated by debate between the African National Congress and the All Africa Convention, Mphahlele reiterates his stance that the category 'black' must include coloureds and Indians (*Down Second Avenue* 190). While he agrees with the All Africa Convention on this, he regrets the Convention's accommodation of the liberal ideology of the time. Mphahlele cannot but see treachery and the desire to cling to hegemonic dominance as the disguised basis of liberal thinking: "Now it's the white liberals you're flirting with and they're the ones telling you to use democratic and constitutional methods of struggle" (189). These "democratic and constitutional methods of struggle" prescribed by Liberals are what Frantz Fanon sees as "neo-liberal universalism" which the "fight for democracy against the oppression of mankind will slowly leave" as soon as colonialism has been defeated (*The Wretched of the Earth* 119). Writing in his essay "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness", Fanon denounces the tactics of neocolonialism in the following words: "The Western bourgeoisie, though fundamentally racist, most often manages to mask this racism by a multiplicity of nuances which allow it to preserve intact its proclamation of mankind's outstanding dignity" (131). Mphahlele's scepticism about the role of liberals in the fight against colonisation should be properly understood to be a caution against the same neocolonial tactics as the citation of Fanon above describes, which "mask this racism by a multiplicity of nuances" serving but to "preserve intact" colonialism's imposition of the norms for proper governance.

Like any consciousness, liberalism has evolved over the years ("Versus the Political Morality" 370). Mphahlele expresses his appreciation of the evolution of liberalism as follows:

> White liberalism constantly pleads that the law be obeyed, and that the political morality of the rulers can only be subverted when the same rulers experience a change of heart …We must acknowledge that activist liberalism (as distinct from garden party or paternalistic liberalism) has moved a few paces forward since 1948, on questions like the franchise and rate of political change, and seems unequivocally against the ideology of separate development. And yet the constraints it set for itself in the manner of resistance remain: extra-parliamentary mass resistance is out of the question. ("Versus the Political Morality" 370)

It must be understood that Mphahlele, like most black leaders of the time, regretted the claim by liberals to represent black interests in parliament instead of debating in favour of blacks being allowed into the then all-white parliament to speak for themselves. Mphahlele sees such a "sinister" attitude in liberalism as indicative of "white liberalism in this country [feeling] constrained to operate from a Christian base", which makes the liberals "believe that the white fascist or tyrant is capable of attaining grace and thus of ruling with a human wisdom" (369). According to Mphahlele, it is this belief among liberals that they are the (chosen) saviour of (reprobate) blacks which engenders "historical liberalism's abhorrence of violence (by blacks) and preference for gradualism in the liberating process" (369). What this means is that liberal whites prescribe their

norms and values in order to perpetuate the oppression of blacks, and that this has led them to stand up against any method (such as violent military overthrow) that may attain the termination of white rule.

Mphahlele's criticism of liberalism is supported by details of his contemporary Todd Matshikiza's autobiography, as when Matshikiza depicts a meeting he holds in London with the Englishman William Smythe as characterised by harangues, as follows:

> What is all this business about you Africans wanting to have equal share of any performance put on for the Whites down there? … You Blacks are filled with a sense of injustice. You think anything happening to you is unjust. You're full of complaints about everything … You blokes want to start a Black theatrical movement …You are hoping to get your Whites to come and see you in Orlando? Be reasonable. Why should they come to Orlando to the segregated Bantu area to see natives doing Shakespeare by candlelight? (Matshikiza, *Chocolates for My Wife* 43-44)

It is fair to assume that Matshikiza's depiction of William Smythe is meant to satirise the South African liberals' apparently paranoid revulsion against any liberatory action of blacks smacking of radicalism.

Mphahlele most clearly explains his scepticism about the honesty of liberals (in their claim to support the liberation of blacks from apartheid) in the following passage:

> The liberal tries to allow for a variety of of human foibles that can result in misrule and tyranny. The underdog's 'backwardness' or 'primitivism' make the liberal's heart bleed, and so he ends up praying for both the oppressor and the oppressed in one breath: may they both find grace and acknowledge each his own moral shortcomings and love each other. ("Literature Versus Political Morality" (369-70)

As long as they were politically disenfranchised, blacks like Mphahlele, however, saw extra-parliamentary mass action as the only effective way to put across their demands to Government. It is understandable then that the position of liberals (indicated in the passage above), in opposing black mass action, aroused suspicion among blacks that the liberals wanted no real change to occur and that they (as a 'saviour' race) wanted to continue to 'represent' blacks "in the two houses of parliament" ("Prometheus in Chains" 354). Moreover, it should be understood that dependence (as opposed to self-reliance and self-constitution) is one of the things postcolonial writers including the Afrocentric writers of Pan Africanist persuasion in general and Mphahlele with his African humanism in particular oppose. Mphahlele defines dependence as "refer[ring] to a condition or fact of relying on someone" (200). Tracing the apartheid ruling class hostility towards black self-reliance back to student formations of the 1970s – like SASO, spearheaded by student leaders Steve Biko (later murdered in custody by the police) and Onkgopotse Tiro (assassinated by the apartheid government while exiled to Botswana) – Mphahlele writes that: "The ruling class was out to kill the spirit of self-reliance SASO generated at grassroots level. The white man … is in charge of every aspect of our lives, except, in some respects, our spiritual existence …We have waited until the white man gave or did things for us" ("From Dependence" 199). Because the liberals were part of the white ruling class with its attitude of wanting to do things for blacks, thus negating black self-

reliance (as explained in the quotation above), Mphahlele's African humanist consciousness cannot accept the socio-political stance of liberalism. This (for Mphahlele) has been made possible by the surviving "spiritual existence" or African humanist sensibility that has survived the obliterating policies of the apartheid government of the time in some form.

Emphasising the need for postcolonial populaces to do things for themselves as opposed to dependence on the fomer colonial power thinly veiled as the bourgeois ruling class, Fanon proposes "political education" in the following words: "To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that *everything depends on them …"* (*The Wretched* 159, my emphasis). Mphahlele's championing of self-reliance shown in the quotation above clearly agrees with Fanon's opposition to colonial agents or neocolonial African bourgeoisie "making a political speech" to the ordinary citizens. The reason for Fanon rejecting "political speech" is due to the danger of such speeches echoing neocolonial dictations through the mouths of bourgeouis African leaders who "will prove themselves incapable of triumphantly putting into practice a programme with even a minimun humanist content" (*The Wretched* 131). In other words, Fanon believes in programmes that inculcate self-reliance in the ordinary men and women by "[making] adults of them", rather than an approach which "[treats] the masses as children by deciding things for them" (*The Wretched* 146). It can thus be seen that Fanon emphasises post-colonial enlistment of the population from the point of view of government, while Mphahlele stresses the importance of postcolonial self-constitution from the point of view of the ordinary people.

Mphahlele's detection of liberalism's agenda to perpetrate neocolonialism is evident in short stories like "Mrs Plum" (*The Unbroken Song*) and "The Living and the Dead" (*The Living and the Dead and Other Stories*), as discussed earlier in this thesis. One finds it difficult to agree with Ursula Barnett in her remark that "Mrs Plum's liberalism is quite genuine" (*A Vision of Order* 177). This is despite the same critic's judicious observation that "Mrs Plum's liberalism … is completely impersonal, directed at idea rather than at people" thus lacking in Mphahlele's ideal of "ruling passion, a feeling of compassion for one's fellow men" (*A Vision of Order* 177). This "feeling of compassion for one's fellow men" is one of the chief aspects of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism. It is the same lack of African humanist orientation shown above in the depiction of liberals which Mphahlele is exposing among outright apartheid champions by constructing the dialogue of characters like Stoffel Visser and Doppie Fourie (in "The Living and the Dead" cited earlier in this study), themselves being adherents of hardcore apartheid. To Visser and Fourie the future of South Africa lies either in continued domination of blacks by whites, or (if whites are lax in enforcing racial separation) a takeover by blacks (who are also likely to practice apartheid in reverse in the form of brutal domination of whites). Mphahlele's African humanism being a strategy that adapts itself from time to time to prevalent social attitudes, it is understandable why (in the above quotation from *Down Second Avenue*) he expresses a belief that at that point in the history of South Africa, the correct attitude of Africans is strategic or temporary exclusivism, which will include whites only later when their prevailing patronising tendency shall have abated. That

Mphahlele will not indulge in indiscreet trust of those who have until the recent past been on the side of power and control that worked against the survival of Africans (whether overtly or covertly) is revealed in the following blunt comment (which he made as recently as 1990): "No, we have been victims of *white dishonesty* for too long for us to be indulging in non-racial wet dreams, let alone any degree of orgasmic satisfaction at the sound of words such as 'forgiveness', 'reconciliation', 'New South Africa' – even before the other race has earned these tender mercies" ("Disinherited Imagination" 18, emphasis added). So to Mphahlele there has been "white dishonesty" during colonial times, and nowhere does he exclude liberals in his judgement of whites (during the apartheid era) as dishonest particularly in their treatment of blacks.

Mphahlele's abhorrence of the patronising politics of the South African liberals is tied up with his recoiling from neocolonialism, as he describes what he experienced as an exile when he tried to make inroads in Hastings Banda's Malawi: "So here I am with Chiume in his large office. The pictures on the walls give me an eerie feeling. I am surrounded by colonial ghosts, who peer out to remind me that they had steered the caravan of history across this country" (*Afrika My Music* 46). President Banda and the regime he leads are exposed in this quotation for the neocolonialists they are. That is why Mphahlele feels in the atmosphere of Banda's office the same unease he experiences in the face of liberalism. It comes as no surprise then, when Mphahlele is shooed out of the African President Banda's office and his bid to advance the self-expression of Africans through the arts is aborted (*Afrika My Music* 46). Fanon laments the neocolonialism that characterises some African states after liberation as follows: "We observe a permanent see-saw between African unity, which fades quicker and quicker into the mists of oblivion, and a heart-breaking return to chauvinism in its most bitter and detestable form" (*The Wretched* 126). The neocolonial chauvinism Mphahlele meets with when he attempts to include Malawi in post-independence self-constructing programmes in the name of African unity, is an example of the aspect of neocolonialism referred to by Fanon above. Here, neocolonialism works in direct opposition to the African humanist treatment of Africans as one all over the globe.

Of course, the creeping danger of neocolonialism in independent African states has been the obsession of every Africanist thinker, including heads of postcolonial states such as Nkrumah, Kaunda and Nyerere. In a 1996 essay, "The Function of Literature at the Present Time", Mphahlele spells out what he conceives as dangers that face the newly-independent African state, in the following words: "The focus is now on social manners, the betrayal of the nation by corrupt black dictators, the individual's relationship to political and economic power, the neo-colonial subversion of national goals, and so on" (421). The above citation makes clear that Mphahlele is sensitive to the potential dangers of neo-colonialism in his pursuit of the survival of African humanist values and practices beyond the period of apartheid or colonialism, in newly independent states.

While *Down Second Avenue* chronicles Mphahlele's struggle with the tyranny of time in apartheid South Africa, *Afrika My Music* graphically and microscopically explores the tyranny of place as Mphahlele experiences it during exile even in African states like Malawi and Kenya. The "tyranny of time" and the "tyranny of place" are interrelated for

Mphahlele. Tyranny of time to him in actual life is the tyranny of the historical time at home in South Africa in the form of the apartheid era as a segment of the long, unending history of black existence. Tyranny of place on the other hand indicates the cultural unfamiliarity of place experienced in exile, as well as the excruciating attraction to home soil which is at the same time rebuffed by conditions under apartheid. The harshness of exile in African states is best summed up when (upon his attempt at getting an appointment with President Banda of Malawi being snubbed) Mphahlele asks: "why is your government so hostile to South African exiles and refugees, especially Africans?" (47). The irony of Mphahlele's life history is that where the tyranny of time seems to abate in exile due to political and cultural freedom, the tyranny of place becomes dominant; back home where cultural convergence with fellow blacks and the South African locale eliminates the tyranny of place, the tyranny of time in the form of apartheid is the norm. For harmony to exist, time and place have to coincide in mutually reinforcing, non-tyrannical ways.

The author describes the tension of his life history as follows — while brooding on the condition of exile in his Philadelphia days of wandering:

> I could, if I chose, renew my lease indefinitely in this glasshouse, quite forget, write off my past, take my chances on new territory. I shall not. Because I'm a helpless captive of place and to come to terms with the tyranny of place is to have something to live for that saves me from stagnation, anonymity. It's not fame you want, it's having your shadow noticed. It's the comfort that you can show control over your life, that you can function. Comforting also to feel you can coil around the ego centre, feel the juices flow within and when time is ripe, uncoil, stretch out and feel the spiral motion of body and mind interwoven with other lives as a specific time and place. The place is not here alas, so the moment must wait its renewal time. (*Afrika My Music* 161–162)

Place is tyrannical to Mphahlele in that he cannot rip himself from a place whose colours and smells he is familiar with and still remain himself, whereas time is tyrannical to him because he cannot be himself in a historical juncture devoid of freedom. Reference to life in exile as "this glasshouse" reveals Mphahlele's regard of such a life as fragile because it is hollow. The hollowness of an exile's life is caused by Mphahlele's inability to have his "shadow noticed". This means that, in contrast with alienating American life where one hankers after individualist fame, life back home is amenable to his African humanist consciousness whose pursuit is to have one's memory immortalised after one's death (probably due to the recognition of perennial ancestral presence in human affairs).

The longing for a meaningful existence among fellow African humanists back home in South Africa is expressed by means of the image contained in the term "coil around the ego centre" as well as the image elicited in "uncoil, stretch out" – meaning that the African humanist consciousness is strengthened back home, through the nourishment one derives from familiar territory and social context (with the idea of nourishment captured in the image "feel the juices flow within"). Equipped with such a revitalised African humanist consciousness, (once back home) the author will have that "something to live for" without which life in exile is characterised by lack of impact on fellow humans due to his alienation from them (as indicated by "stagnation, anonymity"). After receiving

nourishing renewal of his African humanist awareness (with reference to consciousness indicated by means of the term "ego centre"), Mphahlele will perfect the meaningfulness of his life back home by interacting with fellow Africans. Such later action will yield synergy that is bigger than any one individual, and is equated to the existence of a whole people who transform in oneness into a distinctively African segment of the continuum of human existence (according to the way this catalytic power of African humanist synergy is described in the expression "body and mind interwoven with other lives as a specific time and place"). Such a depiction of the collective power of Africans may be the author's way of exhorting fellow Africans that their strength lies in contiguous, united effort rather than in a state of brooding on issues in isolation as exile may compel one to do.

The personal experience of seeing the Marabastad community subjected to forced removal by the apartheid government to make way for developments hatched by and known only to the powers that be (*Down Second Avenue* 151, 152) assumes a higher significance with Mphahlele's departure from South Africa into exile. While in exile, however, his attachment to his home never leaves him in peace, which feeling leads to 'place' (in exile) turning tyrannical. The tyranny of place proves shallow and short-lived as Mphahlele packs for home. Despite apartheid's continued dominance (i.e. the tyranny of time), Mphahlele as an African humanist achieves self-fulfilment by making the choice for a life of meaningful contribution to the survival of the identity of his people. The "sounds" of the familiar apartheid milieu "begin again" *inter alia* as he applies for a job at the University of the North and (because of oppressive apartheid attitudes) is denied the position (*Afrika My Music* 6), but Mphahlele finds the revival of his African humanist consciousness among groups of people sharing the same spiritual character with him, fulfilling. These milestones in his own personal history alternate (in his autobiographies) with bigger historical events like the Sharpeville massacre and the Soweto student uprising, and together they lend a remarkable resonance to his books as well as forming a specifically African humanist perspective because of the way the books record the way he has interpreted these events in terms of his African humanism.

3.3 CLOSING REMARKS

Mphahlele's thematic focus on the "tyranny of time" and the "tyranny of place" binds all his writings together, starting with the 1946 collection of short stories, enduring through the autobiography of 1959 and the 1960 poem "Exile in Nigeria" and persisting into the later autobiography of 1984. While the short stories seem to incline more towards a self-asserting celebration of life and pay tribute to resourceful black women, the poetry and autobiography deal more pointedly with the apartheid and exile themes. Mphahlele's constant emphasis on the tyranny of time exerted on him and fellow Africans by the apartheid government of the time should be interpreted as his reaction to what he not only sees as a threat to the material well-being of Africans under apartheid, but more importantly as an expression of his awareness of its more profound threat to the underlying African humanist consciousness, whose self-constituting preservation and capacity for redefining survival have been his life long concerns. Even as he tries to evade the tyranny of time by going into exile, its alienating effect on his African humanist composure and the displacement he suffers through the estranging experience of exile evoke in him a longing for communing with fellow African humanists back home. Unfortunately, memories of the delightful familiarity and identity with home cannot but enter Mphahlele's mind in tandem with the associated apartheid experiences which (by no choice of his own) are inseparable from the idea of home, as a result of the historical times in which he and his fellow South Africans live. In this way, Mphahlele's concept of African humanism cannot be defined without inclusion of its self-preserving capacity to strengthen resistance against the violence inflicted upon it – first by apartheid, and later by exile (combined with traumatising memories of apartheid).

All the works spanning the genres attended to so far conform to Mphahlele's tenets of African humanism in the way he describes the concept as a state of mind, a way of life and a meaning-making approach to life. There is indeed a characteristic Black Consciousness perspective (barring the parochialism imposed on the Black Consciousness Movement by its proponents, which Mphahlele is known to have criticised) to the works the study has so far looked at, probably externalising what Mphahlele has called the dialogue of two selves that is the "irony" of black existence (*African Image - Revised Edition* 79).

In the way Mphahlele describes it, the "dialogue of two selves" is a state in which the African writer needs to negotiate (by means of metaphors and symbols) the meeting point between the distant past and the immediate present, and success in this enterprise leads to the writer speaking in a prophethic voice ("African Literature" 267, 268, 271). Simply put, the dialogue of two selves within a writer is the source of alienation. A prophet is one who sings "and in what he sings he repeats a number of things [where] one note echoes what you said before" ("African Literature" 271). Different writers with different pasts will necessarily have varying dialogues of two selves, so that in the African American, for instance, one dialogue concerns slavery while the other dialogue results from the African American's life in contemporary American society. If an African feels alienated in exile, he or she had better go back to his or her continent, "because there the present and the past live side by side [as] the traditional past is also the present" ("African

Literature" 270). Of course the act of going back to Africa might end at the psychological level in embracing African consciousness without one's being physically able to relocate – as in the case of African Americans, people of the diaspora and other Africans for whom it may not be feasible to terminate physical dislodgement. Management of the dialogue of two selves succeeds when the two selves are dialectically reconciled. For an African writer, it is African humanist consciousness that will enable him to deal with the dialogue of two selves, because of the ability of such a consciousness to accommodate change and still retain its own distinctive identity. That is why Mphahlele writes that as an African writer with the proper consciousness:

> You can commute between the European stream and the indigenous. You can make reference to the one while you are in the other. The indigenous consciousness is there. It is solid. It is changing physically, yes … and yet age-old custom has survived, and this is why the dialogue continues between the old and the new. ("African Literature" 270)

Such a dialogue "between the old and the new" is brought to the surface in Mphahlele's narrative writings by means of images of the traditional past that are constantly made part of the fabric of writing/vision in combination with images of culturally African existence during historical times unfolding currently. This characteristic practice is what the critic J.U. Jacobs draws our attention to in stating that "Mphahlele crosses and re-crosses cultural thresholds deliberately to mediate discourse" ("Language and Liminality in South African Autobiographical Writing" 98). This very device is what Mphahlele calls resonance in the African humanist sense, by means of which he includes images of orature and myths (to achieve the repetitiveness of the notes of the prophet that he explains above, as oral literary devices are a repetition of what ancient Africans used to narrate). The cumulative effect of such culture-specific repetition is creation of an African humanist perspective. This is the case when we correctly acknowledge the rupture and discontinuity that may occur between the cultural past and present which would require modification in present forms in which culture is dialectically repeated and continued.

Perspective is achieved in Mphahlele's writings in yet other forms. One is his characteristic dialogue with or interrogation of the setting. Such an unusual infusion of the setting with life achieves an unmistakable embodiment as well as analysis of resilient survival of black life painted in all its minutiae. This almost allegorical animation of the physical milieu enables the author to attain a significant stylistic consistency, joining the short stories and the autobiographies. The generic confines of the short story, requiring a taut adherence to a single theme and limited emphasis on other parts of the narrative, does place constraints on what could otherwise be abundant applications of this effective style as far as representations of African humanism function to provide relief from ambient apartheid conditions. Predictably, the liberty of the longer narrative in terms of form gives latitude to the writer to indulge in this technique of painting the locale so graphically that the locale itself is elevated to the higher functional level of supplying resonance within the narratives.

The superior artistry of the autobiographies written by a number of black South African authors is explained by a writer like Ursula Barnett as being the consequence of freedom

on the part of the black African writers to: "shed all pretence of using [their] imagination" as is the writing of fiction under the unpropitious apartheid conditions yet with "all the elements which make the short stories interesting and readable [available to] be incorporated in the autobiography" (*A Vision of Order* 221-22). This generic stylic pattern can be applied to Mphahlele among the other writers discussed above by Barnett.

Concerning characterisation in Mphahlele's autobiographies, a continuity is established through the examples of obsequious black instruments of white power (such as Mfukeri in "The Master of Doornvlei" and the treacherous Swazi who join forces with the *voortrekkers* to overpower Sekhukhune as described in *Down Second Avenue*), flowing from the shorter fiction to the real-life actors of the autobiographies. Much as Mphahlele humorously satirises the mimicry of the black characters of the short stories and autobiographies, actions spawned by uncritical reactions to hegemonic culuture (such as the maids wearing beautiful western outfits on Thursdays in a manner that seeks to outshine the white madams in "Mrs Plum", and Grandma's restriction of Eseki and his siblings from playing with some of the children in Marabastad on the grounds that they are "heathen" or "uncivilized"), much sarcasm is also directed towards whites who are unable to acknowledge mutual cultural influence between blacks and whites, resulting in ambivalent consciousness and behaviour that is a corollary of colonisation. Such failure to acknowledge ambivalence is shown when the white madams (in "Mrs Plum") feel intimidated by the sleekness of some of the maids in western dress on Thursdays. (Recognition of the Africanness of the black domestic workers undergoing a dialectical fusion with western manners should supposedly replace fear with a positive appreciation of diminishing cultural division on the part of the white ladies.) One more aspect of characterisation that links the short stories with the autobiographies is an eye-opening portrayal of actors who are prone to neocolonial influence. In the shorter narratives, the actions of Ishola's husband (in "A Ballad of Oyo") can be seen as an inadvertent hero-worshipping of the colonial culture that is inclined towards a plundering of weaker persons and territories and hoarding of money and other material possessions obtained through such conquest or subjugation. This is seen when the husband rotates among his different wives in different geographical locations only to feast on whatever harvest the toiling women might have secured while he was away loafing and drinking without engaging in any beneficial economic activity. While westerners indulge in leisure only after hard work, imperfections and misjudgements that go with mimicry confuse Balogun to perceive only one aspect of the whiteman's spectacular culture – that is, enjoyment of material possession acquired through making other people toil who are perceived as being weaker. Mphahlele proceeds in the longer narratives to debunk the lurking peril of neocolonialism, exemplified by the snobbishness of President Banda of Malawi in *Afrika my Music*.

From the above it is clear that the devices employed in Mphahlele's shorter works of art are put to more vivid and effective use in the autobiographies. All the stylistic features identified earlier on and attributed to Mphahlele's writing abound in the later works — the autobiographies that have been the subject of the present section of this study. He engages, by the very stylistic devices he uses to instance aspects of his concept of African humanism, with issues that preoccupy theorists like Ndebele. An example of such a

theoretical engagement by Mphahlele includes how he resolves in his writings (as our analysis of the autobiographies demonstrates) the problem which Ndebele has stated in the following words: "The role of English in South Africa is a matter the complexity of which goes far beyond the convenience and correctness of its use, for that very convenience, and that very correctness, are, in essence, problematic. The problem is that recourse to them is fraught with assumptions" ("The English Language" 103). It is the assumptions regarding the very "convenience and correctness" which Ndebele is talking about above that Mphahlele attempts to resolve by the use of tactics such as literal translation that accommodates the African way of thinking. Mphahlele is also aware that "recourse to [convenient and correct English] is fraught with assumptions" ("The English Language" 103). That is why his handling of narrative writing as evidenced also in the autobiographies displays an awareness that writing in "correct" English would work against the agency that the concept of African humanism is all about. Such an abrogation of the English language by Mphahlele reveals his recognition of the problematic of communicating to the colonised in a language that is an item in colonial hegemony – similarly to the way Ndebele does. Cautioning against attempting to stick to 'correct' English, Said has written that "there is a generalized awareness that the colonial language can be used to attack the system of political control"by means of which "as a world-language English has a rather menacing side when it is exported" ("Beginnings" 30, 31).

It remains to be probed, as the latter part of this study will now attempt to do, what the texture of Mphahlele's novels is and whether the kinds of writings exemplified in them serve to further clarify the concept of African humanism (or not) within the fictional medium, what the themes of these writings are and whether such style and themes as feature in the novels function effectively in the quest to give the readers a fuller understanding of the concept of African humanism. It is only logical to posit that if Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is as coherent and nuanced at it avows, it must prove so in different environments, especially environments farther removed from Africa both geographically and spiritually. Hence the crucial need to test the strength of this philosophy on a global, postcolonial scale. The milieu of Mphahlele's novels should prove to be even more fertile ground against which to test the strength of African humanism, because of their more extensive and complex globality than that of an autobiography like *Afrika My Music*. If anything may appear repetitive to the senses of the reader in the next chapter, it will be as the result of the fictionality linking Mphahlele's fiction with autobiography; definitely not as a result of the autobiographies being anywhere close to the novels in their global stride of action and vivid colouring of disparate culturally-definable consciousnesses.

4. <u>THE NOVELS</u>

4.1 OPENING REMARKS

Having explored Mphahlele's autobiographies in the preceding chapter, it is relevant (before moving on to his novels) to compare autobiography as writing on one's own life history with the novel as fiction. It has already been indicated that on the need for a relevant writer to "have vision" in Mphahlele's terms (*Looking Through* 35), he or she must go beyond the evident and the obvious.

Ndebele has remarked that in order for the writer to be relevant "during the process of struggle" such a writer should "pay closer attention to [the] material expression … such that culture itself can constitute the material content of a changing alternative consciousness" ("Towards" 131). Fanon similarly remarks that "the popular struggle [for liberation]" and "the fight for culture" should develop in an intertwined manner because "this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men *cannot leave intact* either the form or content of the people's culture" ("On National Culture" 187, 198, emphasis added). For the "form or content of the people's culture" to be transfigured as Fanon suggests (by means of the italicised words above), the writer has to "pay closer attention to [the] material expression" following Ndebele's view of the role of the writer as an "interpreter" – that is, the writer should not reproduce empirical reality as it is, but should "pay closer attention to it" by interpreting it in line with his or her hypothetical solution of existential challenges. From these statements it is clear that Fanon, like Mphahlele in asserting "vision" and Ndebele in advocating "a changing alternative consciousness", sees the need for writers among the oppressed of the world representing the reality of the people while at the same time forging an understanding, a questioning or a theory springing from a response to the specific challenges posed by the environment. In distinguishing fiction from such factual writing as historiography (which is a divergent mode of representation from fiction in that it stops at reporting "objectively" on "bare facts"), Pavel (commented on in the preceding chapter) thus agrees with Fanon, Mphahlele and Ndebele's views that fiction should reach beyond a mere reproduction of the everyday events it imitates. This is what Mphahlele means by differentiating "[writing on] the moment" from a mode of writing which "goes beyond the moment" and expresses a vision ("Fiction and Imitation" 522; *Looking Through* 35; "Towards" 131).

What these statements by Fanon, Pavel, Ndebele and Mphahlele highlight is the double function of literature — both as a straightforward reproduction of the conditions about which it is writtten and as a purposefully adapted or arranged reproduction of such conditions. The state of the representation of reality in fiction being filtered through the author's artistic and moral choices mediates what would otherwise be a somewhat punctilious reproduction into imaginative, persuasive writing. According to what Achebe states in "The Truth of Fiction", "man's imagination" is the "apparatus" through which "[man] has the capacity … to create fictions" whose function is "to help [humans] out of particular problems [they] encounter in living" (*Hopes* 139, 140, 141). This means that

to “have a vision” as Mphahlele puts it (*Looking Through* 35), or to “create fictions” (in Achebe’s terms) (*Hopes* 141), is aimed at resolving “particular problems … [encountered] in living” (Hopes 140), or (as Mphahlele formulates it), is a means towards “[going] beyond the moment into the future” (*Looking Through* 35). This explains why Mphahlele had inevitably to create the “fiction” of African humanism in order to enable himself to “go beyond” the existential challenge of cultural obliteration faced by Africans at a particular point in their history.

The arguments cited above by Pavel, Ndebele, Mphahlele and Achebe imply that in reading fiction (including Mphahlele’s own fiction) the reader must not expect an unmediated modelling of the fictional events on everyday occurrences. In this sense, autobiography stands between historiography (as objective, factual reproduction of reality according to Pavel) and fiction as far as skilful imitation of reality is concerned, because in autobiography one reports on the bare facts of (both personal and public) history while at the same time reporting on one’s own subjective opinion about and reaction to such historical facts. Chapman rightly explains that for the South African autobiographer who is engaged in recording personal and public historical moments, “the larger issue of racial oppression” inevitably leads to “the roles of artistic consciousness and social conscience … resist[ing] the literary critic’s discrete classifications” (“Identity and the Apartheid State” 230). This can be said to account for the thin line between Mphahlele’s fiction and autobiography as resulting from the common element of subjective interpretation of black life in the face of colonisation and apartheid. Because the autobiographies also contain Mphahlele’s subjective reaction to conditions under apartheid/colonisation, they are a representation of a life lived that skilfully encodes existential hypotheses and beliefs. Manipulated representation of reality is bound to be especially reliable in the case of a writer like Mphahlele, who has been described by witers like Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma as “using literature to come to terms with his own life” as well as “explore the meaning of raw experience in fiction” (*Es’kia* 461). By this the writers mean that Mphahlele makes use of his writing (whether it is autobiography or pure fiction) to reach for a meaningful interpretation (for himself and his compatriots in particular) of his life experiences and those of the society he writes about. This is responsible for Mphahlele’s autobiographies and fiction having the common denominator of arising from and interpreting the writer’s personal experiences. If Mphahlele’s autobiographical works chronicle his biographical history in dexterous literary ways (as demonstrated in the analysis carried out in the preceding sections of this study), and if Mphahlele’s approach to life and literature is as it is described in the quotation above from Ogude *et al.*, then his autobiographies are very close to fiction in the way they reflect reality. As such, only a flimsy partition exists between Mphahlele’s autobiographies and novels. The difference between fiction and “imitation” as described by Pavel clarifies the position of autobiography as straddling historiography (as objective imitation) and fiction (as manipulated imitation), which should justify moving in this dissertation from an analysis of writing that is closer to historiography to scrutinising the mode that is further away from such “factual” writing, proceeding from autobiography to the novels.

Mphahlele's disapproval of tendentious promotion of ideology in creative writing as well as the way he counteracts such simplification in his fiction through detailed attention to the achievement of resonance and cultural perspective (demonstrated earlier in this study), suggest the aptness to his writing of Ndebele's theory. In "Against Pamphleteering the Future" Ndebele iterates his approval of the writer functioning as an "interpreter" when he remarks that: "The power of the written word in the moulding of social perceptions should never be taken for granted" ("Against Pamphleteering" 141). He then condemns simplified writing in the following words:

> We should not pamphleteer the future. Nor should we pamphleteer the past. To pamphleteer the future is to reduce complex issues to simple formulations such that understanding is prevented, or at best, clouded. Pamphleteering the future means writing that establishes its case without the onus of proof; writing that challenges without educating, that is heroic without being too convinced of its heroism. Pamphleteering the future might also mean conviction without knowledge. ("Against Pamphleteering" 142)

Of this flaw (of being simplistic and facile in analysis of society) Said has written that "There is nothing more indecent in criticism than someone who uses a lot of marginal nonsense … as a substitute for serious refutation" ("Beginnings" 9).

Writing in 1983 on the impoverishing results of any literary work which compromises needed complexity in social commentary that goes beyond incitement to action without concomitant education of readers concerning the details of the context within which such action may occur, Mphahlele expresses his convictions on the role of an "interpreter" in the following words: "I propose that we think of literature as a compulsive cultural act – an act of self-knowledge, an act of language. Against such a proposition we can best see how intimately literature can monitor intellectual and emotional growth and contribute to its refinement at the personal and social levels" ("Versus the Political Morality" 361).

The position expressed above by Mphahlele convinces one that in his writings he resists compromising circumspection and racial inclusiveness, while articulating the predominantly black cultural-experiential identity he calls African humanism. This should be why he has observed that "Every culture" including African cultures "has its own abominations and crudities but, if it is developed, we expect it to display awareness of these and institutionalise efforts to purge itself" ("Versus the Political Morality" 362). To display an awareness of the follies within cultures in a non-partisan manner as Mphahlele professes above tallies with his views that literary production should be "an act of self-knowledge" so that "literature can monitor intellectual and emotional growth and contribute to its refinement" ("Versus the Political Morality" 361). On this point Ndebele too has exhorted that: "We need to create a broad literary culture founded on the understanding that writing in all its various forms represents the attempt of the human mind to reach out towards ever increasing intellectual refinement" ("Against Pamphleteering" 143).

In another affirmation of the views on literature cited above, Mphahlele in an interview with Manganyi recalls an incident when he visited Fort Hare university, in which one

staff member expressed a concern that African humanism could exclude people of races other than African if its artistic expression should "have a sense of self-pride and work with [its] own African idioms" (*Looking Through* 35). On this score Mphahlele argues that the African humanist artist is not bound to be racially or culturally exclusive, in the following words: "There is no reason why he should be [exclusive] if he is a good artist. He must have a vision and there is no reason why he should become exclusive. If he does, it is because he is very local in his appeal. But there is nothing wrong with that, as a starting point" (*Looking Through* 35). Here Mphahlele reiterates the importance of the African humanist writer moving beyond a mere direct reporting on instances of life to the higher level at which the writer's vision leads him or her to evoke a richer interpretation of life. In keeping with this line of argument, the Pan Africanist writer may (appear to) exclude non-Africans in the fiction he or she writes, as long as this is only the first-level meaning of the work of art. In the same way (according to Mphahlele's point cited earlier), there is nothing wrong with protest literature, provided that it is enriched with African humanist detail – identified by him as myth, resonance and perspective. This is the case because, as soon as the work is interrogated at the higher level where the writer infuses it with his or her vision, every reader will make his or her own subjective interpretation of it, whether African or non-African. Such a vindication of focusing at the primary level on the identity of Africans is consistent with Mphahlele's conception of African humanism as a strategically essentialist concept whose behavioural essentialism could be discarded when people of other identities have acknowledged the existence of Africans as a distinctive cluster of worthy cultural groups bound by a fundamentally common behavioural identity born of geo-political factors resulting from events of the past such as brutish slavery, imperial colonisation and apartheid exclusivism. Such a transformation of exclusivity into inclusivity is parallel with the proper harnessing of literary style redeeming a work of art from pedestrian sloganeering that imposes ready-made solutions on the reader in order – instead – to equip the reader with a catalyst of the imagination enabling him or her to understand and resolve existential obstacles.

Espousing the philosophy of African humanism which he has described as incapable of exclusivity, Mphahlele cannot but practise inclusivity as an ingredient of the free, unselfcensored, creative imagination. In the interview with Manganyi quoted above, the writer concedes that to be exclusive as a writer is to be unrealistic, as life itself is (at the higher level) characterised by complex inclusivity/holism; and to be exclusive is to censor oneself and take away from oneself the freedom of creative imagination, since reality consists of more than one's own chosen focus of attention (35-50). The inclusivity or holism of life itself (in Mphahlele's reasoning) functions at the secondary level where a number of exclusive identities meet to form a complex; and that is why the African humanist artist should not ignore the exclusivity (at the primary level) of Africanness in order to arrive at the rich inclusivity of the secondary level. It is for this reason that in defining African humanism as an inclusive concept, Mphahlele himself (as well as Afrocentric writers like Manganyi) have in a sustained and consistent manner illustrated the incompatibility of creative writing with any laying of borderlines for the imagination. In "The Censored Imagination", Manganyi writes: "Let us say what the censored imagination is not; let us celebrate its poverty by eulogising the creative successes of the *free* imagination and we will gradually come to know the former" (*Looking Through* 54,

emphasis added). Manganyi here stresses (as Mphahlele does, above) the indispensable need for any imaginative activity (including narrative writing) to be free and uncensored.

Following the above description of Mphahlele's relationship with his work, one would expect only a slight difference between his autobiography and fiction. The difference is expected to show with regard to what Mphahlele foregrounds at the primary/mimetic level in the autobiographies as contrasted with what he foregrounds at the primary/mimetic level in the novels. But because Mphahlele's handling of language in the autobiographies is no less profound than in the novels, at the higher level of representing the invisible norms and values that inform the observable (imitable) action, one should not expect any difference in terms of impact. Their literary art (as opposed to plain preachings of pre-set ideas) should rescue the novels from the sloganeering that Mphahlele has criticised, making them creative explorations of what constitutes African humanist lifestyles and practices and what the challenges to these are. In this way, the novels take the form of journeys of discovery for the author as well as for the reader.

The analysis of *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* will be guided by this view which I share (though critically, as I show above) with writers like Pavel when he asserts that: "Literary fictions … differ from history (but not from myth) insofar as they emphasize the problematic nature of the links between observable (imitable) action and the invisible norms and values that inform it …" (532). If concurrence with (the editorial note of) Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma, that Mphahlele's autobiographical work is so poetic as to attain the stature of works of art (*Es'kia* 461) is valid, then the literary quality of the language in the autobiographies should result in a greater blurring of the line between fiction and direct imitation of life than Pavel suggests. The common 'fictional' quality shared by Mphahlele's autobiographies and his novels is brought about by his consistently subtle and complex representation of African humanism in both of the genres.

Mphahlele's *The Wanderers* (1971) and *Chirundu* (1979) are both about wandering as well as transformation. The themes of wandering and transformation are handled in inverse proportion in the two novels. The former novel places wandering (of individuals and groups) under a magnifying glass in such a way that individual transformation of characters both as individuals and as members of groups is depicted in fine detail. This is due to what Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma observe when they describe *The Wanderers* as "[leaning] heavily on the autobiographical as it confronts the thoughts and events Mphahlele lived through" (458). The latter novel centralises personal and societal transformation while exile/wandering is pushed to the periphery. It is important to perceive that the theme of wandering still forms the background of *Chirundu*, for, as the above critics rightly state, "characters both local and refugee" in *Chirundu* "are often based on real people" (*Es'kia* 460).

Predictably, these two books, in different ways and to varying degrees, make bold attempts at dismantling and redefining the form of the novel. Mphahlele's comments on the form of the novel are relevant here:

> We must not delude ourselves that the novel as we have inherited it from the white world is the ideal genre in its present form …We also need to evolve another kind of narrative by way of domesticating the novel, without necesssarily telling people to stop writing the novel in its present form. Also, autobiography should be encouraged. Epic forms should be revived. ("The African Critic" 386)

Mphahlele's asseveration of the need to "[domesticate] the novel" exhibits the similarity of his theoretical stance with Said's recognition that "in the main … the European novel [is] a cultural form consolidating but also refining and articulating the authority" of imperial Europe ("Consolidated Vision" 91). The above statement by Mphahlele about domesticating the form of the novel, is compatible with the style and aim of his literary project: of conveying and reinforcing the concept of African humanism. Reinforcing African humanist inclinations – relatively foreign ideas in the western world – could not have been a pursuit of the novel when the form of the novel was conceived and evolved in the western world. Orature, which is an African literary form as far as Mphahlele's theory goes, has always included praise poetry (whose content is usually autobiographical) as well as epic renditions of a tribe or nation's history, ancestry, myths and envisaged fate. It is because such a traditional use of autobiographical and epic orature are native to this continent that Mphahlele believes (as he states in the quotation above) that their encouragement and revival in modernised forms should ensure the survival of an African humanist consciousness, in much the same way as appropriation of the novel form should.

Critics like Lokangaka Losambe and Rina Minervini have written perceptively and analytically about Mphahlele's rupture with the normative structure of the novel as determined by Europe. However, this they have done without necessarily identifying the constitutive devices in the same way as this study attempts to do. Losambe subscribes to the view that there is no universal norm regarding structure for the novel when he remarks that:

> Structure is, in essence, the framework from which the plot evolves, and the author builds his novelistic world around its internal, complex relationships. This world may envelop as many persons, things and relationships as possible, but these must not conflict with its aesthetic framework, refered to here as structure … This argument lead us to the conclusion that just as we have various designs for various types of houses, we can have various structures for various types of novels … Perhaps the major mistake often made by critics who try to evaluate various novels is their assumption that there is only one possible and fixed structure for the novel. ("Apartheid and Es'kia Mphahlele's Aesthetics in *The Wanderers*" 156)

It is similarly with reference to the peculiar way Mphahlele handles the structure of the novel to dovetail with his theory of African humanism that the critic Rina Minervini observes redefinition of novelistic form in his novel *Chirundu* : "Unusually structured in third-person marrative, dramatic dialogue and first-person narrative, the novel explores the moral dilemmas of its greater stage through the lives of its central characters and something like a Greek-chorus commentary involving a group of South African exiles" ("Chirundu" 40). Without the need for focusing especially on the representations of African humanism in *Chirundu*, Minervini uses terms such as "moral dilemmas of its

greater stage" and "Greek-chorus commentary" to refer respectively to the African humanist elements of existential alienation from Africanist consciousness, and communality of dialogic expression depicted in this novel.

4.2 THE TYRANNY OF PLACE AND TIME PORTRAYED IN BOLD

In his newspaper review of *The Wanderers*, Guwa (8) describes the book as a "semi-autobiographical novel … set in South Africa" which in part -- and he correctly ascribes the intention to a statement by Mphahlele himself -- tries to show that exile begins at home. The following passage is one of the many examples from this text that shows black life in apartheid South Africa as no less alienating than life in exile:

> In fact, *Bongo* reporters found out that several [black pass-law offenders] had been forced onto the trucks; that white farmers raided labour bureaux and police stations to collect their human cargo for their farms. On these farms they were stripped of their clothing and dressed in sacks. They worked from dawn to after sunset at the point of a whip. At night they were chained and locked up in high-walled compounds. (*The Wanderers* 18)

Although for the black farm labourers the place is familiar South Africa to which they are intimately tied as it is their home, the inhumane conditions in which they are forced to live constitute an experience akin to exile in that the dehumanisation taking place here clashes with their African humanist consciousness that values human life as sacred (and as such cannot compromise the well-being of people for material gain). The early sections of the novel set in South Africa are in fact a continuation of the theme of exile-at-home which starts (albeit in subtle ways) in as early a work as *Down Second Avenue*, which for many may appear to have nothing to do with exile as it is entirely set in South Africa. It is likely to have been detection of the atmosphere of psychological exile that obtains in the earlier work that led Gready to remark that "During the course of *Down Second Avenue* the comfort of community and family recedes into the background as bitterness and frustration take root" (159). It is the progressive intensification of a feeling of exile-at-home caused by the unrelenting, crushing effect of living conditions wrought of apartheid that leads to "frustration tak[ing] root" among characters in the early work as well as within Mphahlele himself as a participant-observer in the real life which the work echoes. Evident in this early autobiography is the same theme of exile-at-home that we now encounter in the opening sections of *The Wanderers*.

The experience of exile which underlies the story of *The Wanderers* is depicted through the description of the characters and the setting as starting in South Africa and ramifying through the whole of Africa until it refracts at the global level. It is important to specify that the experience of exile is refracted (and not just reflected) in that it is experienced and expressed subjectively by the narrator (imbued as he is with a restive African humanist consciousness) in the form of interpreted reality rather than as a life that is axiomatically accepted to be without alternatives. Mphahlele himself seems to have consciously intended to highlight the broadness of the parameters within which the oddysey that is *The Wanderers* unfurls, having to contend with a broad and disparate variety of local demands, as the story advances towards the close of the novel, when he assembles a sordid montage of reportage such as: "And the telegram came from Dar es Salaam. Felang had been killed" (312); and: "Steven Cartwright … was yesterday killed during heavy mortar fire now raging between government and rebel forces near the Eastern province border in the Congo" (315). The concentration of depressing reports like this in a single closing section of the novel and through the senses of the same

recipient creates a heavy atmosphere that is the antithesis of the exile detailed in *Afrika My Music*, that ends happily when Mphahlele returns home to South Africa (*Afrika My Music* 1). The fact that *The Wanderers* was written while Mphahlele was still in exile during which he obsessively revealed the fear of being unable ever to return to South Africa ("Africa in Exile" 124, 125) should enable us to sense an expression of Mphahlele's own fear of death in exile in the images of death in these closing lines of *The Wanderers*. Attwell's take on Felang's death (*Wanderers* 312) is that it is "chiefly psychic, a stripping of illusion in the consciousness of the narrator himself" ("Mphahlele's *The Wanderers*" 70). I agree that at one level, the gory death of Felang and other freedom fighters could express Mphahlele's belief that it is futile at this juncture to utilise one's youthful years to fight either the menacing obduracy of settler governments that are still intact (like the one in apartheid South Africa) or lop-sided black nationalist governments in the free states of Africa now plagued by evils like ethnicity, corruption or neocolonialism (as he has experienced in Iboyoru). But this image of what happens to the lifeless bodies of young freedom fighters does go further to externalise Mphahlele's own fear of dying in exile where he will be without a grave (as the image of being entombed inside living corocodiles actually suggests). What causes Mphahlele's resentment at the idea of dying before the freedom he is striving for is achieved, is that the apartheid regime would actually dig its roots even deeper as well as grow stronger once it has been relieved of the agitation that his own actions as an artist-revolutionary could inflict.

Timi's experiences in Iboyoru are significant for revealing the survival of an African humanist consciousness in him. While it is correct to link Timi's seeking of solace within an atmosphere of community during his wanderings to "the author's concern with creating identity" (as the critic Ramakuela does), one might observe that the author Mphahlele's concern, through such a delineation of Timi's character, is "with creating" the specific identity called African humanism ("Exile and Return" 43-44). This is the case because the cultural tendency to find fulfilment in performing whatever one does within and to the benefit of the community is a tenet of the concept of African humanism, as Mphahlele has characterised it. After Timi Tabane's psychological exile at home in South Africa has developed to a physical one in the African state of Iboyoru, he takes up teaching at Takora University. The common African humanist consciousness in the exile Timi and the Iboyoru citizen Awoonor impels them both to express a yearning for the Africanisation of educational structure and content in Iboyoru, now an independent state.

While both men chafe psychologically against the neocolonial educational, social and economic culture, through the authorial voice Timi's lonely condition of exile elicits the anguished self-awareness typical of exile:

> And what power did he represent? None. He was not even sure that he knew the problems of Iboyoru sufficiently to suggest a single remedy. He was a black foreigner, and could only talk to a man like Awoonor who could not possibly mistake his inquiring habit for the arrogance of an alien … Then the howling of the long-tongued hounds his dreams seemed to symbolise – the hounds from the far south, his home country: could he cease to heed them? (*The Wanderers* 203-204)

In the cited quotation it can be seen that the protagonist is haunted (even though he is now in a supposedly different context) by a similar, if somewhat differently coloured, sense of alienation as has been the case in his South African home village of Jericho and neighbouring villages like Sekoting, neighbouring towns like Tirong and abominable farms like Goshen where the dehumanising conditions of black labourers could not but intensify the sense of alienation of a person with as inquiring a mind as Timi Tabane. What he is experiencing in Iboyoru is xenophobia, which is a less severe form of alienation as contrasted with the intense psychological exile he has experienced in apartheid South Africa. The nightmares he has about "the hounds from the far south" indicates that the trauma of estrangement and fear in apartheid South Africa does not relent even after he has departed from South Africa. Such an imprisonment to "place" that is apartheid South Africa defying the distance of physical exile has to do with what the theorist Attwell calls "the fugitive['s] double consciousness" in which "he is both within and outside the prevailing order … [because] the fugitive never quite loses his investment in the politics of *place*" ("Es'kia Mphahlele's *The Wanderers*" 69). The introspective question Timi asks himself regarding whether he will "cease to heed" the hounds from the far south reveals intimacy with the plight of blacks back home in South Africa (i.e. "his investment in the politics of *place*") – a feeling he is still struggling to overcome after initially hoping that it would abate upon his attaining the 'freedom' of exile. Exactly as Ramakuela has observed, Timi's "search" for freedom and his truer self "begins at home in South and ends with the recognition that, to be fully himself, he needs to return there" ("Exile and Return" 44). Such a longing to return home despite the (at the time) continuing prevalence of apartheid is to pursue Timi throughout his whole exiled life, similarly to the way Mphahlele has described his own anguish during exile:

> I also realised that the longer we were away from South Africa, the angrier, the more outraged I felt against the plight of the black Africans – out of sheer impotence. In a sense my homecoming was another way of dealing with impotent anger. It was also a way of extricating myself from twenty years of the compromise that exile itself is. Indeed, exile had become for me a 'ghetto of the mind' ... For us, the best thing would be to move back home, we decided. ("Africa in Exile" 124, 125)

By referring to exile as "a ghetto of the mind" Mphahlele is exposing the soul-destroying quality of ghetto life (as he experienced it in apartheid South Africa), which is ironically continuing to live within him in exile after he had hoped to leave it behind. This initial hope in African writers of the time, who opted for self-exile, is borne out by what Bloke Modisane expresses in his autobiography (which closes just as he leaves for exile): "I wanted a little peace, some amount of freedom, and a little time to reconstruct my battered soul under an easier political climate where I could humanise myself. Ezekiel Mphahlele had been writing me sane letters which implied that he was on the road to a human recovery …" (*Blame Me* 250).

Ironically the "sane letters" referred to above were not sane at all, as the above metaphor of "a ghetto of the mind" (in Mphahlele's words) reveals ("Africa in Exile" 125). At a subtle level the metaphor of "a ghetto of the mind" reveals the hybrid personality composed of exile experience and persistent African humanist consciousness, which

creates a tension that Mphahlele only resolves at the "actor" level by returning home to live meaningfully among his own people.

The pain of psychological attraction to the familiar cultural context of South Africa while being physically exiled is the nightmare not only of Mphahlele during exile, but also of fellow exiles. In Nat Nakasa's "Met with Smiles and Questions" (*The World of Nat Nakasa*), we are shown how Nakasa joins the thrilling night life of New York to go and attend a performance by the exiled South African musician Hugh Masekela, in which the trumpeter blows "Pondo and Swazi tunes in Greenwich Village" (114). For Nakasa to notice the Pondo and Swazi rhythms of Masekela's music in a New York nightclub is a revelation of the lingering African humanist aesthetic values remaining with him in exile. After Masekela's performance, Miriam Makeba's daughter gives a poetry peformance which for Nakasa reveals that "she obviously" longs for South Africa (114). Hugh Masekela confides to Nakasa and fellow exiles soon after the show that he wishes he could go home "just to hear the music of the people there – the Pondos, the Zulus and the Shangaans" (114). Todd Matshikiza similarly describes an incident in London when he meets a black Nigerian student who confides in him that "when you come to study in the white man's land, brother, you take out only the white water, an' you swallow the black blot" (*Chocolates for My Wife* 14). What the speaker means is that the pull of home can only be atoned for by pretending to nourish one's brains by means of distilling the European section of one's hybrid culture and repressing the African recesses of one's soul, in order to deal with the alienation of (temporary) exile. Matshikiza himself describes such an experience in words that reveal his longing for South Africa. When he is directed to the Club in Norfolk Street and leaves the African who has just directed him with a smile on his face, he says: "Me and my frozen smile. Frozen on my face like the butcher's display window freezes a pig's head and trotters, or sheep's head and trotters. We called it the Smiling Face in Johannesburg …" (14).

The smile is frozen on Matshikiza's face because the pain of separating from the African with whom he has in the short while they walk together become intimate transports his mind longingly to South Africa from which he has been ripped in as dehumanising a manner as butchers treat the animals they slaughter, display and sell. Despite bitter memories of apartheid back home in South Africa, something the exiles miss in the African social milieu makes them long perpetually to return home. African exiles share this surviving spiritual attraction to home soil. They may differ in how each individually resolves the "dialogue of two selves" that alienation puts them through – Nat Nakasa, for instance, subsequently falls "from the seventh floor of a New York City skycraper" and dies aged 28 (*The World of Nat Nakasa* xii). This happens possibly because he cannot repress the passionate longing for home raging within him in the face of the unrelenting alienation of exile. In Mphahlele's terms, the nostalgia of the exiles (illustrated above) is a manifestation of their underlying African humanist consciousness that survives the overwhelming alienation of exile.

Africans face alienation whether on foreign or home soil. This is exemplified in *The Wanderers* when Timi joins *Bongo* magazine but not because he loves journalism. He does so "after being thrown out of secondary school teaching", as Arthur Maimane would

say of Mphahlele in his memoir on his time with the latter on the staff of *Drum* ("I remember Zeke when …" 38). More significantly, his "unruly" behaviour as a teacher under Bantu Education is a mere outward concretisation of his conscience that does not allow him to continue teaching his people "only those things that would make them willing followers of the white man's instructions" (11). That Timi is forced by circumstances to leave teaching and become a journalist is revealed by the following words of the narrator himself: "I had never really thought of making journalism my second love [after teaching, because I loved teaching so much that] it could not ever be" (11). Timi's conscience that does not allow him to feed young black minds with the kind of education determined to perpetrate black people's humiliation by the apartheid centre should be understood as being a manifestation of the deeper African humanist conscience within him. In the way Mphahlele has defined African humanism, the concept refers to a consciousness that leads the people it drives to collide with "othering" attitudes displayed by non-Africans (such as the non-African rulers' imposition of educational content for Africans, described above), so they seek to behave in a self-constituting manner. If African humanist consciousness is the motive behind Timi's revolt against the education system, it then becomes clear that the act of abandoning teaching is an indication of his undertaking to define himself. Timi's non-voluntary joining of Bongo magazine as an attempt at self-definition expands from personal self-realisation to self-realisation as an existence-through-communal-experience.

The journey Timi undertakes with Naledi in search of her husband is one that increases self-definition, because it grows beyond individualist concerns into communal concerns. The slave conditions the two unearth at Goshen farm and the search for Naledi's husband form a broader, more profound discovery of self in the communal sense; the state of mind Mphahlele has called African humanism. The novel thus exemplifies "the tyranny of time" by way of depicting the *tyranny* of apartheid at the *time* in history that is its context. The reality that their lifespan coincides with the heyday of apartheid alienates Timi and his people from their otherwise loved and intimate setting. The alienation of Timi and fellow Africans is brought about by their African humanist consciousness, whose co-existence with incongruous apartheid consciousness gives rise to friction. Place, too, comparably to its role in exile, proves to be tyrannical to the probing mind of Timi, because the rulers have replaced its (pre-colonial) familiarity with (colonial) unfamiliarity – for the natives. In this sense, for Africans living in South Africa under apartheid, the meaning of life resembles that experienced by those in exile in foreign territory. Hence my concurrence with Guwa (1984) (stated at the beginning of this chapter) that the novel sets out to show that (psychological) exile begins at home, although Guwa falls short of detecting that this exiled condition of Africans in their home state is informed by the consciousness Mphahlele has called African humanism, and as such is not just a superficial reaction to the action of the champions of apartheid. As his self-definition grows broader and deeper, Timi realises more and more clearly that Africans as a people are strangers both at home and outside the borders of South Africa. Such sensitivity is evidence of Timi's African humanist consciousness that enables him to appreciate the severity of the African's alienation. This consciousness equips him to contrast the two conflicting consciousnesses that have led to those in whom power

resides seeking to counteract the distinctive identity of the powerless by means of an obliterating brutality.

The huge impact on the senses caused by Timi's sensitivity to the denial of African humanist values in the way Africans are treated by the powerful whites is revealed by the imagery that indicates that on the white farms Africans were "stripped of their clothing", "dressed in sacks", worked "at the point of a whip", as well as being "chained and locked up in high-walled compounds" (*The Wanderers* 18). Through the eyes of the narrator Mphahlele conveys the gravity of such maltreatment from the African humanist point of view in a similar way to that of another Black Conscious writer, Manganyi (1981), who describes the living conditions of Africans during apartheid as out of step with *botho/ubuntu* or African humanism, as follows:

> Today, when we talk about black housing needs, we are referring to two sets of conditions. In the first instance, we are talking about requirements that are generally well known. We know, for example, that for most family settings the standard four-roomed house with its notorious deficiencies is inadequate for family activities – something which in reality is more than sleeping at night. This activity means, amongst other things, that parents should be able to engage in a quarrel or make love for that matter, without intruding on the delicate sensibilities of growing children … the other facet has to do with community consultation and participation. (*Looking Through* 155-156)

Mphahlele's orientation towards communal, African humanist living is revealed in statements such as the one he expresses by means of the character Timi, quoted in this section (*The Wanderers* 18). As he is himself an intellectual motivated by African humanist consciousness, Timi needs to be portrayed as sensitive to problems besetting himself and his fellow Africans.

The hobbling conditions under which Africans are made to live, "locked up in high-walled compounds" and in the "standard four-roomed house" (as Mphahlele and Manganyi depict in *The Wanderers* and *Looking Through the Keyhole* respectively), can be looked at as natural choices of representation in terms of Said's theory (*The Wanderers* 18; *Looking Through* 156). Said describes the act (which necessarily negates self-definition) more fully in the following words:

> I'm not sure I could define it economically, or neatly for that matter, but certainly representation, or more particularly the act of representing (and hence reducing) others, almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation, as well as a contrast between the violence of the act of representing something and the calm exterior of the representation itself, the image – verbal, visual or otherwise – of the subject. Whether you call it a spectacular image, or an exotic image, or a scholarly representation, there is always this paradoxical contrast between the surface, which seems to be in control, and the process which produces it, which inevitably involves some degree of violence, decontextualization, miniaturization, etc. The action or process of representing implies control, it implies accumulation, it implies confinement, it implies a certain kind of estrangement or disorientation on the part of the one representing. ("In the Shadow" 41)

Through the eyes of Timi, Mphahlele can be said to penetrate the "calm exterior of the representation" signified in the quotations above by the terms "locked up" and "standard". The serene façade suggested by these terms is in contrast with the "violence", "decontextualisation" and "miniaturization" (to use Said's terms) the blacks face inside the compounds the dehumanizing conditions of which are exposed in *The Wanderers* by Timi Tabane's journalistic ventures. Incisive sensitivity that equips Timi to pierce through such sham normality as the conditions of South African blacks portrayed in *The Wanderers* should justify why his gradual self-discovery – revealed initially by his protest against the education system and later by his reaction to the dehumanisation of blacks that he reports on in *Bongo* magazine – is necessarily accompanied by a sense of estrangement that is so acute as to amount to psychological exile even at home and before he embarks on formal exile in Iboyoru. Timi's intimate interaction, later, with more exiles of all races and religious beliefs (who come from South Africa) in Iboyoru and other parts of the globe can be said to culminate in an African solidarity that enhances his self-discovery on a bigger canvas and in higher relief. Timi's interaction with African exiles of varying backgrounds reinforces Mphahlele's conception of African humanism as inclusive of people of whatever race, whose consciousness earns them the description "African". Mphahlele's global setting for this story (achieved by the exiled characters who wander to any part of the world) elucidates his definition of African humanism and transcends continental and national boundaries.

Timi's contestation of Babs's suggestion that he should take Iboyoru citizenship (204) clarifies Mphahlele's anti-homogenising conception of African cultures as much as it expresses sensitivity towards the hollowness of life in exile. Timi articulates an awareness of non-acceptance by fellow blacks in Iboyoru. The numerous examples of interracial marriages in Iboyoru high society is interpreted by Mphahlele as vain attempts at forging a post-independence synthesis of cultures that recognises no racial barriers, as the following sceptical question makes clear: "Do you represent fissures in an otherwise impenetrable wall of tradition, of culture?" (204). By likening the interracial marriages in the independent state to shallow cracks in a wall of tradition or culture that remains impenetrable, Mphahlele should be understood to be frowning upon the superficiality of behaviour that lacks the basis of a distinct, identifiable consciousness. Because the distinct Africanist consciousness has been eroded by colonisation, Africans should make a conscious effort at self-discovery. Mphahlele's apparent anxiety about post-colonial social conduct such as mixed marriages in Iboyoru seems to stem from the fear that such an apparent synthesis of African with Western cultures might take the wrong direction (of neo-colonialism), further endangering the survival of African humanism instead of consolidating it into a modernised yet distinctively African humanist culture. Elsewhere he wrote:

> Our own lives in Africa have, like those of the Western world, become fragmented, differentiated, even within the large area of the 'African consciousness'. Political and economic styles, including systems of land ownership and the technology that we inherited [from colonialism], have brought us to this point. And so we have to make the journey back. ("The African Critic" 382)

However, a cultural event that is supposed to unite Timi Tabane with other Africans beyond the borders of South Africa does not evoke a sense of solidarity either. The African drums in the Iboyoru township of Oro (near Takora University), rather than cementing the protagonist's sense of shared culture with his fellow blacks in the social setting of his exile make him more aware of the differences between African culture practised in this part of Africa and the African cultures practised by different groups of black South Africans: "– his ancestors had thrived in other climes, they had stamped their feet, clapped their hands to other rhythms … had drunk beer from corn and wild fruits and not palm wine … had fought other wars with other weapons …" (202). The drums that evoke the feeling expressed here symbolise a supposed marriage of cultures which should result in the protagonist harmoniously identifying with the Africans participating in the social event, as black life back in South Africa is undoubtedly associated culturally with the playing of drums. What the author is illustrating is that (under current neo-colonial conditions) trying to marry the lives of black South Africans with those of Africans in other African states is as superficial and confused as attempting to marry blacks and whites (in racially mixed connubium) prior to a thorough and genuine Africanisation of the souls of the marrying parties that would not stomach the neo-colonial tendencies in the corruption with which the host country is riddled.

The message Mphahlele is putting across by stressing the heterogeneity of African cultures is that African humanism is a deeply embedded consciousness that binds Africans together at an underlying level without homogenising the cultures that they practise in everyday life. That is why superficially the combination of the protagonist and these Africans (similarly to that of blacks and whites in mixed marriages) seems perfect until its façade is exploded by a revelation of the protagonist's feeling of alienation – which is indicative of the need for a deeper harmony of consciousness that should pave the way for its own genuine manifestation at the surface. Extant materialism that is a sign of cultural colonialism on the part of whites (now indulging in whitewash mixed marriages) and newly acquired materialism among the *petit bourgeois* are not congruous with African humanist values on the underlying plane, so that any veneer of harmony between the protagonist (who is informed by African humanist values) and the white and black post-colonial citizens of independent Iboyoru (who are driven by neo-colonialist values) is false. Of course, the author here is also deriding facile notions of African solidarity that do not accommodate localised differences. As a young exile probably still steeped in visionary rather than pragmatic views of African unity, Timi is awakened by this incident to the stark reality that African unity should be conceived at a certain level more in terms of heterogeneity rather than homogeneity. However, the rift between Timi and the fellow Africans of Iboyoru is also the result of ironic rootedness in a particular African culture that may prevent a feeling of belonging in another African culture, similarly to the way ethnicity hampers one from contributing positively to African solidarity that is needed in the liberation struggle of Africans and beyond. From this perspective, Timi's estrangement from Iboyoruan Africans is a hint of his need to grow with the experience of exile to grasp the need for accommodative selflessness among African humanists.

As a mode of existence, African humanism is shaped by the environment (signified by "thrived in other climes"). Africans who live in different environments interact in their own unique way with the conditions of the environment (signified by the metaphor in "stamped their feet, clapped their hands to other rhythms"); they are influenced by specific environmental factors which results in their African humanist behaviour differing on the surface from the behaviour of other cultural groups also endowed with African humanist consciousness (signified by the metaphor in "drunk beer from corn and wild fruits and not palm wine") who fought against colonisation and in pre-colonial wars according to their environmental factors (as the image in "fought other wars" indicates). It is for this reason that in the 2000 essay "Africa in Exile" Mphahlele states that he "absorbed the African environment outside South Africa and felt at home in cultures that were so similar *in essentials* to [his] own" (in *Es'kia* 122, emphasis added). It is known that the inhospitality Timi is exposed to in Iboyoru is the same reception Mphahlele experienced in his exile within Africa, in which he was nevertheless contented with the fact that his and the cultures of his hosts were "similar in essentials". Yet manifestations of cultural differences at the profound level of consciousness (like neocolonial corruption) offend him, because they threaten the unity Africans would otherwise enjoy by acknowledging and enacting a shared African humanist consciousness putting advancement of the community above that of the individual.

A similar definition of African culture as various is supported by a writer like Losambe, who remarks that through the psychological conflict in Timi, Mphahlele is indirectly criticising adherents of negritude likeLéopold Senghor in their belief in the "universality of the Negro culture" ("Apartheid" 165). Losambe's statement is valid in showing that Mphahlele conceives of African cultures as differing among peoples, nevertheless joined together by African humanist consciousness, because cultures as the concretisation of African humanist psyche are shaped differentially by varying environments. Of course the fact that the wanderers include white characters like Cartwright also testifies to the fact that Mphahlele does not describe Africans in essentialist terms that would concentrate on aspects such as the black skin and biological genes.

Brooding despairingly on the dominance of whites in the Iboyoru civil service, Timi comments that "they've come out to … tame a wild continent but never try to mix with the native element" (220). To mix with "the native element" is to allow the humanism of Africa to penetrate one's European consciousness (in this instance) in order to allow dialectic interaction. Protesting against the injudicious accommodation of whites by black independent states, which opens them to the risk of neo-colonial regression (while ironically rejecting black expatriates imbued with African humanist consciousness that could help check such neo-colonial tendencies among the black middle and ruling classes), Timi's internal monologue rings out stridently in the remark: "And what about us from South Africa? No use in assuming an immediate common heritage among Negroes everywhere. No use. You're an expatriate" (221). Colonisation (from which Iboroyu has just recently emerged) is still etched on the minds of its citizens and reinforced by neo-colonialism to the extent that it blurs any affinity of Africans that is supposed to arise from their common Africanness. Mphahlele's unpalatable awareness of the extent to which colonisation has harmed African humanist consciousness – as

manifested by neo-colonial lifestyles creating schisms among Africans – causes Timi's despondency regarding the existence of "an *immediate* common heritage among Negroes everywhere" (221, emphasis added). It is important to perceive that Timi's (quoted) words lament a latent but not wholly absent African humanist consciousness or "common heritage" that permeates all African existence. The agent of such a debilitation of African humanist consciousness is colonisation, which (as Mphahlele holds) has fortunately not succeeded in totally stamping it out in its adapted form.

In a microcosmic, sardonically depicted episode, Timi's fellow South African exile Holeng (who helps him settle in Takora upon his assuming a lectureship there) is asked by a bar patron in front of other self-assured Iboyoru patrons whether he has received his training in the UK. He retorts: "Why should it always be the UK that can train a person? … Why don't you think of Fiji Islands for a change?" (243-244). The casual conversation takes on a serious tone when Holeng whips out a knife and charges at the speaker after being called a slave and reminded by a patron that South African exiles are free in the patrons' country and slaves in their own. Summarily insulting all South Africans as knife-throwers, the 'civilised' Iboyoru citizens lose their pompous composure, pick up their beers and run out into the yard.

Holeng then resorts to haranguing the bar owner at the counter, with the words of the supposedly 'backward' exile exuding his sharply perceptive awareness of neocolonial brainwashing (which the taunters who have left are blind to):

> 'You're all big-mouthed, that's what!' he shouted. 'Slave! Did you hear him call me slave? Yes you heard him. Think because you're independent you're smart, eh! Well you aren't. You'll still need us to come and teach you. Because you won't wake up in time, start work in time, your teachers are running for senior service in government. All you do is beg for favours, clean the floors with your bellies prostrating. The machines are going to flatten you out one day while you're on your bellies! (*The Wanderers* 244)

As would be expected of the African humanist Mphahlele, the dialogue of the self-important Iboyoruans in which they enquire of Holeng whether he has received his training in the UK is an expression of private feeling only on the surface, while at the profound level (which matters more) they are articulating public feeling. The public nature of this dialogue matters more because it points to the bigger picture of a discriminatory attitude towards African exiles which exists at regional/national level. Holeng's dialogue, too, expresses more than his individual feeling and spirals into communal feeling shared by exiles who (like Timi) come from South Africa. In terms of the theory of pragmatics in the way it is asserted by linguists like Matsumoto (1988) and Fraser (1990), both the cynical Iboyoru citizens and the pair of South African exiles in the bar scene (cited above) are aware of Africanist "positive face wants" that demand of the communicator to align his or her message with communal opinion on the issue at hand. The stance of the Iboyoruans in this instance rejects the ethic of interdependence between them and the exiles, while Timi and Holeng affirm the need for Africanist interdependence, as confirmed even by their contemptuous remark that the citizens of Iboyoru will "still need [them] to come and teach" in Iboyoru.

The harshly comical nature of the scene serves to inculcate the truth that the problematic condition of exile persists in whatever context – whether grave or comical, formal or casual, urban or rural, African or non-African. The images of "bellies prostrating" and the "machines" flattening out those crawling on their "bellies" in the indented quote (above) represent colonised mimicry and hegemonic power (respectively). Reference to the Iboyoruans' failure to adhere to disciplined professional conduct in going about the duties of their jobs in the postcolonial government reveals sensitivity to corruption in the conscience of Holeng and other black South African exiles. The dangers of corruption, along with the army of other perils that neocolonialism is endowed with, have been identified by Pan Africanist thinkers like Fanon (1967) as threatening to post-independence black states. Mphahlele is expressing a similar repugnance against postcolonial bourgeois tendencies when he remarks that "we should compel them to realize that their survival lies in thinking African" ("In Search of" 232).

The serene or even complacent state in which the Iboyoruans and the population they symbolise live contrasts with the agitation of Holeng and the section of Iboyoru society that he represents. This throws into relief the depth of the anguish felt by the exiles: it would be less disturbing and difficult for Timi, Holeng and other exiles to point out the dangers of neocolonialism and corruption to Iboyoruans who are not smug but sensitive to their deplorable situation – rather than trying to awaken a lulled people to the unsettling reality of their neocolonial post-independence, as is the case with the Iboyoru elite represented in the citation by the bourgeois bar patrons.

Writing on his own conception of the non-racial, non-sexist and non-discriminatory national and cultural identity he proposes for a postapartheid South Africa, Manganyi (*Looking Through* 69-10) writes of a synthesis culture emanating from a dynamic integration of the separate "siege cultures" in apartheid South Africa as Africanisation — the precondition for which is a process of exploration, development and consolidation. In his own formulation (as preceding chapters show), Mphahlele's African humanist view of the postolonial state concurs with that of Afrocentric writers like Manganyi. With this background in mind, Mphahlele's disappointment with the polarised coexistence in Iboyoru and Lao-Kiku between native blacks and those who have come as exiles on the one hand, and on the other hand, blacks of whichever background with resident and expatriate whites, will be better understood. Such characterisation and use of dialogue (explained above) demonstrates Mphahlele's poignant sensitivity towards the alienating experience of wandering or exile as foregrounded throughout in *The Wanderers*.

Mphahlele himself has confessed to the frustrations of exile that *The Wanderers* exemplifies. Despite acknowledging some gains in personal growth, as McClurg has rightly observed, he found the condition generally deplorable: "Certainly he felt the need to be 'engaged in the struggles of [his] people' and had decided early on that there was something demoraliszing about life in exile" (14). McClurg's observation would imply that the organising principle in *The Wanderers* – which the writer Longaka Losambe has formulated as an "unquenchable desire or quest for self-realisation" ("Apartheid and Es'kia Mphahlele's Aesthetics in *The Wanderers*"161) does not find fulfilment in exile.

One more important aspect of *The Wanderers* is an introduction of the theme of mental indigestion that Mphahlele has called "the dialogue of two selves" which is explored further in *Chirundu*. As explained earlier in this study, the "two selves" that enter into a dialogue within Africans that are facing change are the conflicting consciousnesses of the distant home country and of the country of exile (in the case of exiles); or those of the distant pre-colonial past and current post-independence condition. I equate such a crisis of consciousness to "mental indigestion" in that it characterises failure to 'digest' or to accommodate the two conflicting sensibilities described above into a meaningful synthesis that should equip one to perfect an African humanist lifestyle which then survives in intelligently adapted forms. There is a recognition (emanating from a better synthesis of the two selves within them than that of nationalist bourgeoisie in postcolonial African states) by exiles like Timi and Holeng of such mental indigestion within the leaders of postcolonial Iboroyu. Timi and Holeng's awareness of this condition is displayed by their detection of failure by post-independence despots and civil servants to handle alterity rationally. Yet their awareness heightens their own exilic alienation, or what Mphahlele would call both the tyranny of place (which is being in the Iboyoru state itself) and of time (which is its neocolonial post-independence condition). Elitist propensities displayed by those at the helm of Iboyoru government intensifies "the dialogue of two selves" within the exiles – first as social distance from fellow Africans ruling Iboyoru, and secondly as distance from the "pull" of their countries of origin. The ludicrous colonial mimicry of the bar patrons (cited extract, above) and the dictatorial ruler of the post-independence black state of Lao-Kiku, do signify their mental indigestion. By contrast, capable handling of cultural transformation within the post-independence citizen amounts to healthy absorption of new social realities, in a way that is appropriate to emancipation and ensures survival of the Africans' African humanist psyche.

The theme of exile that pervades *The Wanderers* is again in evidence when Timi is about to leave for another teaching post at Kambani College in the black independent state of Lao-Kiku. Timi's alienation has been sharpened in Iboyoru (as explained earlier) and this leads him to weigh the chances of ever coming back to Iboyoru. Probably, optimism about a healthier accommodation to postcolonial realities in the Lao-Kiku leadership spurs him on. As a result he admits that the chances of his ever returning to Iboyoru are slim, since he cannot honestly as a teacher continue working among people in whom he has lost faith. Neither does Timi foresee finding complete self-fulfilment in Lao-Kiku, as this is to be yet another protraction of the condition of exile. But at least he hopes to reduce the double layer of alienation to a single one through stronger identification – which so dismally evaded him in Iboyoru – with the supposedly African humanist leaders of Lao-Kiku.

In a monologue that expresses the growth in insight that he has acquired while grappling with the condition of exile, Timi remarks: " You see, once you have left your native shores, you continue to circle up there, like a bird in a storm. Only, the storm is inside yourself this time. When I have thought things over, I may come back: but I suppose it must always be on terms other than my own" (*The Wanderers* 264). The agony of the admission that there is no freedom in exile (as the image of lostness in "circle up there"

indicates) is the realisation that it is a fallacy to believe that the self-fulfilling freedom that you fail to reach in the country of your birth can be found anywhere else, in exile. The action described as "circling" suggests the monotony and removal of creativity one experiences in exile whereas "up there" qualifies the 'circling' movement as intellectual detachment. The psychologically stifling environment of exile reaches near-fatal proportions as it takes the form of introvert intellectualising that is not good for one's mental health, as is made clear by Mphahlele's statement that "the storm is inside yourself". In addition, the reference to the storm being "inside yourself this time" subtly points to an insidious stunting of self-constitution (tallying with the subtly undermining effect of neocolonialism), which may be worse than more spectacular alienation one experiences in apartheid South Africa with its stark apartheid policies, for in an arrogantly dehumanising atmosphere one is able to release the tensions within by means of unrestrained counterdiscourse. That the prospect of ever coming back to Iboyoru "must always be on terms other than [Timi's] own" ironically articulates the danger of one's being compelled to live one's life as prescribed by others. Such a view of exile has been described elsewhere by Mphahlele as the "impotence" of exile.

Timi's speculation about possibly better exile conditions in Lao-Kiku meet with a blunt answer in his dialogue with his candid colleague George as they chat during a pompous presidential function to which they have been invited: "Africa is still a whiteman's paradise, not a black exile's. The white man may eventually have no future in Africa, but he's certainly making himself indispensable as long as he can, while the black man still wants him or is still aspiring to be his equal" (304). George's declaration that Africa "is still a whiteman's paradise" confirms Timi's own observation of the neocolonial tendencies of the nationalist bourgeois leaders in independent African states of the time (echoed in George's reference, above, to "the black man ... aspiring to be his equal"). The *comprador* bourgeois men and women of the independent African states are not spared, as revealed by George's critique of Africa's postcolonial failures, for this is the meaning of the whiteman "making himself indispensable … while the black man still wants him". As described by a writer like Ngugi, *comprador* bourgeoisie consciously enlist dependence on the former colonising power after independence while the nationalist bourgeoisie unconsciously yield to continued dominance by the former colonising power through such lax behaviour as corrupt hankering after western consumer goods (*Decolonising the Mind* 101).

In *The Wanderers*, Mphahlele depicts instances of the way African humanism empowers his characters to cope with the alienating experience of psychological exile in apartheid South Africa as well as geographic exile beyond the borders of their country of origin. While estrangement from the central characters' African humanist consciousness is atoned for by the "pull" of familiar physical and social landscape prior to their departure from apartheid South Africa, once in physical exile in foreign states, the characters feel the double-edged cut of longing for the native land as well as harassment by the incompatibility of exile with their innate African humanist values.

4.3 THE TYRANNY OF PLACE AND TIME PORTRAYED IN FINE PRINT

I partly agree with Tucker (1979) that the main theme of *Chirundu* is "the clash between the ways of the white man, the old ways of the tribes and the ways of the new rulers trying to reconcile the other two" (10). My position is that attempts by postcolonial black rulers to map out a synthesis culture for the post-independence citizen is the core of the story and the central theme of the novel. Abrahams (1979) succinctly sums up the central theme of the novel as "power and problems of transition" (15). Frantz Fanon has defined one of the problems of transition in newly independent but neocolonial African states (the subject of *Chirundu*) in the following words: "National consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing cystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilization of the people, will be in any case only an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been" ("The Pitfalls" 119). The action in *Chirundu* of the populist Moyo is successfully pitted against that of his bourgeois uncle Chimba, precisely because Chimba and the ruling class he represents fail, if one were to put it in Fanon's terms, "to repudiate [their] own nature … in so far as [they are] the tool of capitalism, and to make [themselves] the willing slave of that revolutionary capital which is the people" ("The Pitfalls" 120).

Forging a new culture for the new unified state which dialectically merges the hitherto racially, ethnically and religiously polarised part-cultures has been acknowledged by post-colonial writers as a most challenging task facing newly freed African states and their rulers. Mphahlele himself has declared the adaptive nature of culture as a building block of the way of life he calls African humanism. It is in this vein that Mphahlele has been quoted by Sesanti (1999) as saying: "But we should not regard culture as a museum artefact. It should continue to absorb and redefine the technological, economic and political systems, which we must master if we are to participate effectively in international business and politics" ("Africanise our Education" 6).

While in *The Wanderers* the narrative expands to trace Timi Tabane's saga in the oddysey that spans no less than three countries, in *Chirundu* Mphahlele confines himself to portraying the exile experiences of several exiles, including the Zimbabwean Chieza and the two South Africans, Pitso Mokae and Studs Letanka, to one central African state. Partly, this is the case because (unlike with the former) the central focus of the latter work is not the theme of exile but that of the erosion of the African humanist temperament by neo-colonialism. Like the Iboyoru and Lao-Kiku states of *The Wanderers*, the Central African state of *Chirundu* has just been freed from colonial rule.

The delimitation of exile to one state effectively leads the reader's focus from wandering and concentrating excessively on the theme of wandering. This enables the reader to focus on the workings of a single state in a postcolonial climate within which the character Chirundu exemplifies the intricacies of making meaning of independence. I see the demotion of Chimba Chirundu from being the political head of the interior ministry to heading the ministry of works as an allegory of the state itself deteriorating due to neocolonial corruption that eludes control by the black man. In the characterisation of Chimba, Mphahlele seems to warn more urgently than ever before about "a manifestation

of the fact that capitalism, graft and political dishonesty have no race or colour" ("Your History" 177). Chimba's arrogant highhandedness ironically pits the ordinary men (whom 'proletariat' nationalist leaders vowed to fight for, before facing the vicissitudes of actual independence) against elites (led by Chimba himself). It is significant that the leader of the worker organisation is Moyo, a black youth of ordinary rural upbringing, described in a heated argument by Chimba himself as "this herdboy come to the city" (24). Mphahlele has observed that in developing his African humanist sensibilities, the rural setting has become even more important than the urban one (*Exiles and Homecomings* 32), and that memories of his own rural upbringing as a young boy are still pursuing him to this day in the form of "a dual sensibility that was to influence [his] responses to a diversity of experiences in [his] adult life" ("Growing Up in South Africa" 64). By "dual sensibility" Mphahlele is referring to the tension between western and African or urban and rural values that exists within modern Africans. For this reason, the rural boy Moyo (who leads the labour movement towards a strike) should be understood as possessing a deeper African humanist consciousness than corrupt characters like his uncle Chimba (a feature which Mphahlele elsewhere ascribes to rural upbringing which involves less contact with the abrasive influences of westernisation). Moyo seems to be presented as the *alter ego* of his uncle Chimba, who has also had a rural boyhood upringing where he "used to learn in primary school that only nine per cent of [their] country was fit for farming" (*Chirundu* 110). That the two are *alter egos* is attested to by their similar rural upbringing and political activism as young men. Chimba's deviation from the good morals associated with rural nurture comes about due to the diametrically opposed ways in which Moyo and he resolve the tension integral to their "dual sensibility". Moyo manages to draw from his African humanist consciousness which, together with African culture "is … more intensely present" in rural Africa ("African Thought and Belief" 280), in order to make sense of postolonial reality, while his uncle Chimba fails. This is why Ursula Barnett has remarked that Moyo "represents the hope of a new dawn … for unlike Chirundu, he has not lost touch with real tradition" (*A Vision of Order* 147). Likewise Ruth Obee has remarked that Moyo "combines the best of two worlds" because he "adheres to the best African humanistic values without experiencing conflict" ("Colonials in Black Skins" 179).

The problems besieging the post-independence state unfold at the miniature level around the life of the central character, Chimba. The prologue to the challenges facing Chimba's family takes the form of Tirenje staking a claim to the heart of her husband Chirundu. At the macroscopic level, Tirenje's subjectivity is a symbolisation of the voice of the hitherto culturally marginalised section of the newly independent state (that has all along been geared towards the promotion of imperial values). This is the case because Tirenje takes a firm stand against injustice at the same time that a supposedly African humanist or African democratic state is emerging. Such a purposeful coincidence of her positive rising to power within Chimba's family with the rise to power of the new African state (albeit in inverse proportion) should be understood as the author's way of likening the preservation of African humanist sensibility embodied in Tirenje with what the independent African state should ideally represent. Seen from this point of view, the pitting of the decolonised Tirenje against the neocolonial Chimba is symbolic of neocolonial alterity that stalks the supposed continuity of the African humanist lifestyle

after independence. Because African cultures characteristically treated women empoweringly as hallowed pillars of communal survival (as discussed earlier in this study), the coupling of Chirundu's abuse of Tirenje with his other tendencies contravening African humanist values can be attributed to the fact that he is neither Western nor African humanist in his conduct towards his wives. He expediently draws on whichever aspect/value of each of them happens to be useful at the time, making a hotchpotch of them both as he goes his selfish way. His 'morality' is mere expediency; he is self-serving first and always in the later, 'city' part of his life. It is such selfishness and self-centredness that discount Chirundu from the category of African humanists who are known for harmonising a valuing of self with communal interest.

Chimba's flaws as a political leader stem from neocolonial opportunism misrepresenting both European and African values for corrupt convenience. The satirical tone of the novel allows for a ridiculing of bourgeois characters like Chimba to such an extent that Mphahlele may portray them farcically as being ludicrously out of step with current western cultures they purport to model their behaviour on, while under the spell of self-deceit. Consistently with the way Mphahlele handles the debauchery of African characters in the face of colonisation or apartheid (as in *Down Second Avenue* and "Down the Quiet Street"), it is important to realise that this novel does not blame the conduct of characters like Chimba solely on neo-colonial manipulation by colonial "centres". Whatever foreign influence is partly responsible for Chimba's ignoble conduct combines with the vulgarization of African patriarchy in men seduced by the temptations and luxuries of neocolonial politics. More importantly, as individuals these characters are held responsible for their misconduct without shifting the blame to western influence or disfigurement of harmless cultural social roles attached to sex. This is proved when the male characters' flaws floor them as the action of Mphahlele's narratives mounts to a climax – as when Chimba's sophistic straddling of African and western cultures eventually leads to his disintegration as a leader and socialite.

Chirundu's defeat in the court action Tirenje brings against him and his overpowering by the voice of the toiling workers (indicated by the haranguing of his government department by ordinary men and women, dramatised by their march – *Chirundu* 154), are thus an indication that the African humanist cultural orientations of the people should be the basis on which emerging independent states are structured. This implies harsh criticism of the errant behaviour of the small postcolonial elite whose African humanism is eclipsed by aspects of selfish, acquired western consciousness. The masses who join the march to multiply an apparently narrower discontent among the workers storm the seat of government and soil the presidential residence with buckets of faeces (*Chirundu* 154) to express the proletariat's revulsion against and rejection of the despicably invalid direction taken by the emerging state. That one symbol of the disgraced state leadership takes refuge during this demonstration in a church building significantly points to the affinity of the black elite with neo-colonialist structures rather than with African humanist structures in the land.

Considering that African humanism (as Mphahlele has been demonstrated in this study as defining it) endorses individualism and the freedom of the individual to choose between

good and evil despite some of the individual's behaviour necessarily aligning itself with communal opinion, the apparent influence of neocolonialism on Chimba should not be misunderstood as equalling an exoneration of his personal responsibility for the faults he makes as an agent of Government. In the same way as African humanism holds an individual personally responsible for maintaining a balance between individual and communal needs, the African (in government or civilian life) is personally responsible for maintaining a balance between those features in the postcolonial era that are good and should be absorbed into African humanist consciousness in the postcolonial context. The African humanist consciousness should be the value base of the African independent state. Mphahlele has described this responsibility of selecting creatively in order to dialectically combine suitable elements, calling it "taking charge of the synthesis beween the best and enduring values from both sides of the cultural encounter" ("Notes Towards" 141). For this reason, failure to digest – intellectually and socially – the new realities facing the independent state is to be blamed neither on a history of colonialism nor on resistant African humanism, because it results from a personal weakness of the individual who is required to integrate the two social practices through the process of mental digestion.

Like the condition of the imprisoned Pitso's bowels that are regularly described to the fellow political detainee Chieza as not "hav[ing] worked this morning"(*Chirundu* 1), Chirundu's brains are not functioning properly as a result of mental indigestion. The malaise suffered by Pitso and other prisoners (often presented by the indigestion or constipation, suffered by Pitso) symbolises a similar condition in the mental make-up of Chimba and his fellow career politicians. Mphahlele could not have bothered to describe the set-up in prison in such vividly clinical imagery if the disturbed state of the prisoners does not symbolically convey a bigger meaning – as he does in the following passage:

> Previously the warder came to taunt them during the noon meal. Of late he is in the habit of haranguing the detainees first thing in the morning like an addict who has to slug down a drink to start a day. This, because Pitso's nightmares are becoming more frequent. He jumps from his bunk as if it were the middle one or the highest, beats on the steel door and cries like a wounded bull. And Chieza will always begin the day's conversation with 'How are the bowels – have they worked?'… In the twenty-seven months they have been in detention, Pitso has put on plenty of fat. To see him now you wouldn't think he used to be slender … Chieza believes firmly that frequent bowel movements can set Pitso right. (*Chirundu* 2)

It is not difficult to see parallels between Pitso's physical condition (described above) and Chimba's mental state (that should be understood by analysis of the whole novel). It is likely that Chimba and other local career politicians are facing a situation in which "[their] nightmares are becoming more frequent" because of the challenges that overwhelm them in their occupations; they also "[have] put on plenty of fat", probably due to feeding on sumptuous meals which their salaries allow them to buy, but more importantly as a symptom of moral or mental ill-health; and "to see [them] now you wouldn't think [they] used to be slender", probably as a recompense for their greed in eating more than one body can stomach. In the midst of sarcastic remarks from the prison warder and brotherly advice from sympathetic fellow detainees – as when Chieza

advises him to "keep [his] gall bladder in check" to avoid his "ulcer acting up again" – the exile Pitso keeps harping on the point that "my uncle always said, clean up your bowels [because] that's where most troubles begin" (1, 2). One's uncle in terms of traditional kinship relations being a senior to be heeded, Mphahlele's use of such dialogue by Pitso is his way of guiding the reader towards the theme of unhealthy (mental) indigestion at the higher level, in members of the postcolonial ruling elite (like Chimba). In the case of Chimba and his colleagues in post-independence government the bowel problem assumes a mental dimension as it has to do with thinking and deciding aptly in order for Government to be run properly. That Pitso and other characters are showing these unhealthy symptoms while languishing in detention is a satirical intimation that (though they are unaware of it) Chimba and his colleagues are also prisoners – but to their own aberrant behaviour – despite their deceitfully prosperous appearance and belief in their own power and freedom.

One more symptom of Chimba's mental constipation is in the topsy-turvy reasoning he and his fellow politicians use in deciding to incarcerate black exiles, rationalising it in the following words: "They might be spies acting for Portugal, Zimbabwe or South Africa" (50). Yet the whites from Portugal, Zimbabwe or South Africa are found in large numbers in the newly independent state, and are treated humanely, never suspected of spying for their governments. Only treacherous minds like those of Chimba and his colleagues can brazenly justify self-important corruption like this, using the subterfuge of suspected espionage. As the story of the novel proceeds, it becomes evident that the white expatriates who are not thrown into detention are spared so that they can build the economy and further benefit the material needs of the small elite. In terms of Mphahlele's African humanism, the seemingly hospitable treatment of the white expatriates reveals that it is not the whites the rulers love, but their wealth-generating skills and hard work. According to the African humanist outlook, human beings must be loved and have their lives held sacred for their own sakes and not for the wealth one hoards through their toil. In this way, the whites who appear to be favoured by the government are perhaps as abused as the incarcerated blacks, for in both respects the common factor remains dehumanisation. The consciousness behind the superficially partisan favouring of the white expatriates is one thing Pitso and other detainees find inscrutable, resulting in their own mental indigestion or failure to make sense of this, which manifests itself in the image of abdominal indigestion. In choosing to satisfy their greed for material gain, profit and luxury, Chimba and his colleagues have repressed their African humanist consciousness to such an extent that it requires a real jolt such as the protesting voice of the people taking the form of the strike led by Moyo to re-awaken this value system. Mphahlele's concept of African humanism hence does not flinch from facing the strategic need for violent action – as encountered in earlier parts of this study in the analysis of poems like "Death".

The majority of critics who comment on *Chirundu* seem to play down the centrality of the theme of broader mental indigestion to which neocolonialism and the challenges of independence are factors and allow the individual frailties of Chimba Chirundu to take centre stage. The individualist assumptions the critics employ in analysing Chimba do not take into consideration his transgression of African humanist values (according to its

uniquely African "face wants" that demand determining the communal voice before articulating one's own voice); they tend to treat Chimba as if the western and Africanist notions of individualism are exactly the same. If such a universalist focus on Chimba's individualism were accurate, Mphahlele's opening of the novel with the prison scene (in which the health trouble with Pitso's bowels is foregrounded) would have to be seen as arbitrary. Far from being purposeless, Mphahlele thus opens the novel in order to hint at the dominant theme of mental indigestion on the part of the new rulers, symbolised here by Pitso's clinically constipated condition. That is why, as the narrator puts it: "There is not a single day when Chieza does not ask Pitso if his bowels have moved … And Chieza will always begin the day's conversation with 'How are the bowels – have they worked?'" (2). The prisoners' refrain punctuates the novel, especially in its early parts, and represents the communal voice which is an index of the public's regard for Chimba Chirundu and his fellow nationalist bourgeoisie. It is on these grounds that I agree with the writer Ruth Obee when she points out that "In addition to the three-part narrative" consisting of the voices of Chirundu, Moyo and Tirenje, "Mphahlele utilizes a chorus of commentators (the people's voices, as opposed to that of the authoritarian, omniscient narrator) in the form of southern African exiles" ("Colonials in Black Skins" 172-173). The "chorus" (to borrow Obee's term) is pitted against the ironically individualist nationalist discourse of Chimba Chirundu. Chimba's discourse in this novel is individualist like that of a westerner in the sense that it departs from communal African mores regarding the institution of marriage as well as from African humanist ways of ruling that should be informed by consultation, involvement, compassion and selflessness.

Pitso and Chieza have now been imprisoned for twenty-seven months (1) on Chimba's orders (3). They come to be informed of Chimba's humiliating court case and other developments outside prison life through sympathetic visits by Moyo and Letanka (3). Such visits give rise to Pitso and Chieza reading about Tirenje's charge of bigamy against Chirundu. The charge of bigamy, as well as Tirenje's eventual court victory, signifies an abortive marriage of western and African ways that is thwarting coherent thinking in the brains of the ruling elite that Chimba symbolises. Typically of a state of mental constipation, the outcome of the court case leaves the justification of the bigamy – as pieced together by the political heavyweight Chimba and the section of the elite sharing his confounded views – defeated. Their views have no firm cultural groundwork. That the small drama revolving around Chimba's private life symbolises the macrocosmic drama within the minds of the rulers is accentuated by the satirical refrain (as I explain below) of "One nation! Kwacha!" bleated continually by the prison warder. The dawn of the new day of freedom referred to by "kwacha" is juxtaposed on the one hand with the warder's recitations, and on the other hand with confabulations between the two prisoners concerning Chimba's court action. Such a joining together of "kwacha" and the court case against Chimba highlights the fact that mental indigestion (which the court case in this instance symbolises) is brought about by the historical fact of a new day of independence dawning in the state. It is at such a point in the historical evolution of African societies that neocolonialism proves a menace, as the new leaders are not yet experienced in the practice of governing and colonial experiences are still fresh on the

people's minds. The African-Caribbean writer Frantz Fanon describes one disappointment of the middle-class rulers of newly independent states as follows:

> In under-developed countries, we have seen that no true bourgeoisie exists; there is only a sort of little greedy caste … too glad to accept the dividends that the former colonial power hands out to it. This get-rich-quick middle class shows itself incapable of great ideas or of inventiveness … [and] becomes not even the replica of Europe, but its caricature. (*The Wretched of the Earth* 141)

The above quotation can safely be applied to Chimba and the prison warder, who symbolise the "caricature" of Europe in the African state in which the story is set.

The prison warder, as a symbol of the new government, is not exempt from its confused state of mind, as the following dialogue reveals:

> '… I hear in your countries the white man splices your balls in the jail. It's like a picnic for you here … You there from South Africa, just you scream again and disturb people in their sleep, you'll shit bricks. And you there the man from Zimbabwe, muttering to yourself won't help you one bit. One country! I know when you two meet out here in the yard you're badmouthing me and this country. We've given you sanctuary and saved you from life in the streets begging for food and shelter. Back in your own countries you'd be shitting bricks. One nation! Kwacha! Kwacha!' (*Chirundu* 1)

Chieza's grumbling that he is warned about represents the rumblings beyond the confines of prison walls against the unjust political order from the mouths of all other refugees and sensible compatriots like Moyo. The insults hurled at the South African Pitso, so reminiscent of the bar mini-drama in *The Wanderers*, articulate common opinion in the ruling class. To think as the warder does (as do the rulers, whose opinions he echoes) and maltreat fellow Africans in the wrong belief that one is being merciful (as contrasted with the treatment the exiles get at home), is nothing other than a symptom of gross misjudgement and blindness to one's own inhumanity. To disturb people in their sleep as Pitso is charged with in the extract, is to act like Ellen Mwansa, Letanka and Moyo do and shake the populace from their sleep and enlighten them about their democratic right to fairness and justice.

Mphahlele's focus (in *Chirundu*) on detained exiles takes forward his exploration of the condition of exile from an African humanist perspective. In *The Wanderers,* maltreatment of the exiles intensifies the acuteness of the experience of exile. But, unlike in *The Wanderers*, a juxtaposition of the prison experience with the glaring symptoms of political leaders' failure healthily to merge influences of the present and the past pushes the exile experience to the margins. An introduction of Chimba's story to the reader through Pitso and Chieza's conversations gears the reader to conceive of the condition of exile as a mere background to the greater drama hingeing on the personal drama of Chimba. Because Chimba is a representative of rulers who fail to take advantage of their African humanist culture in order to interrogate recently-won independence from colonisation, the theme of neocolonial corruption is pushed to the centre of the plot. To prune the theme to its pith for even greater clarity, rather than focus on the evils of exile or neocolonialism, *Chirundu* dwells on failure by individuals to shape the experience of independence into acceptably adapted forms of African humanist existence.

It is therefore correct to state that the theme of African humanist adaptation to a new historical era here takes ascendancy over that of exile or of the tyranny of time and place. In this novel Mphahlele dramatises failure on the part of the rulers to handle the onerous demands of a state in transition from colonial domination to freedom anchored in local cultures – which would be freedom based in African humanism.

4.4 A FURTHER DIMENSION TO MPHAHLELE'S NARRATIVE WRITINGS

Mphahlele's novels, especially *Chirundu*, are successful explorations of the effect of hybridity on married life. Hybridity is (with regard to Mphahlele's writings in general and *Chirundu* in particular) the way and extent to which one's African humanist social behaviour absorbs change brought about by historical transitions such as colonisation and independence. It is important to distinguish the relationships of married couples as straightforward characterisation from the symbolic dimensions of such marriages.

A consideration of Chimba's marriages to Monde and Tirenje, and that of Letanka to his wife should suffice to illustrate this point. Gagiano (2001) makes the interesting observation that although politically speaking Letanka is the opposite of Chirundu, the novel shows that significant parallels exist between the two male characters "in the way they treat and think about the women in their lives" (33). While Gagiano's "Unmasking 'African machismo'" succeeds in illustrating plausibly that even characters who differ in conceptions of political justice in a way gang together in perpetrating male societal domination, what I see as more centrally holding the men together in the unjust treatment of their wives is their analytical failure in their attempt to deal with hybridity.

Tirenje is a traditional woman who is not alienated from African culture by western education and sophistication. Yet she is not a docile kind of woman who is afraid to stand up to injustice, as we can see when, for example, she insists on a Western-style marriage that should empower her to reclaim her position as the woman in the centre of Chimba's family life. This firm decisiveness which Tirenje displays is due to her stronger and healthier African humanist consciousness (compared to her husband), referred to by Letanka's calling her "a lovely girl of ordinary", rural upbringing (144). Confirming Letanka's description of Monde in a talk with Chieza, we see that she is clearly westernised:

> Well – wide mouth, nose that doesn't stand out like Tirenje's, powdered face, pencilled brows, dark lips – almost indigo – that's all I remember of her. I just don't know what to make of her – she's a difficult script, man, tough. You look at the other wife and you could go slowly over each line a few times to understand the script and the line would still be there for you to come back to. And then there is the depth you don't immediately sense looking at Monde. (*Chirundu* 100)

Letanka's dislike of the mimicry exemplified here by Monde is consistent with what he hates in his own wife. While teaching at Fort Hare during the days of nationalist sentiments in black circles, Letanka was bored with his wife precisely for mimicking western culture and looking down upon traditional African women (144). He then fell in love with a teacher in a local primary school whom Letanka himself describes as "a lovely girl of ordinary peasant upbringing" (144). Perhaps it is this consistency that saves Letanka from developing symptoms like those of Chimba and the other males that are indicative of their failure to deal with change. Letanka knows exactly what he wants and what he does not want. Letanka's resoluteness should be credited to his fair success in controlling the way he modifies native African humanist consciousness to adapt to the condition of exile. Mphahlele's demonstration of Letanka's closeness to Moyo (as in their sending newspapers and heartening messages together to Pitso, Chieza and other

detainees) is a way of confirming their shared effort ably to manage the transmutation of African humanism as demanded by the exigencies of historical change (3).

Chimba's pathetic state of indecision is externalised by parts of the narrative such as the following:

> Monde was good in her own way at acting hostess to my important guests. She was smooth and graceful … She made protocol feel like a thing rolling on ball bearings, conducted at the same time with grace, self-confidence. Yet I felt something was missing in Monde. Something unnameable. Maybe something that keeps a woman's feet on the ground, as Tirenje's were. (*Chirundu* 47)

Chimba clearly fails to resolve the ambivalence evident here; he fails to balance western beauty with African beauty without making either suffer. The important point Mphahlele makes in describing Tirenje is that although she is a traditonal woman she is not uneducated or unsophisticated. The moral is that as African humanism is a dynamic way of life, anyone with such a mindset can adapt to western cultures without necessarily suffering cultural self-alienation. Tirenje's assertiveness in declaring she won't share her husband with another woman is congruous with African cultures, but in their adapted form. If some African men could marry more wives without considering whether the chief wife agreed to it or not according to cultural norms, Tirenje here is asserting that African women within the framework of Africanism cannot be treated as objects. It is known that traditionally a husband obtains the permission of his wife or wives to add another wife to the clan. For this reason it is difficult to agree with a critic like Ursula Barnett in her remark that Tirenje fails to grasp the traditional notion of polygamy in indicating that she won't "share [her] man with another woman" (*A Vision of Order* 146). Chimba's marrying Tirenje through the ordinance subsequent to a customary marriage (as a way of admitting that marriage according to western law overrides the traditional one), and his contradictory claim later in life that marriage under colonial ordinance cannot supersede traditional custom, should be seen for what it is – a mixing of African and western customs in an unintelligent, muddled way, as the contradiction reveals. Even though western clinching of his marriage with Tirenje was done upon the latter's insistence, the contradiction remains, because it is western marriage that the former is now invoking while at the same time attempting to justify traditional (and not western) polygamy, thereby displaying inconsistency.

Tirenje contrasts with Chimba in that she is a self-assured adherent to and adaptor of African culture, the endowment her husband Chimba clearly lacks. The author portrays Chimba satirically in terms that conflict with African humanist temparement, as an arrogant and self-righteous person. Chimba's face value contestation of the hegemonic overshadowing of African customs by colonial norms and values is opportunistic as it does not point to his being essentially and primarily driven in his day to day living by an African humanist consciousness in the same way as Tirenje. Flashbacks linking his rural childhood with his present urban adulthood serve to remind the reader that the environment in which he grew as a boy has failed to guarantee that he survives as a positively adapted African humanist after being affected by the temptations of neocolonial power. Without denying admonishment the author directs at him, occasional outbursts of the African humanist value system that has been battered out of shape by

socio-cultural colonialism within Chimba should be accepted as Mphahlele's way of making a strong case for the resilience of African humanism beyond friction with change, albeit sometimes in tremendously disfigured forms. It is in this respect that Chimba and characters like Letanka share a common trait. That Chimba's lawyer is a white man whom it is a bit too ambitious to expect to have a thorough knowledge of and respect for African customs, is again a revelation of Chimba's failure to manage the inevitable hybridity that has to result from creatively synthesising African and western cultures within an individual. What makes Tirenje a victor is her honesty (as opposed to Chimba's often opportunistic hiding behind African customs) as well as her capacity to handle the inevitable hybridity due to Africa's encounter with Europe with equilibrium and integrity, living true to Mphahlele's conviction that African humanism should continually redefine itself to absorb world civilisation.

Tirenje and Letanka, though at the conscious level they manage the synthesis of cultures, do not end up without minor bruises – Tirenje to an appropriately negligible degree, however, as she survives and manages to move into a new set of circumstances with courage and resolution. The drugged conviviality and opportunistic carousel of Letanka's social life lead to his tragic death after a car accident. Importantly, Mphahlele subtly sustains awareness of the adverse effects of exile as partly responsible for Letanka's tragic end. Though putting on a brave face, Letanka externalises his anguish when he confides one day in Moyo:

> But we cannot now hold ceremonies over the millions dead and gone during the long journey in slavery – the journey across the seas. Memory should strengthen us, it should not detain us in the funeral parlour or at the graveside – it gets tiresome to have to keep going to funerals without corpses – *I am tired*, God! It's what Mojo's doing gets me off on my pet subject. (*Chirundu* 141)

The same demoralisation leading exiles like Mojo to stage a funeral for rumoured deaths of relatives back home in South Africa in order to collect condolence money from fellow exiles and then squandering it on liquor and other drugs, is responsible for Letanka himself drinking heavily. All these exiles are depicted as self-deceitfully hoping to drug the frustration of exile away – which leads to their spiritual death, as in the case of Mojo, or both spiritual and physical death, as is the case with Letanka. Mphahlele's emphasis on the way death is regarded with religious awe in African humanist social behaviour has been noted. By portraying the moral decay among exiles such as Mojo and Letanka, the author does not in *Chirundu* efface the impact of exile on African humanist consciousness. He sustains the alienating impact of exile on African humanist existence in the background of the actions of his characters.

What Mphahlele achieves in the novels through the microscopic examination of erotic love and marital life is a new fibre in his literary output. This is the case because his profound dissection of married lives such as Chimba's and Letanka's is a dimension found very scantily and superficially in the autobiographies. *Down Second Avenue* explores in detail only the kind of husband-wife relationship based on the author's own parents. The majority of married people in the autobiography are drawn at the stage when they are already single parents due to death, desertion or divorce, so that focus shifts from the intricacies of married life to survival and resilience under apartheid

conditions. In *Afrika My Music* married men and women are not so much explored in relation to their married co-existence as the symbolic dimensions of their individual lives and for their communal characteristics, as in the example of Khabi Mngoma's wife's presence at the hospital bedside. Such a profound and intricate portrayal of erotic love and marital life as we find in *Chirundu* is an indication of Mphahlele's maturity at this stage both as a person and a writer. Subjective embroilment in Moses and Eva's married life together (in *Down Second Avenue*) is replaced in *Chirundu* (published 20 years later) by an objective, unemotional analysis of relationships. A similar maturity shorn of emotional attachment is evident in Mphahlele's projection of his concept of African humanism. One example of such objective growth on Mphahlele's part is his (already explained) shift from a vitriolic attack on negritude earlier in his career and as a young man to a rational exaltation of those aspects of negritude that reveal purposes common to his in mooting African humanist approaches to life and the arts. Similarly, as Chapman has observed, "soon after leaving South Africa in anger and disillusionment" Mphahlele emotionally expresses his disappointment with Can Themba's fiction in such strong words as "romantic imagery, theatrical characters, Hollywood, with a lace of poetic justice" (269). It is the absence of an African humanist basis in Can Themba's fiction which Mphahlele scoffs at here. Significantly, after returning to South Africa in 1977 Mphahlele writes of the same Can Themba unemotionally as a writer whose fiction "helped fashion a liveable myth"(269). For Mphahlele (later in his life) to perceive finer detail in love and connubial life, and for him also to discern similar attempts in contemporary Africanist writers towards mythmaking (which he considers an indispensable constituent of African humanist existence) is a sign that his later writings show an improvement of the manner in which he expatiates his conception of African humanism as well as asserting it as a tool with which to preserve a distinctive African identity.

In the same vein, Mphahlele's *The Wanderers* (published 12 years after the autobiography *Down Second Avenue*) exhibits Mphahlele's growth as a writer due to its rounded delineation of white exiles such as Cartwright. Whereas white exiles are mentioned in the autobiographies (as in *Afrika My Music)* they are flatly catalogued with the sole purpose of avoiding racist undertones in the handling of the theme of exile, no less than the way white liberals are described as fighting on the side of Mphahlele and his people for social justice in *Down Second Avenue*. In this aspect of objective and rounded characterisation of white characters, *Afrika My Music* (being an autobiography) exhibits progression from and greater maturity than *Down Second Avenue*, as it was written 25 years after the first autobiography. Mphahlele's publishing of two novels between the second and the first autobiography serves to tame the emotional attachment that initially prevents him from seeing white characters in other dimensions than in stereotypically racist relations with blacks during the apartheid years as in *Down Second Avenue*. Chapman's observation that in this autobiography "we encounter … an intellectual, artistic attempt to work through the hurts left by apartheid towards coherence and recovery" ("Identity and the Apartheid State" 244) is an adequate analysis of the different thematic accents between earlier works like *Down Second Avenue* and later ones like *Afrika My Music*. It is true that in writing the earlier work Mphahlele focussed more on the threat apartheid posed against the identity of blacks than on demonstrating that whites

should not be regarded in a homogenising manner as racist. Apart from development in fictional style sketched above, the fully multidimensional portrayal of the white character Cartwright in *The Wanderers* should be understood correctly to point to Mphahlele's development of a genuinely non-racial concept of African humanism to include whites who earn the name African. This contrasts with his earlier rhetoric on the same (racial) aspect of African humanism. The earlier narrative writings are not accompanied by satisfactory representations of white characters who are cogently absorbed as Africans equalling blacks in Africanness and (as is the case with this later work) as persons with fascinating insight into the problems Africans face both at home under apartheid, or across the borders as exiles, due to their African humanist consciousness resisting their alienating experiences.

In this way, it can be seen that Mphahlele's novels represent African humanism in its much more refined phase than the forms in which the concept is represented in the autobiographies. Understandably, in the writing of autobiographies Mphahlele writes more subjectively than is the case with novels that allow relative detachment due to biographical aspects presenting themselves in a more indirect way. Unlike harsh condemnations expressed by a critic like Lewis Nkosi about elements of subjectivity in Mphahlele's novels (*Tasks and Masks* 102), I conceive of this as Mphahlele's way of taming the form of the novel to serve the African aesthetic tenet of self-praise, as in orature forms such as the praise poem or legend. This, and the fragmentary depiction of events in *The Wanderers*, should be seen as aspects of Africanist aesthetic orientation whereby it is acceptable for the self artistically to interconnect seemingly disjointed acts (of which he or she is the subject) in self-eulogy without facing accusations of egoism or egotism.

4.5 Familiar Stylistic Threads Continued

Mphahlele's characteristic devices for asserting and exemplifying African humanism in his narrative writings occur in the two novels as well.

When the teacher Shuping puts Timi Tabane in the picture concerning circumstances in the Goshen area he describes a meeting where community elders were incited by an Afrikaner Commissioner against black journalists from big cities like Tirong whom the Commissioner and neighbouring farmers branded communists (*The Wanderers* 77). A community elder retorts after being called to order by some obsequious induna that "I cannot say it is a zebra unless I see its stripes" (77). This literal translation of the Sotho proverb *Ge re tla re ke dipitsi re tla bona ka mebala*, together with the turn of phrase in Shuping's recounting the scene – the words "He said to the white man, he said" (77) – depart from standard English idiom and become an expression in "english" through which Mphahlele reinforces the reader's sense of the fabric of African culture within which the action of the novel unfolds. It is African humanist consciousness that engenders affinity with the denigrated journalists and precludes the community elder from believing the propaganda of white farmers about the manners of fellow Africans, so that subtly the community elder is urging the gathered indunas to dismiss the claim by people of a foreign group who are not likely to know the rumoured behaviour of their fellow Africans better than the locals themselves. In this way, the dialogue of the community elder employs the African-language proverb to apppeal to the African humanism informing the consciences of the fellow indunas to find the right direction for communal opinion that (as Africans with a humanist psyche which values communal, and not individual opinion) they need to arrive at on this particular issue.

Similarly, when Chimba describes the feebleness of Tirenje's mother's body after she had seen *nsato* the python, she says that the mother's body looked like a log that had been "vomited by the river on its banks" (*Chirundu*16). This is a direct translation of the Sotho way of expressing the idea of something being washed onto the river bank. Considering the African humanist definition of rivers as occupied in their essence by the Vital Force or the Supreme Being, the condition suggested by the image above of Tirenje's mother being washed onto the bank by the flood of the river is indicative of a bigger meaning, which is that she was tossed about by nature and God in coming face to face with such a sacred, mystical creature as the python (16). The python (according to the traditional religion of Tirenje and Chimba's people) "seldom wants human flesh, only if he has gone mad" (16). Yet it is so scary to come across *nsato* that "you never want to see him again" (17). The preceding description of *nsato*'s effect on the lives of humans comes from Chimba's internal monologue – in other words, it is Chimba himself who believes that "you never want to see [nsato] again" (16). Tirenje herself reacts to the traditional aura with which *nsato* is regarded by saying that she wants "to see him again" (17). In this way, the image (above) of a woman who has seen *nsato* being shaken around by Creation itself as a warning to avoid looking too closely as if to challenge the axioms of traditional custom, is a revelation of Chimba's own attitude to life. It is important that, while Chimba believes life as it presents itself should not be questioned and challenged, Tirenje believes the opposite (shown by her boldness in the quotation

above to want to see *nsato* again). Tirenje's spiritual orientation as revealed by her dialogue above explains why she questions Chimba's opportunistic way of taking refuge in traditional custom in order to get to the bottom of his character. In this way Tirenje is shown to possess a more authentic African humanist consciousness than her husband, for it is in its nature to probe things and re-shape itself. Chimba displays a flawed approach to the challenges pitted against African humanism by change, because to him African humanism is a stagnant, inflexible consciousness which should be obeyed without close scrutiny and adaptation. The explanations in the examples given above demonstrate that Mphahlele employs African language idiom and syntactic forms to ground the actions of his characters in an African humanist consciousness, thus indicating the success or failure with which the various characters draw strength from their distinctive group identity in order wisely to tackle challenges of the time.

It is with the same effect that similar use of African proverbs and idiomatic expressions occur in *Chirundu* after Tirenje has confronted Monde in Chimba's city house, and Chimba returns from government work the next day to find a letter left by Tirenje in the apartment he had temporarily arranged for her and the children to occupy after they had joined him and the second wife in the city (*Chirundu* 59). The letter by Tirenje recounts an aspect of her scuffle with Monde as follows: "… what pierces my heart like a spear is when *she says to me she says* when are you returning home?" (59, emphasis added). The African language syntactic formula reminds the reader that Tirenje speaks from the perspective of African modes of existence. The same effect is achieved in an earlier scene when Moyo confronts Chimba about the need for Tirenje to discuss their marital problem traditionally in the presence of senior members of the extended family, and Moyo emphasises the therapeutic effect of talking about problems by saying "it helps the boil to burst" (24). This expression is literally the Sotho idiomatic expression *phula sekaku boladu*, referring to the act of baring one's heart. Demonstration of an African behavioural matrix also occurs when Chimba recollects some of the humorous incidents during his rural upbringing in which an inebriated uncle accidentally stumbles in the dead of the night into the hut of one of his father's wives and onto her bare body (32). Chimba explains that after his father had whipped the mischievous uncle he chased him out of his compound the following day by means of the Sotho idiomatic expression "next day my uncle *was shown the road*", from the Sotho *go mo šupetša/šupa tsela* (32, emphasis added). One comes across the use of Sotho idiomatic expression also during Chimba's visit to the village of Musoro after Tirenje has gone back to her father's house in anger (55). Expressing his admiration of the way his father-in-law embraces the Christian faith while maintaining a strong African humanist resistance, Chimba remarks in a monologue that the father-in-law once "*hauled* the fat Baptist preacher *over the coals*" after disagreement on an issue (55, emphasis added). This is a Sotho idiomatic expression *bea ka marago leretheng la mohwelere* which means grilling someone mercilessly while taking them to task on an issue.

The same stylistic device is continued in *The Wanderers*, as when Naledi describes to Timi how she found the conduct of the German missionaries who once employed her enigmatic (58). Puzzled by Reverend Schwartz's ever-studious manner, Naledi one day enquires from Mrs Schwartz why the reverend always reads many books and if reading

the Bible was not enough, and in reporting on Mrs Schwartz's reply Naledi says "*she told me she said* 'The master is learning about butterflies'" (58, emphasis added). Naledi's use of the Sotho syntactic formula reinforces one's sense of her identity as an African woman who thinks and speaks in a language encoded with an African humanist world-view. Awareness of such an identity in Naledi is useful to the reader in that it heightens her difference from members of the Schwartz family and justifies her wide-eyed wonderment at their lifestyle (directed by a cultural consciousness that makes no sense to her at all). Effective use of African language expression appears also when Timi and Naledi's painful search for Naledi's husband Rampa takes them to the Shuping family near Goshen farm (110). Worried whether their sojourn in the family of the poor couple will not be burdensome, Timi asks whether there is enough food in the house and the wife of their host replies with the words "It is not much but *children of a family must split the head of a locust* when the need comes" (111, emphasis added). This reply is bound to reassure Timi and Naledi that they are safely among the members of a family which lives an African humanist existence that values human life and safety above material parsimony, because it literally contains the Sotho proverb *Bana ba motho ba ngwathelana hlogwana ya tšie* – meaning that moral support to fellow men or women should be provided even in conditions of abject poverty. It is important to realise that the journalist Timi and Rampa's wife Naledi need such human warmth as an antidote to the behaviour of the farmer Van Zyl of Glendale farm whose consciousness is foreign and antagonistic to their African humanist expectations. This is because Timi and Naledi have just been shown Rampa's grave on the fringe of Ha-Pitsi village where he was buried after dying of wounds inflicted on him first by guards and then the farmer Van Zyl – for breaking down under inhuman farm toil and failing to finish the preposterous load of work given him on a particular day (109).

A more direct description of African humanism is found when Timi Tabane's family discusses the untoward behaviour of the son Felang, with the sibling Duma pestering the father with questions that are difficult to answer (*The Wanderers* 306). Thinking hard on the plight of children whose parents are in exile, Timi laments the opportunity the children are missing that they would have had if they had been growing up among their own people back in South Africa:

> Throw morality to the dogs – *their* kind of morality. What have the white man's two thousand years of civilisation to show for it? What have three hundred years of South African fascism to show for it? … Had to use traditional African humanism for the children's moral guidance: what I learned from my Grandmother, now dead these three years, from my mother, now dead these twenty-two years; what I learned from my people. Something passed on to us through poetic speech, not through the printed word … they gave us the wisdom of the elders … nothing belongs to you except what you have eaten … you are a person because of other people … share with others what you have and the ancestors will sleep in peace and that will bring you peace … a guest has short horns: he cannot take liberties. But you must never throw a visitor out or do him ill. He says a woman is like a calabash: do not kick it around, it holds your water, your milk, it gives generously. (*The Wanderers* 307-308)

Timi's noting (above) of the facts that his grandmother had died three and his mother twenty-two years ago (like Mphahlele's) is a reminder that there is a distinctive way in which his concept of African humanism looks at death. The phrases above "learned from my people", "passed on to us" and "gave us the wisdom" emphasise that the concept of African humanism does not only define death but it also defines education. The phrase "wisdom of the elders" teaches the reader that education in African humanist communities is perpetually transmitted from the elders to coming generations. The phrase "wisdom of the elders" serves also to link the definition of education with the conception of death, because elders within traditional social hierarchy are revered for their closeness to entering the realm of the ancestors – access to which is through death. After he has reminded the reader about the meaning of death and education within an African humanist framework in the ealier sentences of the passage above, Mphahlele uses the remaining lines of the passage to reveal the method of teaching and the subject matter. The statements constituting the latter part of the passage above are all literal translations of African language proverbs. The proverb "nothing belongs to you except what you have eaten" in Sotho is *sa gago ke sa ka mpeng*, which urges pragmatism rather than too visionary an inclination; "you are a person because of other people" in Northern Sotho is *motho ke motho ka batho*, which means that a human being finds self-fulfilment in acting individually yet in such a way as to meet with the communal approval of other people around him or her; "share with others what you have" is the Sotho proverb *go fa ke go fega* which refers to the sacred duty of sharing; "a guest has short horns" is literally translated from the Sotho proverb *moeng o naka di maripa* and it means that when in a new environment one should wait and learn from those acquainted with the situation rather than be presumptuous; "you must never throw a visitor out" is the Sotho *moeti ga a rakwe*, meaning that one attracts blessings by being hospitable to strangers; and "a woman is like a calabash" is the Sotho proverb *mosadi ke sego sa meetse*" meaning that a woman should be handled with reverence as her good health and role is central for the survival of the family and the entire community. In short, the dimensions of African humanism that we learn from the passage above is that the dead within African cultures are immortalised through their teachings which are transmitted by elders by means of proverbs and idiomatic expressions; loss of such lessons is loss of one's African humanist identity.

A similarly undisguised instruction about the concept is found in *The Wanderers* when Shuping agrees that the elderly woman of the house should be told the painful story of Rampa in the words: "you know what our people are like – they want to share all your joys and all your sorrows, even if there's nothing they can do about them" (71). This is an aspect of African humanism Mphahlele has identified as the propensity to "gravitate towards other people". A more indirect lesson on African humanism comes in describing Timi's boredom (in London) with museum artefacts and his longing for "just as many people as could … give him a sense of community" (208). Mphahlele is dramatising a rebellion of Timi's African humanist inclination (that thrives in constant company of other people's bodies and minds) against the practices of London social life in which one needs to draw strength from one's own individuality. If Timi's boredom with art galleries in London risks misinterpretations of African humanism as a cultural attitude that does not tolerate preservation of the lost past in artefacts, such misunderstanding

should be dashed by Timi's fascination with the Austrian Irmelin's sculpture, expressed in the following words:

> As a priestess, and in the sculpture she produced to revive a defunct historical shrine, Irmelin worked with those people who were in touch with the basic realities of life, and whose religious beliefs were not cluttered by theological argument and sermonising … No doubt, she had found the satisfaction and self-fulfilment in Iboyoru which she had failed to attain in Austria. (*The Wanderers* 234-35)

Although European (according to the passage above), Irmelin does not work on her sculpture in individualist isolation, as the phrase "worked with those people who were in touch" reveals. The religious practice she immortalises in her sculpture is that of a people "whose religious beliefs were not cluttered by theological argument and sermonising". At once the understanding of the concept of African humanism is deepened to include the aspect whereby an artist is regarded in the community as a priest or priestess whose craft has immense spiritual use necessary for the survival of the community, in keeping with Mphahlele's statement that art "is a compulsive cultural act". The artist in this instance being a European, a further definition of African humanism becomes clear as a state of mind and as social attitude available irrespective of one's pigmentation or continent of origin. If the European, white Irmelin were not an African humanist, she would not be fascinated in her sculpture with the representation of peoples "whose religious beliefs were not cluttered by theological argument and sermonising" – an unequivocal reference by Mphahlele to traditional African religions that were characterised more by practice rather than theory.

African humanism's ability to accommodate change in a dialectic manner (that should not end in self-endangerment) is evinced also in an incident during Chimba's boyhood (*Chirundu* 29). In a flashback that recaptures his boyhood relationship with his obstinate father and his schooling days, Chimba recalls the words of Corkery, the Irish teacher of Principles of Education:

> He urged us to use the school for the tools it could afford us … learn new things, learn how to seize power and to hold on to it … not to forsake our ancestors for something Europeans were themselves throwing out on the dung heap. 'If I were to run an educational system on this continent,' Corkery said, 'I'd begin where your elders left off, and I would be guided by their wisdom in deciding what to put into a curriculum. I would stress human relations all the way … But once being here I tremble, as if I were in the presence of an oracle. That oracle is you put together in front of me. I now realize all the more what a perilous thing it is when you undertake to teach those outside your own culture.' (*Chirundu* 29)

Corkery acknowledges his inadequacy as a teacher of Africans while as a European he does not have the background knowledge of African cultures, when (in the passage above) he states that he realises "what a perilous thing it is when you undertake to teach those outside your own culture". Such a sense of impotence caused by limits set by the experience of exile is strongly reminiscent of Mphahlele's own feeling of irrelevance while a teacher exiled in America as well as a similar problem faced by his wife Rebecca in the field of social work. As Corkery concedes his lack of knowledge about traditional African cultures, Mphahlele prevents whatever possible confusion by the reader who

might mistakenly assume that Corkery is a white African humanist. Corkery's advice to African students is dominated by terms that express universal postcolonial views that are not confined to marginalised peoples of African attachment only but apply to whatever group of people qualifies to be described as "oriental", "subaltern", "on the periphery", and so forth. Corkery's use in dialogue of terms such as "use the school for the tools it could afford us"; "learn new things"; "learn how to seize power and to hold on to it"; "not to forsake our ancestors for something [European]"; "begin where your elders left off"; "would be guided by their wisdom in deciding what to put into a curriculum"; and "stress human relations all the way" – are expressions calling for appropriation of western tools to reach a self-definition that counters the very discourse of the centre, whose tools have been turned to use opposed to their apparently totalising intention. What can be deduced from the example above as Mphahlele's expanded definition of the concept of African humanism is its ability to accommodate the globally-defined postcolonial attitude that employs ideas like "appropriation", "abrogation", "counterdiscourse", "Empire", "subaltern", "oriental", "othering", and others already explained in this study in the way they are used by postcolonial writers such as Ashcroft et al., Said, Spivak, Cabral, Pieterse and others.

Corkery's African humanist emphasis (in the passage above) on Africanising any modern institutions that the Africans cannot but interact with in their continued existence as a people, is designated by means of Chimba's contrasting character. His facing a charge of bigamy in a supposedly modern African court of law in his capacity as a modern African occuping the position of cabinet minister is a parody of Mphahlele's ideal of the modern African humanist. It is important to note that Chimba's obscure African humanism is still the feeble stimulus in his adaptation of consciousness to modern institutions, albeit in a greatly jaded state. The appropriating task such as Chimba faces necessarily includes embracing those aspect of colonial existence that are good and merging them dialectically with those aspects of African humanism that are good. This also implies abandonment of traditional practices that are bad, such as those recognised by the young and not yet corrupted Chimba in discussing genetics with a German district surgeon (31). The modification of consciousness that is taking place within Chirundu's mind is revealed by his statement that:

> I got a picture of the horrors of in-breeding my bowels could hardly bear. There were several families which suffered heavy casualties, some more than others. One branch of the Chirundu line was a case in point … There were to be found in the Chirundu family an adult with a monstrously huge head which he had carried since birth; a homicidal maniac; drunks; bums and hoboes; non-starters; petty minds; mental cases and other nameless deviates. (*Chirundu* 31)

The above citation makes clear that in-breeding is one of the traditional practices that are not good and should be forsaken. It is important that Chirundu learns this from a German national. By this dialogue Mphahlele's concept of African humanism defines itself as accommodative of acceptable inputs from any well-meaning people one comes in contact with, whether they are of African or European origin.

Chimba's alterity brought about by westernisation should not be mistaken for a complete void within him as far as African humanist consciousness is concerned. That is why

Mphahlele makes a point of dispersing rural, traditional patches of Chimba's childhood and growth throughout the novel. The function of these details is also to indicate that a wholesome African humanist upbringing is no guaranteee that an individual will retain those wholesome values, demonstrated by the eventual disgraceful way in which Chimba conducts himself in family and political life. One technique by which the author keeps constant the reminder that Chimba's consciousness is an aberration from a basically African humanist basis despite his deviant behaviour in adult life is the use of flashbacks in which Ambuye's approach in bringing up the young Chimba is continually reconstructed. This is hinted at when Ambuye continues to inculcate African humanist precepts into Chimba's mind even in his adulthood, as in the following statement: "… that reminds me about your late father, and that always takes my mind to that terrible day – I have told you many times before – it shows how one thing goes into another and this also goes into another and you see how the ancestors work through the animals and the trees and the rivers—you feel the mystery of things child of my son" (*Chirundu* 117). Reference (in the citation above) to the memory of Chimba's late father and past historical events – "when Tumbuka people were spilling over the north-eastern border from Nyasaland" – is Ambuye's way of keeping the memory of the dead alive. Ambuye goes on to mention to Chimba that "ancestors work through the animals and the trees and the rivers". The notions of the universe that Ambuye is repeating to Chimba are what Mphahlele has been shown in this study to describe as the vision of African humanism. Mphahlele's technique of using flashback reinforces the reader's awareness of Chimba's consciousness consisting of some aspects of African humanism, for the above dialogue of Ambuye is told in the novel by the I-narrator Chimba in a flashback (116). For Chimba to be able to re-tell incidents that surrounded his birth and growth in a flashback like this and include evidence of an African humanist outlook, should leave us with no doubt that Chimba, like Tirenje and other African characters, has had all the opportunities for developing a wholesome adult consciousness and professional code by having been brought up in an environment characterised by African humanist values. However, Chimba does not succeed like the latter in maintaining an African humanist existence, once faced with the lures of neo-colonialism. What is at stake in the novel is how an individual or groups of individuals adapt their African humanist consciousness to historical change.

In *Chirundu* it is again indicated that in traditional African cultures women were always treated with respect. Reminiscing nostalgically on what Elena Mwansa taught them when she and her peers were still schoolgirls, Tirenje quotes Elena as saying: "Our fathers knew what a woman is worth, where her power lies. But young men of your age, even mine, think that because they call themselves modern, because more women are going to school, more things are open for us to do than there were for our mothers, so more women are also open to men to take and use" (*Chirundu* 83-84). For Elena to start her social analysis of the way the modern day African woman is valued by society against the backdrop of the traditional regard for women (as expressed by the words "our fathers knew what a woman is worth") is acknowledgement on her part that people living within African cultures in modern times are failing to synthesise the modern with the traditional in a sensible way. Mphahlele's portrayal of the teacher Elena Mwansa as a sophisticated, professional woman of formidable intellect (as one gathers from Tirenje's

respectful remembrances of her), yet with a firm grasp of the way Africans traditionally treated women, is intended to elucidate her deep-lying African humanist consciousness. This is akin to the way Mphahlele generally depicts Moyo as coping with urban life without ignoring demonstrations of his African humanist consciousness (in ways shown above). All these purposeful portrayals serve to reinforce Mphahlele's criticism implicitly levelled throughout the text against failures to adapt African humanism to the transition from colonialism to post-independence, and not on any complete absence of African humanism within the psychological make-up of the African characters such as Chimba in *Chirundu*. Elena's admission to her secondary school learners (above) that "more things are open for us to do than there were for our mothers", is Mphahlele's highlighting of the dynamic quality of African humanism that allows it to redefine the traditional role of women without detracting from an enduring commitment to Africanist values within the modern African woman. The wise Elena's mention of the modernist tendency leading to "more women … [being] open to men to take and use" is a castigation of the errant utilitarianism to which individuals failing to digest the confluence of tradition with modernity are prone.

As the paragraph quoted above proceeds, Elena goes on to affirm Mphahlele's view of black women as strong in a description of struggling South African women that evokes memories of the women characters in *Down Second Avenue* – as when she says: "… those people down there in the south also lost their lands, but they do not sit gaping at the sun – they cook food and brew beer to sell – good beer that is as good as food. They go out to the factories, they sew clothes and sell – many things" (84).

The portrayal of black women as stronger than men is exemplified once more when Chimba argues that Tirenje should neither assume the position of secretary in his political life nor feels happy about her returning to teaching, because he "believed firmly that woman's place is with her family, in the house"(42). Chimba's failure to redefine the position of an African woman in modern times is ironically preceded in the monologue by his admission that "there had been women heroes in history, like the warrior queen Mma Ntatise of South Africa who led her people from one conquest to another in the 1820s" (42). To admit that traditionally African women can excel in any role no less than men and yet deny your wife such an opportunity (in reclaiming the subjective position denied her) in which she is sure to excel hints at a fear within Chimba of the power the woman possesses that could even lead to her outperforming him. An observation like this is confirmed by a description of one of Elena's supportive teachings to her learners stating that "the man who wants a woman for a thing to kick about is himself very weak" (84). The image of a woman in African society as the source of life is painted very strongly also when Moyo describes how as a young rural boy his family found it extremely hard to make ends meet (122). Moyo predicates the pauper status of the family on his alcoholic father's "going down", whereas the family is salvaged from the menacing ruin by the fact that "[his] mother grew pumpkin which she bartered for sorghum or maize" (at times when the family is not saved from starvation by charity) (122). The imagery of life-giving nourishment elicited by words such as "pumpkin", "sorghum" and "maize" and linked to the role of woman whose agency is borne out by her demonstrable resourcefulness (suggested by the word that explains that she

“bartered”) carves the robust figure of a traditional African woman on whom life hinges. The instances above bear out the fact that in keeping with his African humanist acknowledgement of the centrality of women in family and community life, Mphahlele’s narrative writings portray black women as stronger than men.

It is with a similar impact that Mphahlele contrasts male and female characters in *The Wanderers*. When Timi goes to investigate the story of Rampa in Sekoting, the patience of the hostess he consults brings about memories of Rampo’s wife Karabo and his own wife Felang as strong black women: “Woman has such a capacity for waiting, for suffering, that makes us males look like rats” (93). The ebullience exuding from the passage quoted below extols to the maximum the sustained image of African women as enduring pillars on which spiritual survival of a whole people depends, even as their carnal beings perish with the passage of time:

> There was Ma Letsatsi – Mother-of-the-sun – who waited for the sun and for whatever other cheer life could give. There was Karabo’s mother, who had waited nine months while her husband was looking for a fortune in the diamond diggings of Kimberlery …The widow was still waiting; this time, for only death, since the government had hounded all blacks from free-hold property and turned them all into municipal tenants. My own mother had suffered phyical violence from my father and waited seven years before she could divorce him, waited until the youngest of her three children was twenty-two and then died. (*The Wanderers* 94)

Mphahlele’s centralisation of family women alongside his interweaving of private, personal life history with historical milestones in the evolution of an entire people epitomises the tenacious survival of African humanist identity by means of the metaphor of the traditional African woman. Historical milestones that are depicted as inextricably entangled with the resilient evolution of African humanist consciousness are those like the forerunner instances of migrant labour, that were triggered by blacks being stripped of arable land by the exploring Voortrekkers – a process which scattered breadwinners to hunt livelihood as far afield from the then Northern Transvaal as the Kimberley diamond mines in the Northern Cape, as well as involving forced removals from free-hold non-racial residential areas during the history of South Africa such as happened to Sophiatown (after the forced urbanisation of Africans). Such a strong sense of history is confirmed in dialogue like Naledi’s words in response to Karabo’s remark on her strength in the face of adversity, when she is about to leave and report back to her parents about Timi’s and her macabre findings on Goshen farm. She credits her strength to the historical fact that “[she] was widowed before [she] became a widow” (112-113). By this remark Naledi means that all black women under the historical circumstances they find themselves in are widows even if their husbands are still alive (such as when a husband separates from his family for long spells to go and work in the white-owned mines). As it is African humanist reasoning that equips Naledi to see her own suffering in such a broad way, Mphahlele through depicting the character of Naledi teaches the reader that his concept of African humanism is tied to sensitivity to historical events in order to redefine and reconstitute itself as circumstances change. As confirmation of the historicity of his concept of African humanism, Mphahlele in personal comments constantly tells the story of his life and those of other people around him in a way that

contextualises them in historical events that have impacted on them, as in the following extract:

> By the end of the eighteenth century, several wars of conquest and resistance had been fought in South Africa. They had started earlier on the eastern Cape frontiers and by the end of the last century the white settlers had reached the hinterland of the Transvaal. In the eastern and northern parts of the Transvaal several African peoples such as the Pedi, the Venda and the Shangaan had established viable communities with various chiefdoms. After conquest and the landgrabbing which followed, the forms of worship, systems of land tenure and the culture of the indigenous peoples were systematically subverted. The beginning of South Africa's own industrial revolution that followed the discovery of diamonds and gold as well as the establishment of towns and cities added to the burden of military and cultural conquest upon our people as migration into the cities started to take its toll. (quoted Manganyi, *Exiles and Homecomings* 30)

Against the historical background he sketches above, lives of characters in Mphahlele's narrative writings are depicted in a culturally defined environment. This grounding of art in real historical events also confirms the African humanist view of art as a cultural act that cannot be seen as a luxurious, hermetic activity.

Interesting also is Steve Cartwright's remark in *The Wanderers* about Naledi's refusal formally to marry him, that he "wouldn't have thought Naledi had it in her [to be] so free of the shackles of tradition" (195). Ironically, it is the very "shackles of tradition" which make it difficult for Naledi to marry another man. Unlike in western Christian cultures, the traditional notion of marital commitment is such that Africans are not united 'till death does them part'. To use a proverb as reference point (as Mphahlele has been shown in this study to do) in order to suggest her awareness of African humanist tenets, one proverb instructs that *lehu ga le hlalwe*, meaning literally "death may not be divorced". Traditionally, a widowed woman after observing the period of mourning joins with another male only by means of respectful love in order for children to be sired if need be; the children bear the surname of the deceased husband and the private lover can lay no claim to their identity. Neither can the widow associate in any ceremonious manner with the family of the secret lover, for she is married until her own death to the extended family of the late husband – meaning she plays the role of a *makoti* or bride fully with the extended family of the late husband, as she and all her children will for ever belong to and be identified by the surname of the deceased husband. That the secret lover this time is the European Cartwright and not a black African attests to the aspect of Mphahlele's African humanism that regards a person as being African due to such a person's consciousness and behaviour and not because of the colour of the skin. That Naledi and Cartwright enter into a relationship according to Naledi's customs (and not the other way round) could also be interpreted as further evidence of African women being stronger than men. Naledi's immersion in traditional customs (demonstrated by the agency of her self-assertion in defining her relationship with Cartwright) as well as her possession of hybrid consciousness demonstrated by her "mixture of vernacular proverbs and modern colloquial images" in her dialogue cannot be indicative merely of her earthiness as the writer Ursula Barnett seems to suggest (*A Vision of Order* 145). On the contrary, hybrid images that combine an African humanist world-view with colonial

experiences reveal her strength in transcending the onslaught of apartheid and exile, which is consistent with Mphahlele's notion of black women as stronger than men.

The novel *Chirundu* stresses the importance of an historical perspective right from the time when Chimba makes seductive advances to the schoolgirl Tirenje: "Here we are learning about the American Revolution and our children do not know where our people came from, how great they were once" (15). Moyo also keeps the memory of his ancestors green to acknowledge their heroism, a personal perspective (or spiritual commitment) that is intertwined with the historical perspective from which, according to African humanist orientation, Africans must interpret their own present as well as shape their own future. This is achieved when Moyo laments the fall of the Chirundu house and harnesses the memory to serve as an inspiration to act heroically among the Africans of his own lifespan, as he ponders: "Grandfather Mutiso was born in the dark times of *chifwamba* – the Arab and Yao slave raids in Nyasaland" (123). The thought of his ancestors as one of several conquered peoples [during the difficult epoch (circa 1884) in the history of his own state] who yet survived the period of historical oppression to see the day their sacrifices were rewarded by the dawn of political freedom in a unified modern state, spurs Moyo on to continue the heroic struggle in which he is immersed as an organiser of workers. On the importance of reconstituting Christianity, Mphahlele through the mouth of Moyo tells the epic tale of the hero Joni Chilembwe who during the *chifwamba* "was Christian and said his church was going to save the people from the rule of the white man" (123). Reference to this abrogation of western Christianity and its use as a reconstituted religion in the fight for liberation re-affirms Mphahlele's homage to the role of religious nationalism in bringing about creative hybridity in the practices of post-independence Africans (as he does with Zionist sects in other texts analysed in this study).

Mphahlele is not the only *Drum* writer who finds it imperative to highlight the historical context within which Africans have behaved in determinate ways. Todd Matshikiza's *Chocolates for My Wife* describes how, when a housekeeper welcomes him to Mr Rutherford's house near Kensington Palace, his memories of the 1929 visit to South Africa by the Prince of Wales are revived (45). More importantly, Matshikiza devotes time and space to describing the meaning of the Prince's visit to his fellow Africans back home, in the following potent words:

> My father and his fellow advisory committee of important black men did not have the Royal opportunity of meeting and shaking hands with the Prince of Wales but they were placed in an honorary box from where they could bow in the direction of His Royal Highness in full view of the general public. They were allowed also to take charge of the ceremonial slaughter where several beasts were sacrificed and thousands of the location residents partook of the traditional royal roast. (*Chocolates for My Wife* 45)

Although Todd's educated father may have comprehended the purpose and importance of the Prince's visit to South Africa (as one of the British Commonwealth member states), the white rulers do not allow him and his peers a prominence in the ceremony and closeness to the Prince equal to theirs. In the way writers like Ashcroft *et al.* (1998) have defined ambivalence as fear by the "centre" that the hybridity of the subaltern or others

may lead to the dangerous situation where the subaltern may outdo members of the "centre" in enacting the very lifestyles the colonizer imposed on them, the white South African government of the time can be said to have feared the erudition and eloquence of Africans like Matshikiza's father. Hence the refusal to allow them a chance to prove how cultivated they are in European manners as well as African courtesies and dignity. As for the black rank and file attending the ceremony, their ritual concentration on the sacrificing of several cattle to their ancestors should be seen as appropriation of this western-style ceremony and its re-direction towards serving African spiritual needs in order to communicate whatever petitions they might have had to their ancestors. In Mphahlele's definition, the Africans attending the ceremony to whom (in terms of the Eurocentric vision) it might have been inscrutable, display a survival of their African humanism despite the condition of colonisation. In other words, the Africans have turned the otherwise 'othering' gesture of the white government into a self-constituting one in which they sacrifice beasts for liberation and in demonstration of their own dignity as much as the Prince's.

Not only are political history and religious nationalism employed in Mphahlele's two novels to convey African humanist resonances and perspective. Other constituents of resonance like myth contribute to the creation of perspective in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu*. That is why, in the ditty sung by the wife of Papa Joas's neighbour (who is irritated by Papa Joas's slothful pastime of always drinking and playing music from a tattered gramophone), the lines "Somewhere is an old man/ who sent his teeth/to fetch a rabbit/they never came back" create a mythical atmosphere of the kind that usually accompanies traditional oral storytelling (*The Wanderers* 13). It is in folktales that parables like the one conjured up by the ditty are told by means of song and narrative. Mphahlele makes a similar allusion when he depicts how Chimba retorts when Hacket confronts him after receiving a letter from the missionaries, to whose souls Tirenje's father had surrendered – accusing him of having sinfully impregnated the schoolgirl Tirenje: "So the conference of birds must have said when they hauled up the owl to accuse him of going about at night and sleeping in day-time" (*Chirundu* 18). The mythical images of the congregating birds and the owl in the above examples from *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* respectively create localised variants of a unique, African humanist perspective for Mphahlele's narrative writings. After the mythical image of *nsato* the python has been implemented in earlier incidents that reveal its mythical power (as already demonstrated earlier in this study), Tirenje sustains the image, pointing to the immortality of *nsato* and the qualities the mythical creature embodies when she begrudgingly bids farewell to Chimba in the following way: "One last wish Chimba – when I die – wherever it may be – do not come to my funeral … *nsato* will watch over the grave" (94). More importantly, she legitimately appropriates the mythical image and (just as she is divorcing herself from Chirundu) 'divorces' the image of *nsato* from Chirundu so much that the mythical creature turns into some kind of Frankenstein monster for him. In this way, *nsato* as an allegorical representation of Chimba's greed for unbridled power boomerangs to consume its own master, most like the endings of folktales in which misdeeds are usually turned dramatically against the hero. Mphahlele consistently employs this invocation of myth and orature in the two novels (as he has done in other genres scrutinised earlier on in this study) to indicate that resonance as an

artistic device implemented within African cultures constantly includes such allegorical items as myths, fables and folktales. In this way the 'unbroken song' that manifests itself in repeated humanist patterns in the social practices of Africans continues *ad infinitum*.

Reference to *nsato* as constituting mythical resonance in *Chirundu* need not detract from an alternative interpretation by the critic Gagiano when she states: "The central symbol of *nsato*, the python, is Mphahlele's expression of the combination of sexual, social and political forces which dominate this society" (39). I agree that the sustained image of "nsato gone mad" is a precise description by Mphahlele of Chimba' s failure as well as failure of those behaving like him to redefine the traditional "sexual, social and political forces" within society, as their traditional definition is compelled by post-independence realities to transform .

The two novels exemplify human behaviour that may be interpreted as representing African humanist consciousness such as conceptions of the relationship between life and death evident in African cultures, invocation of ancestral intervention in activities of carnal life, mystical attachment to places seen as home, as well as counterhegemonic appropriation of religious practice. Mphahlele's style uses Sotho proverbs and idiomatic expressions that are translated literally into English, even in the dialogue of a character like Tirenje whose indigenous language is not Sotho. This is an indication that the same expressions are assumed to have their equivalents in the local languages, so that what matters is not the surface structure of an expression but its underlying formulation, which transcends linguistic barriers. This attitude makes clear that cultural groups that are described as African bear a common identity only in terms of underlying attitudes which are African humanist and spawned by common geo-political environmental factors, and not in terms of observable cultural behaviour which is localised. In his quest to demonstrate this and other aspects of African humamism, Mphahlele has had to appropriate English in such a manner that his imagery and dialogue bear a purposeful, functional quality characterised by his unique translation of Sotho idiom into English.

He does so differently from the other black South African writers of the 1950s whose attempts to appropriate English have been demonstrated in this study to have fitted more the model of critics like Chapman who see these writers' "wrestling [English] into new forms" as "saturat[ing it] with the imagery and rhythm of *tsotsitaal* and everyday speech which provided a vivid articulation of street culture … [and] could carry the weight of the new African urban experience in a way that vernacular languages and 'pure' English could not" ("Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties" 145). Clearly the intention of the 1950s writers matching Chapman's description was not common with Mphahlele's – which was reinforcement of the value of thought originally expressed in indigenous languages. For the former group of writers Chapman's observation remains true – to them as to him – that "the new African urban experience" could not be captured by "vernacular languages" ("Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties" 145). On the contrary, part of Mphahlele's mission in his writing career has been to illustrate that vernacular languages as carriers of the African humanist outlook can and should be harnessed to express Africans' experience in any new situation, including the urban milieu of the fifties. As this study attempts to show, one device Mphahlele employs is imagery that revives African ways of thinking

and living together with dialogue that effectively captures colloquial speech forms and communal utterances and verdicts. One achievement of imagery and dialogue devised in this way is more complete communication of African humanist sensibility, in keeping with Mphahlele's commitment mentioned above. For a reader who prefers conventional English in order to carry and transmit the social culture of western English speakers, or to stop at transmitting the superficial culture of blacks borne of transient environmental factors (such as urbanisation under apartheid conditions), this could lead to a perception of unpalatability and intractability – as seems to be the case with a critic like Lewis Nkosi, when he resents Mphahlele's "language [that is] at once dry, brittle and sterile, with dialogue that is uniformly heavy and awkward in syntax, whoever happens to be talking" (*Tasks and Masks* 97). It is the sustained inherence of African humanist thought and expression whose constancy in Mphahlele's narrative writings comes across to critics like Lewis Nkosi as "uniformly heavy and awkward in syntax, whoever happens to be talking", however fascinating and effective this style may prove to be – as this study is attempting to demonstrate (97).

Understanding of African humanism as Mphahlele defines it is deepened by illustration through characterisation that one need not belong to a certain race to be African, or to respect African humanist conduct among people to whose group identity one does not belong, as such characters as *Bongo* editor Steve Cartwright (*The Wanderers*) and the Irish teacher Corkery (*Chirundu*) respectively demonstrate. African humanism as an intellectual, spiritual and social reality is also clarified in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* as characterised by a non-homogenising way of looking at life, as evinced by white characters who interact sensitively with Africans despite the existence of other whites who fail to do so due to whatever non-African consciousness may be responsible for their behaviour. In this way, African humanism is posited as a distinctive identity of a cluster of peoples with symptomatically varying forms of cultural behaviour neither more nor less important than other groups exhibiting their own distinctive identities.

4.6 Closing Remarks

Mbembe (2002) has rightly observed that African modes of writing the self are inseparably tied to the problematics of self-constitution and the modern philosophy of the subject (240). Mbembe's remark holds for Mphahlele in that the concept of African humanism (as he proposes it) is an attempt at self-writing. It is a mode of self-writing because it contributes to the Africans' self-constitution (as has been illustrated in this study through textual scrutiny of his narrative writings). It is "tied to the modern philosophy of the subject", too, because (as some parts of this study show) his concept of African humanism counterdiscursively negates the "centre's" definition of Africans as objects, asserting their subjective self-definition and their capacity to interpret reality according to indigenous norms. The authorial voice and textual messages in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* show that Mbembe's observation is as true of Mphahlele as it is of the other Afrocentric writers cited in this study.

Mbembe laments the fact that some Afrocentric thinkers in an attempt at self-writing have failed to free themselves of the "victim complex" (242) in the following statement: "These three fundamental elements of slavery, colonization, and apartheid are said to serve as a unifying center of Africans' desire to know themselves, to recapture their destiny (*sovereignty*), and to belong to themselves in the world (*autonomy*)" ("African Modes of Self-Writing" 242). The above statement by Mbembe foregrounds the weakness of the "victim complex" as an extraneously based exclusivism, which he terms a mistaken form of the Africans' desire "to belong to themselves" (242). According to him, the undeniable facts of history (which are slavery, colonisation and apartheid) should not narrowly unify Africans in order for them to wallow in paralysing self-pity, because in this way their unity will be based on an obsession with their victim status. When Africans unite "to recapture their destiny" it should not be because they define themselves in object terms as victims, but they should do this as subjective agents whose definition disregards the victimising actions of any other group. In the same way that characters in *Chirundu* (for example) struggle with reconstitution in subjective responses to the new historical reality of post-independence, Africans' self-definition should be premised on the new historical realities which challenge groups of whatever identity not to freeze in the past but to adapt to new realities.

While the two novels considered in this chapter feed on the experiences of "slavery, colonization, and apartheid" ("African Modes" 262) for their subject matter, Mphahlele's postulation of African humanism as an attitude that shifts attention away from preoccupation with colonisation or apartheid towards a strengthening of Africans themselves spiritually, so that they may live their lives fully as a self-defining distinctive group, should be properly understood to be aimed at ridding Africans of what Mbembe calls the "victim complex". Mphahlele's concept of African humanism similarly finds expression (although in different terminology) also in the writings of some other African writers. This can be witnessed in Mphahlele's call to Africans to move away from defining their existence in relation to actions and attitudes of the coloniser, to achieve interdependence among themselves as well as across the colour bar. He proposes as a solution for this engagement in what some African writers have called "positive action"

(such as Nkrumah, Nyerere and Kenyatta in the late 50s and early 60s). It has already been shown in this study, for example, that during Zambia's struggle for liberation leaders like Kaunda campaigned for self-initiated nation-building projects by Zambians (rather than reacting to colonisers' conduct).

This should illustrate that Mbembe's caution to some Africans failing to rid themselves of the "victim complex" identifies a problem formerly detected and tackled by Mphahlele (and some African writers such as those just mentioned). Mphahlele writes, for example in his 1990 essay "From Dependence to Interdependence: Towards Nation Building" that concentration by some African leaders on conditions of apartheid rather than on a spirit of non-exlusive self-sufficiency has led in the late 1980s to De Klerk pulling "the carpet from under [their] feet" as all their "energies have been totally obsessed with surviving the barbarism of the white man's rule" ("From Dependence" 199). African humanism as exemplified in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* teaches Africans to initiate constructive nation-building activities rather than focusing on idealisation or demonisation of the enemy as their focus. That is why, for example, Tirenje (in *Chirundu*) acts in the entire novel not against any action of the coloniser, but against the behaviour of her African husband. That Chimba acts within the context of post-independence is a mere background of his personal failure to reconstitute his African humanist consciousness to accord with a new historical reality. Postcolonialism is a mere background to the native characters' actions in *Chirundu*, in the same way as apartheid and exile are the background in the case of South African characters in both *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu*, with failure or success measured in the attempt to reshape African humanist consciousness to cope with apartheid or exile circumstances – which rightly takes the forefront. An African humanist consciousness thus takes precedence in Mphahlele's writings over obsession with victimisation by either apartheid or exile.

As illustrated by his creation of characters whose African humanism transcends race and skin colour (in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu*), Mphahlele should be exonerated also from Mbembe's charge of Africans carrying out self-writing in a manner that unfortunately replicates the Hegelian ethnographic practice of striving for an exclusivist, absolutely essentialist self-constitution (244). The awareness of complexity demonstrated in the behaviour of characters like Corkery (*Chirundu*) and Cartwright (*The Wanderers*), together with the hybridity of characters like Chimba Chirundu, should prove that Mphahlele does not define his African humanism in absolute or essentialist terms that either exclude or include people on the basis of biological origin.

What a writer like Mbembe observes as flaws in self-writing attempts by some African writers are also the concerns of writers like Mphahlele. As antecedent parts of this study attempt to illustrate, many characters in Mphahlele's autobiographies and novels are epitomes of exemplary conduct by Africans, portraying them as acting without unhealthy preoccupation with apartheid and exile and demonstrating their capacity to survive as members of a social group with binding, distinctively African behavioural features.

By exonerating himself (through the representations of African humanism in his narrative writings) from the theoretical frailties generally dogging Afrocentric writers as pointed

out by writers like Mbembe (cited above), Mphahlele *ipso facto* responds to the concerns explored by Ndebele's theory. Ndebele censures the predicating of Africans' self-definition on the egregious effects of life under apartheid, in the following words:

> One other way by which the South African writer can move effectively into the post-protest era is by working towards a radical displacement of the white oppressor as an active, dominant player in the imagination of the oppressed. This tactical absence will mean that the writer can consolidate the sense of a viable, psychologically self-sufficient community among the oppressed. ("Redefining" 71)

It should now be opportune to turn to *Father Come Home* and examine whether Mphahlele still in this final novel uses language and setting to communicate his concept of African humanism.

5. BACK TO MAUPANENG

5.1 OPENING REMARKS

In a 1998 interview with Samin, Mphahlele professes that in writing *Father Come Home* he specifically wanted to give the novel a rural setting and tried to "create a pace here that corresponds to the pace of rural life, its contemplative aura" ("Interview" 194). This is interesting because in "Redefining Relevance" (published in 1991), the theorist Ndebele regrets "the lack" in black South African writing since the era of protest literature "of compelling imaginative recreations of rural life in our literature" ("Redefining" 71). He stresses the need for "rural culture as a serious fictional theme … to be revisited" ("Redefining" 71).
Of the importance of the consciousness of the rural populace in theorising about the liberation struggle, Fanon has remarked that:

> The embryonic proletariat of the towns is in a comparatively privileged position … So we understand that the followers of the nationalist political parties are above all town-dwellers … The overwhelming majority of nationalist parties show a deep distrust towards the people of the rural areas … The country people are suspicious of the townsman …What is more, the colonialists make use of this antagonism in their struggle against the nationalist parties. ("Spontaneity" 86, 89)

Such positions by Ndebele and Fanon as quoted above should be considered side by side with Mphahlele's declared objective (as a postcolonial writer) in setting out to compose *Father Come Home* ("Interview" 194). For Mphahlele to see the need to write a novel in which to "create a pace" that corresponds to the "*contemplative* aura" of rural life is to reaffirm his own belief in interpreting the lot of his people in such an inclusive manner that "literature … can step outside the rough-and-tumble of human concerns and activity and *monitor, record and refine them*" ("Interview" 194; "Versus the Political Morality" 361-62, emphases added). According to the broader theoretical context represented by Ndebele, not only is redefinition of relevant literature to focus on "rural culture as a serious fictional theme" ("Redefining" 71), but the proposed shift of literary approach and focus is important for the development of African literature produced in (post-) apartheid South Africa due to the "compelling imaginative" effect or social result it may have ("Redefining" 71). Ndebele advocates that such a rural-focused literature should employ techniques that stimulate intellectual growth and should be shorn of depicting simplistic reactions to existential challenges that accompanied life under apartheid – as the phrase "compelling imaginative" implies. According to this theory, it can only be a credit to Mphahlele to have reversed the neglect of rural people by "actors" within the environment of struggle for liberation. Ndebele discourages a literary and theoretical atmosphere in which "to know has been to know how badly one has been treated [and] every other thing is irrelevant unless it is perceived as contributing to the extension of this knowledge" ("Redefining" 59).

True to Mphahlele's declared approach and in harmony with Ndebele's theoretical stance, *Father Come Home* is Mphahlele's only narrative set in a fully rural milieu (apart

from some of the short stories dealt with earlier). Its symbolically potent rural imagery is conducive to the depiction of more overt and frequently observable forms of African humanism, which are nevertheless no simplistic representation of Africans' way of thinking and living. The novel's echoes of *Down Second Avenue* make its analysis last in this study a satisfactory rounding off, after the study opened with considerations of the longer narratives, in discussing *Down Second Avenue*.

The surface simplicity of language in *Father Come Home* (as in *Down Second Avenue*) (belying its underlying vitality and turbulence) should be seen to support Mphahlele's literary intention which is, as Reingard Nethersole has observed, "to fill the gap of African self-knowledge for a young reading public" ("Places of" 503). The deceitful ordinariness of the storyline and its apparent targeting of teenage readership leads Ruth Obee to describe it (in her essay "Father Come Home" 202) as "juvenile fiction". Distinctive incarnations of the ordinariness, and artistry not easily accessible to an unseasoned reader characterise this text. Mphahlele's approach in *Father Come Home* "that seeks to preserve the legacy of the wisdom of his people in an unbroken song", as recognized by Reingard Nethersole ("Places of" 503), *is* akin to what Edward Said has seen (in his 2003 essay) as necessary for the preservation of Palestinians as a rounded people in the face of Israeli injustices comparable with those suffered by blacks in apartheid South Africa –

> What is amazing to me is the persistence of the Palestinian story, and the many different turns it takes, and the fact that it isn't an organized story, because we are a stateless and exiled people. One has to keep telling the story *in as many ways as possible*, as insistently as possible, and *in as compelling a way as possible*, to keep attention to it, because there is always a fear that it might just disappear. ("Rendezvous" 187, emphases added)

In this citation Said recognises (as the parts I have italicised demonstrate) the need for the artistic interpretation of a people's existence to adapt itself to different times in the history of the emancipation of such a people, and for it to be done in a manner that appeals to profound intellectual engagement with detail rather than employing simplistic emotional reaction to the unanalysed, bigger picture.

It is within the light of such declarations in Mphahlele's expository writings as have been cited in the opening remarks of this chapter that the text *Father Come Home* will be looked at. The analysis of this Mphahlele novel will also be done in cognisance of the theoretical framework as articulated by critics such as Edward Said and Njabulo Ndebele. Ruth Obee sees the fictive focus on rural affirmation as essential in the re-establishment of African cultural confidence in the face of the culturally disorienting effect of apartheid, for the reason that "apartheid social engineers went to great trouble to link the blacks' rural roots "with barbarism and backwardness" ("Father Come Home" 204).

5.2 RURAL LIFE BEYOND EXILE

If *Chirundu* is remembered in part (as Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma have remarked) for its "fresh variation on a common theme [which is] the confrontation between a traditional African sensibility and a Western one" (459), *Father Come Home* will be remembered for depicting African humanist behaviour in a more extensively rural context than *Down Second Avenue*. The protagonist Maredi's search for balanced parental care takes him from rural Sedibeng through the even more rural tracts of bushveld lying between it and Fort Victoria and, in 1975 when nearly eighty years of age, back to his own house in rural Chuene district, "near the pass at the foot of the tall Mountain of Mogodumo, [which he calls] the Mountain of the Gods" (95).

Mphahlele broadens and deepens Maredi's search for more adequate parental care to make it a search for a more meaningful relationship with the cosmos, as perceived from an African humanist angle:

> For their way of worship, the people of Mashite had no church, because they had no church-day like Sunday. They believed in the Supreme Being, whose presence they felt where human relations were harmonious, in animal life, in plant life, in the mountains and valleys and the elements: water, air, light – everywhere. They believed that their ancestors – the kinfolk and ancient leaders – were always living and present to guide them into the paths of decency, of goodness, of harmony among people. They prayed to the Supreme Being through the ancestors, without assembling for the express purpose of praying. (36)

This is Mphahlele's description of African humanist existence, as has also earlier been shown in this study. Twelve-year-old Maredi Tulamo, having been born of African parents living in Sedibeng (separated thinly from Mashite by its being 'Christian' while Mashite is 'heathen') should on the whole be at peace with himself (36). Despite boys and girls from Sedibeng being made to believe that Mashite people are witches with whom it is dangerous to mingle, the cultural divisions between the two villages are more imaginary than actual, as signified by the image of the river in the valley dividing the two villages having "long dried up" and by the fact of children from both sides of the dead river attending circumcision school despite Christian precepts forbidding it (36). The one aspect for which the boy Maredi still needs to claim self-constitution is in the sphere of religious belief as revealed by his resolve to attend circumcision school "this winter" rather than later (3). The other aspect, in terms of the passage above, concerns complete participation in African humanist religious conduct, "where human relations [are] harmonious" (36). The major reason for disharmony in Maredi's human relations is caused by the situation in which he has to "keep asking Mother when Papa will come back", because his father has left the family before he was born (3).

Such a repetitive, urgent, question by Maredi regarding the crucial family value of a manchild growing up under the close tutelage of a father broaches one of the major themes of this novel – that of eroded family values. Far from being a stock theme for protest literature, this theme is Mphahlele's contribution to a "rediscovery of the ordinary". Ndebele's theory on the relevance of literature emphasises that:

> Most paradoxically, for the writer, the *immediate* problem, just at the point at which he sits down to write his novel, is not the seizure of power. Far from it. His immediate aim is a radically contemplative state of mind in which the objects of contemplation are that range of social conditions which are the major ingredients of social consciousness. Exclusion of any on the grounds that they do not easily lend themselves to dramatic political statement will limit the possibilities of any literary revolution, by severely limiting the social range on which to exercise its imagination. ("Redefining" 69)

Mphahlele's *Father Come Home* revolves on the social issue of family relations, which theme at first impression ignores the burning political issue of the time which (as Ndebele indicates) is "the seizure of power" ("Redefining" 69).

Apart from handling the supposedly inane theme of family relations under apartheid conditions, the novel has a rural setting. Ndebele has expressed the desperate need for intellectual focus on black rural life under apartheid in the following words:

> The South African industrial revolution occasioned a massive flow of labour from the rural areas into the towns and cities of the country … [after which] the perception appears to have consolidated within the ranks of the liberation struggle that the decisive element in determining the course of the coming South African future, is the workers in the cities … But what of the millions of Africans in the rural areas who, at that very decisive moment, might decide the fate of the hinterland? What of the deliberate peasantisation of urban Africans by the government through the Banstustans? ("Turkish Tales" 21).

Ndebele's words quoted above identify the disregard on the part of creative writers (such as a section of the intelligentsia within the "liberation struggle") of themes that microscopically analyse black rural life under apartheid for meaningful links with and involvement in the struggle for liberation. It is for this reason that Mphahlele's decision to write *Father Come Home* with the "the pace of rural life, its contemplative aura", is significant in terms of further evolving post-protest literature in South Africa ("Interview" 194).

The rural nature of the environment into which Maredi is born is attested to by Mphahlele's indication (illustrated above) of Sedibeng and Mashite people commonly leading lives imbued within African humanist values. This common lifestyle is only superficially masked by varying degrees of westernisation in one community as the 'Christians' clubbing together in "mass prayers during drought or some other disaster" resembles the 'heathens' of Mashite coming together to feast and sing and dance "at the beginning of the ploughing season, soon after the first rains" and during other beacons of day to day life, invariably adjusting to seasonal change (35, 37). Against such a environmentally sedate background, the beating by Eliyase that follows Maredi's inquisitive venture into "the forbidden forest to the north-west of Sedibeng" (where the overtly traditional Mashite people reside and perform their rituals) can only be the manifestation of the paternal uncle Eliyase's unpleasant personality and not that of clashing cultures between the two adjoining villages (27, 35). That is why Dineo and Hunadi eventually concur that the former is right to refuse Eliyase's proposal to marry her as his second wife, because "he is a terror and he is selfish and he has no heart for

anybody but himself". Hunadi even calls her brother "that louse Eliyase" (48). That this happens when Maredi's mother Dineo and paternal aunt Hunadi (who also suffers from anguish because neither her husband nor son ever returned from Johannesburg, where they went to seek jobs) nearly fall out since each takes out her frustrations on the other as they contemplate the woes inflicted by urbanisation on their extended family, is the author's way of highlighting that Eliyase (though technically at home) is actually absent in the sense of his failure to practise African humanist values (just like the other three male members of the extended family who have vanished away in Johannesburg). The metaphor of "louse" reveals Eliyase's disgusting disposition as *parasite* on the woman suffering because of the dark machinations of apartheid, exploiting the family and community to indulge his indolence and selfishness.

Eliyase's personality flaws include failure to accommodate other people's views (made more crassly evident when he defies communal opinion about the responsibility of a family man to work hard in the fields and fulfil other social roles). Hence he capitalises on the major cause of disharmony in Maredi's family relationships – that of the boy's father Lemeko's disappearance. Lemeko's disappearance is caused by white-ruled apartheid conditions which prove too powerful to allow his balanced absorption into urban existence. The actual event symptomatic of Lemeko's difficulty in adjusting to the harshness of the life of blacks under apartheid remains unknown to both Maredi and other family members until the re-union at the Sukumakara railway station, after which the family settles together in Rhodesia's Fort Victoria. As a freshly-wed man working in Pretoria, Lemeko one day experiences the trampling to death of a friend (the same man who is also a close neighbour back home in Sedibeng) by one of the horses ridden by the police who chase behind the *malaeta* men as they return from their usual Sunday afternoon boxing sport (88).

What is significant about the tragic event during one of the *malaeta* routines is Mphahlele's description, which leads the reader to blame Lemeko's traumatised reaction to it not on Lemeko himself, but on the apartheid system behind it, in the following words:

> These young men, some of them mere boys, work in the kitchens in white homes … They love the game – they shake heads and arms full of bangles – hear them shout "Whoooooo! My blood is boiling. I'm the boy from Machaka, Polokwane – Peeteesburg!" They are not killers – they want to feel their manhood – test it – prove it – that they're men not women just because they do woman's work in the kitchens. Where are the manly things to do today – where are the heroes made like in the olden days? Police come after them on horses – drive them from behind – they believed *malaeta* kill everybody in the way … Now then the horses – strong horses – the rider pokes it and it charges and the groups of [*malaeta*] break up and the men go mad and think this is another test of their manhood – they must run and outrun the horses … [while] the riders are laughing … A friend of mine who was in the ring – I see him clearly – he trips and falls in front of the horse standing on two legs. The hoofs come down on him – *gi-gi* – one, two, three, his head is smashed – the second time the hoofs nail him to the road – Boom Street – that was it. (87-88)

In addition to the image of the *malaeta* creating cultural perspective for the reader in the style that permeates all of Mphahlele's narrative writings considered in this study, with similar effect), the subsequent image of mounted, powerful white men laughing as the vulnerable victims are trampled under the hooves of the horses (for fun!) evokes horror and pathos that highlight the cruelty of apartheid – symbolised by these mounted police. The intensity of Lemeko's shock at this incident will be best understood once his African humanist consciousness is properly seen as sharpening the horrifying effect of the unAfrican group attitudes represented by these policemen. This is because African humanism, as Mphahlele defines it, is "originally a religious state of mind producing moral action; attachment to the soil, social relationships, the art of healing, the sense of community and its welfare …" ("The Fabric" 154). Lemeko's desertion of his family is understood to have been propelled by this shocking, spiritually disruptive experience.

The structure of the novel foregrounds rural African life as conducive to the thriving of successful adaptations of the African humanist mentality. Action throughout the novel unfolds in this rural setting, oscillating between Sedibeng and places like Sukumakara, Phalaborwa and Messina. The incidents reach a point when there is a danger of breaking the sustained imagery of rural exuberance and abandon through the return of Lemeko to urban Fort Victoria with the family. Mphahlele counterbalances this by obscuring the predominance of urban setting during his schooling in urban areas and his forays into married life and in the job world. This is achieved because the chapter immediately following the arrival of the Tulamos in semi-urban Fort Victoria is the Epilogue in which emphasis returns to memories of rural nurture and nourishment by means of 72-year-old Maredi's conversation with Mashabela's daughter Batseba (at a wedding in rural Seshego) (92).

The novel is a tribute to the capacity of rural Africa to contain and preserve social patterns and consciousnesses that constitute African humanism. This becomes clearer in the light of Thuynsma's observation that "personal experience, whether fictionalised or not, forms [Mphahlele's] creative impulse" (221). It is thus important to read *Father Come Home* in terms of the knowledge that it was written after Mphahlele's return from exile and after he had settled with much satisfaction in rural Lebowakgomo. Mphahlele enjoyed settling among fellow Africans in an environment he is familiar with and in which he can function meaningfully by contributing towards the welfare of the community, no longer hampered by the debilitating impotence of exile. Exile can never be fulfilling because one of its aspects, according to Mphahlele, is "the attitude of the exile to the circumstances prevailing in his homeland that are bound to influence him psychologically" ("Africa in Exile" 117). In Mphahlele's view, what one does after returning to South Africa from exile is as fulfilling as opting to remain home under apartheid, "because … that very act would [have given one] a purpose – that thing for which one lives when one wants to create beauty out of chaos and make sense of it" ("Africa in Exile" 123). This source of Mphahlele's gratification, stemming from his African humanist outlook, is summed up by his friend Sonia Sanchez in a tribute to Mphahlele that she wrote upon the parting of their ways as Mphahlele returned permanently to South Africa: "heard you say, sonia. i must be buried in my country in my own homeland, my bones must replenish the black earth from whence they came, our

bones must fertilize the ground on which we walk or we shall never walk as men and women in the 21st century" ("A Letter to Ezekiel Mphahlele" 29). Clearly, in this quote Mphahlele ties the success of the liberation struggle in South Africa with his physical presence and involvement there (as opposed to exile). That when he returned he chose to live in rural Lebowakgomo has to do with his significant conviction regarding the preservation of African humanist values. The novel *Father Come Home* expresses Mphahlele's satisfaction with the rural setting, which according to him remains the place where African humanism survives more meaningfully and profoundly than in the cities, as his portrayal of characters like Moyo (in *Chirundu*) demonstrates.

Indeed, it is not far-fetched to interpret Maredi's satisfaction with finding a stable home in a rural setting as a symbol of the satisfaction Mphahlele himself derives from having settled (after traversing the globe) in rural Lebowakgomo. There is a curious parallel in the way Maredi and Mphahlele both content themselves with settling in a rural environment close to that of their childhood upbringing without actually returning to their place of birth. We know that Maredi was born in Sedibeng, but now has "[retired] to a house in Chuene's district, near the pass at the foot of the tall Mountain of Mogodumo" (95). Mphahlele, too, settled in rural Lebowakgomo instead of Maupaneng when he returned from exile. The critic Reingard Nethersole is sharply conscious of this parallelism between the lives of Maredi and Mphahlele, as revealed by her remark that "The epilogue refers to a chance meeting … [at which] the two old women provide the reader with an overview of Maredi's adult later life of unsettled wanderings" ("Places of" 502). It is common knowledge that "unsettled wanderings" are a fitting description of Mphahlele's adult life before returning from exile and settling in Lebowakgomo. As such, Maredi's search for his father and the ultimate reunion between the two could be understood to symbolise Mphahlele's search for ancestral wisdom for which he searched as a youth without much success until he was reunited with his rural place of birth, his "father".

5.3 DIMENSIONS OF GROWTH

5.3.1 WOMEN AS PILLARS OF FAMILY AND NATION

It has already been shown in this study that women's personal tribulations in Mphahlele's fiction assume epic dimensions. This is illustrated, for example, when the widow Naledi says (in *The Wanderers)* that she is not devastated by the news of Rampa's death "because [she] was widowed before [she] became a widow" (113). The same use of dialogue to affirm the position of women as more powerful than men presents itself in *Father Come Home* when Maredi's mother Dineo and her sister-in-law Hunadi console each other in pondering the dispossession they face as two husbands and a son from the extended family disappear in response to the demand of labour in the white-owned mines, factories and kitchens of the big cities (47). Painfully, Hunadi asks the rhetorical question why Dineo and she "were chosen for this kind of waiting" (47).

Mphahlele uses the now familiar technique of historical perspective to contextualise this private deprivation within the Tulamo family, by detailing that the discovery of minerals in South Africa after the First World War spiralled into economic developments that created (for white colonisers) the need for cheap black labour (15). Legislation then followed (since 1913) that drove people from the land on which they depended for their own farming, which led to individuals such as Maredi's father Lemeko, Namedi, the *malaeta* member who is later crushed to death and others going and looking for work in Pretoria, Johannesburg and other cities (16). The dehumanisation that the landless blacks face in the mine compounds and urban townships debauches some of them to the lowest levels of immorality. It leads, for instance, to Hunadi's son turning into an urban ghetto creature called a hole-digger, described as follows:

> Hunadi was really alarmed when it was reported that her son had become a bum, a drunk, that he had become a hole-digger. This meant that he was being kept by a beer-brewing queen who gave him food and sleeping room in return for digging holes in the yard to conceal tins of beer against police raids. A hole-digger was considered to have sunk to the lowest level of self-hate – beyond all hope. Once a hole-digger, only bodily decay and death await you, and there is never a return to the decent life. (18)

Mphahlele's disapproving tone refuses to strip Africans of the responsibility to be as resourceful as their tradition of self-pride demands – a tradition that requires self-praise and the praise of fellow Africans for achievement (in the spirit of *letšema* or working in groups rather than as individuals) even under such highly adverse conditions. This is the same self-pride with which Mphahlele invests the unfortunate *malaeta*, which is the impulse behind the exlamation "Whoooooo! My blood is boiling. I'm the boy from Machaka, Polokwane – Peeteesburg!". This cry simultaneously casts glory also on fellow Africans facing the same situation of urban brutalisation (87).

It can thus be seen that for Hunadi's son to allow himself to sink to the level of a "hole-digger" amounts to mismanagement of an African humanist orientation. Mphahlele's message, like that of other African writers such as Todd Matshikiza (quoted above), is that Africans should retain their characteristic self-pride even under the harshest

conditions possible that threaten their very survival as a distinctive people. This is the effect Mphahlele wants to produce in *Afrika My Music*, for example, when he shows himself coping with the intimidating influence of exile by, *inter alia*, praising fellow exiles, even as they are crushed to death by their circumstances: “Like Selby Mvusi, whose remains were shipped from Kenya to his home province, Eastern Cape” (119); “Inscrutable Mvusi … He had created some impressive art in black and white when he was still in South Africa … Like Archibald Jordan, doctor of philosophy in African languages” (120); “Novelists …. Like Todd Matshikiza” (120 - 121); “His mound stands in a Lusaka graveyard…A coil of barbed wire beneath the cultured, jovial, even-tempered exterior … Remember how you wept when you told us Art Tatum was dead?” (122); “And Can Themba…You pulled the strands together in *Drum*, Can” (123). The common denominator conjoining the heroes immortalised in the passage above is that they maintained their African posture and excelled despite adversity.

In *Father Come Home* the group of Africans who crumble in the face of apartheid’s existential challenges contrast with Tintina’s dignified Africanist “fierce self-pride” and the bravery of the individual typified in panegyric in the oral tradition, which impels him to steadfastly pursue his intended marriage to the daughter of haughty Matime, because he is “Maleka the grandson of a warrior with a character worth more than a hundred head of cattle” (30). Such a disposition, which Mphahlele consolidates as the impulse responsible for explicit cultural practice and describes as a consciousness that interconnects people of African-historical heritage that he calls African humanism, portrays Tintina as a hero even though currently he is mentally deranged following a mining accident and is dismissed in social gatherings as a numbskull. The description of his fortitude prior to the mining accident, and of his maltreatment at the hands of his father-in-law Matime and the wife (who deserts him as soon as the compensation money from the mines has been finished), evoke sympathy among fellow African humanists who are equipped with the required consciousness to sense the cruel selfishness and greed of the people owning the mines. Matime is portrayed as an example of those individuals who fail to manage a proper fusion of tradition and modernity, a predicament which results in mimicry gaining the upper hand (as the description “haughty aristocrat” implies) (29). His illusions about being wealthy and denying Tintina the opportunity to marry his daughter – on the vain assumption that the prospective son-in-law’s pauper status renders him materially uncongenial – adequately portray him as a hybrid materialist whose false values cannot be reconciled with the African view that the dignity of humans should be put above worldly possessions.

Such *traditional* individualism as Tintina, on the other hand, exhibits is what another African writer, Ngugi, refers to as “the African tradition of poetic self-praise or praise of others” (*Decolonising* 78). It is this African humanist orientation which leads the other *Drum* writer Nat Nakasa to laud fellow black achievers (while in a hotel called The Theresa in Harlem) for defying marginalisation by the centre, in the following words:

> The Theresa was built in 1895, strictly for whites. As Harlem went black, however, it was taken over by Negro celebrities. Joe Louis, Ella Fitzgerald and other personages have lived there. More recently, its guests included Fidel

> Castro and Cassius Clay. The world champion gave instructions that all walls and furniture in his suite be painted pink. (*The World of Nat Nakasa* 117)

The African Americans Nakasa pays homage to in African self-praising manner in this citation are achievers respectively in international boxing, jazz, political liberation and (again) international boxing.

The historical perspective which Mphahlele weaves around the private musings of Hunadi and Dineo about apartheid-induced destabilisation of their extended family should be properly understood to be a way of protesting against apartheid without directly assuming the function of political activism. It should be remembered that in a state of siege such as black Africans lived under in apartheid South Africa, "Anything that resembles an archive that gives material existence to a history is thought of as something to be destroyed [and] that is the folly of every imperial conqueror" (Said, "Rendezvous" 160). Because such historical perspective is of public as opposed to private significance, it elevates the dialogue of Hunadi and Dineo into communal, epic clamour against the alienation of apartheid. For Mphahlele this is affirmation that "the sounds" of apartheid "begin again" as one returns home after almost two decades of exile. But Mphahlele the humanist being a great believer in man's victorious reshaping of the environment into self-fulfilling meaningfulness, the "unbroken song" or myth of survival is achieved through the use of imagery that puts women in control while men are flung around by alienating time and place. That is why, on the day Eliyase flogs the boy Maredi for entering the mystic forest, Dineo faces his wrath squarely and dissolves his skin deep male courage by a mere mention of the name of yet another woman of authority in the extended family: "Let him go, you are going to hurt him, let his aunt talk to him, you do not kill a person for making mistakes" (27).

This time, unlike in some of Mphahlele's works analysed earlier in this study, the unquestioned wisdom of African proverbs is not wielded to appeal mainly to people who (by their own self-definition) are non-African to readjust their group consciousness. It is directed to Africans whose lowly social and educational status (unlike that of Chimba in *Chirundu*, for example, who is a cabinet minister) and characterisation within an inescapably rural setting do not make them vulnerable to neocolonialist manipulation. In the central action of *Father Come Home*, African humanism is not pitted against manifestations of a conflicting group identity such as apartheid racism (or arguably neocolonialism in the case of high-class black characters). It is used against antagonists seemingly sharing a common African humanist consciousness with the protagonists. To compensate for the lack of conflicting group consciousnesses and to indicate the differences between characters in *Father Come Home* as resulting from individuality, the English syntactic texture into which African proverbs and idiomatic expressions are embedded has lost conspicuity. That is why the proverb *molato ga o bolaelwe motho* (or "you do not kill a person for making mistakes") fits so smoothly into the sentence uttered by Dineo that it appears more harmoniously as continuation of plain English language than similar expressions in earlier narratives. This is as fused an intertextuality between languages representing two distinctly contrasting cultural clusters as the one introduced, for example, by means of an utterance like "What can it be *eating the boy*?" in *The Wanderers*, where the African-language idiom *jewa ke eng*, literally translated, "eating

the boy" – meaning *troubling/bothering the boy* – conforms grammatically to both English and Sotho (225, emphasis added). While such a levelling up of idioms is introduced sparingly in works that appeared around the middle of Mphahlele's career as a writer, its intensified frequency cannot escape notice in the much later work, *Father Come Home*.

Significantly (in *Father Come Home*), as Dineo grapples with the fuming Eliyase, Hunadi goes "to her millstone in the house to grind the corn" (27). The resonance of a woman grinding on a millstone in front of a burning fire as one aspect of "the unbroken [African] song" recaptures Mphahlele's view of the economic and social centrality of women in the family and the nation as an important aspect of his concept of African humanism. The myth of such a role of the African person in preserving African humanist consciousness is evidenced more vividly in the following words:

> Her mind was too crowded to accommodate Eliyase's ravings and whatever might have brought about the scene out there in the dark. The fire in the house and the corn she was grinding seemed to be her only comfort at this moment. The only real things, things that would always be there to occupy a woman; woman the source of nourishment, the giver, the eternal guardian of life's beginnings. Whatever human stupidities raged around her, whatever storms, whatever turmoil brewed in the mind, however lonely life could be without a man and a son, the fire and the millstone would still be there to return to: woman's unbroken song … (27)

The opening line of the passage above is in the private voice of the narrator relating the individual saga Hunadi is faced with in the form (this time) of the unreliable Eliyase hurting Maredi. To signify the gloomy future prospects this action suggests, because of its evocation of the absence of the male members of the family, Hunadi refers to the beating as "the scene out there in the dark" (27). The narrator assumes a public, prophetic voice as Hunadi starts to expand her thoughts from survival in the Tulamo family to that of the entire nation, referring to "the fire in the house and the corn" as the only "real things that would always be there to occupy a woman" (27). In other words, when the individual Eliyases will be gone from this physical existence and the women Hunadi and Dineo will be dead too, the mythical woman will always be there with her fire and corn and grinding stone to ensure survival of the distictively African humanist peoples through timeless existence.

The handling of plot and characterisation reveals a quality of abstracting the ambience of apartheid further from the centre of the narrative than in the texts discussed earlier in this study. The slow, hesitant pace of *Father Come Home*, perhaps representative of the patience and slipperiness of timeframes regarding the return of the awaited men in the extended Tulamo family, centralises the lives of the African characters while apartheid and the few white characters playing a part in the drama are portrayed as being on the periphery of the novel's action.

However, the placing of white characters and the consciousness they represent on the fringes as a persistent (though peripheral) constituent of the atmosphere of *Father Come Home* is significant in yet another way than just extending the hesitant pace of the story

and its foregrounding of the subjectivity of the Africans. It should be seen also as Mphahlele's way of pointing to the inevitability of the African characters' ambivalence that has resulted from their historically having encountered Europe through imperialism and colonisation. It should be borne in mind that Mphahlele himself constantly reminds his readers that (like the other blacks who have gone through colonisation and exile), his soul is "a dialogue of two selves". As the critic Woeber has ably demonstrated, one other factor in Mphahlele's personal life which reinforced in him the constantly dialectical co-existence of European and African consciousnesses is that "However Eurocentric, and however disruptive, his education [at St Peter's Secondary School in Rosettenville] set him on the path to negotiation of the Western and African experience, so that all his subsequent work, teaching, writing, artistic development would be an attempt to integrate the two" ("The Influence of Western Education" 65). One reason for Mphahlele not to expunge white characters from the drama of *Father Come Home* — especially because of its obvious intention of illuminating the capacity of Africans to live independently of white domination or trusteeship — is consciously to remind the reader of the inevitable presence in the consciousnesses of the African characters of aspects of European thinking and ways of living, as well as some individual whites.

This is not to discount what is achieved by the deliberately languid tempo of the protagonist's action in *Father Come Home*. The hesitancy that leads to such a tempo in the novel is exemplified when Maredi runs away during the school holidays and joins four other boys on a droning truck owned by white hunters, only to return home from "about fifty kilometres east of Sedibeng" (12). When he runs away the second time a messenger from Sedibeng takes him back home from Du Plessis's dairy farm after he has gone only as far as between Sukumakara and Messina (72). Mphahlele avoids spoiling the intentional marginalisation of the existence of whites in the plot and the way of life imposed on blacks by apartheid with which the whites are associated as a group, by keeping in suspense the major event of *malaeta* and cavalier cruelty of the police until almost at the end of the tale, when Lemeko and the son Maredi slowly begin to work at thawing the hard feelings between them. The sense of waiting lasts in keeping with this intentionally slack pace of incidents in the novel, even after Dineo has physically reunited with Lemeko, to allow the deeper trauma of Maredi to heal slowly first, thus reinforcing the generally slow and meditative pace of the novel. This thought-provoking, relaxed pace is achieved also by means of the lengthiness and repetitiveness of the dialogue between Dineo and Hunadi, between Hunadi and Eliyase or Dineo and Eliyase, between Maredi and his mother or aunt and his inner self, repeating itself in monologue but also in the form of dreams and the contemplative, long epic recitals by the sage Mashabela. These narrative devices spill over into the extended action of the novel comprised mainly of Maredi's wanderings on foot and occasional rides on a waggon to Sukumakara and other places further north towards the Limpopo in pursuit of his father. This journey lasts a full two months, only for an emissary from Sedibeng to catch up with Maredi and take him back home, thus delaying the forward movement of the novel's action. The mode of transport used (further) also slows down the pace of the narrative, unlike in *The Wanderers* and *Chirundu* where fast automobiles and even aeroplanes are used to dart from one scene to the next. Significantly, the plot reaffirms the place of the African woman as the hub of all economic and social activity. It is Hunadi and Dineo Maredi

runs away from, and it is to them he comes back. It is from Hunadi and Dineo husbands run away. It is against the consciences of Hunadi and Dineo that Eliyase's unmanly conduct grates.

As such, the repetitive patterns of action in *Father Come Home* revolve around women, in the same way as the intrigues leading to fathers being successfully reclaimed from or lost to the hostile environment uncoil from around the women in the novel.

5.3.2 MYTHMAKING

The novel opens with a nightmare in which indistinct, hazy faces demand of Maredi to identify himself in full by his father's surname. In the background of the blurred faces is a chorus of elderly women who sing about the village of Sedibeng where a baby was born talking, asking the family the whereabouts of his father, upon which the people point to the grave (2). The composite parts of the "popular village ballad" are mythical from an African humanist perspective (signified by phrases such as "baby was born talking" – an expression associated with the folktales and fables which Mphahlele uses to create a resonance of African traditions) and epic in their loftiness (a quality conjured up by the communal voice in the description of the song as belonging not to individual composition, but to the entire "village"). This device, occurring right at the beginning of the novel, shows the boy Maredi's apparently private agony confined to a single household for the general problem it is, an issue harming almost all Africans of the apartheid era within which the story unfolds. This Mphahlele achieves by means of his (now familiar) mythmaking technique, as demonstrated above.

Mphahlele defines myth as "a fictitious idea we believe in collectively for the power it inspires in us [which] we do not have to prove" as long as "it lends a passionate purpose to life" ("Social Work" 243). To the writer mythmaking is crucial because "[it] and context lend resonance to [the writer's] creations" ("Educating" 33). Considering that myth inspires hope ("Social Work" 243) about the meaningfulness of the Africans' existence as a collective, mythmaking is indispensable to the creations of every African writer, especially as myth is what Mphahlele describes elsewhere in the following words:

> The myth is that never-ending story of life: children are still being born, women still wait and endure, men still betray one another, we still dream both idle and meaningful dreams … and we must keep trying to negotiate the meeting point between art and history: an effort that is itself the enduring purpose of life. ("Educating" 33)

While the above description of myth could be seen as universal to the existence of all categories of mankind, Mphahlele's description of the artist's function vis-à-vis mythmaking as that of "[trying] to negotiate the meeting point between art and history" reaffirms his definition of African humanism to be non-essentialist in that it does not define African cultural clusters in absolute terms by which the groups would be regarded as held together by indelibly innate attributes. Art – which inevitably includes mythmaking – must be dialectically combined with the history of a specific people or cluster of peoples in order to tint the art with the history (as this quotation declares regarding Mphahlele himself). It also has to be in dialectical relationship with immediate

reality within which Africans exist, as Mphahlele's sense of history, tradition or culture is proven in the the analysis of his writings not to be an ossified one. From the angle of Said's theory of beginnings, Mphahlele's writings and his theory, as beginning, fit into the description that "a beginning intends meaning, but the continuities and methods developing from it are generally *orders of dispersion*, of *adjacency*, and of *complementarity* ... giving rise to the sort of multileveled coherence of dispersion we find in … the texts of modern writers" ("Conclusion: Vico" 373). This means that Mphahlele's instancing of aspects of his concept of African humanism in his works allows itself to be affected by other theories and lifestyles, co-habits harmoniously with those lifestyles it cannot mix with, and performs the function of taking advantage of the accomplishments of other theories with which it differs (as the words from the above quotation *dispersion*, *adjacency* and *complementarity* imply, respectively).

It is significant, in terms of Said's theory of beginnings, that Mphahlele asserts mythmaking as the function of "[negotiating] the meeting point between art and *history*" ("Educating" 33, emphasis added). Of history within his own theory of beginnings, Said has remarked that: "History [is] the mind considered as synchronous structure (an ideal persistent architecture), as the inner form of man's activity, and as diachronous modality, or temporal modifications, or sequential continuity: above all, it is necessary to understand that history is neither one nor the other exclusively" ("Conclusion: Vico" 361). According to Said (as he explains here), history as once-off memory of the "beginning" or "discontinuous" past of a specific cluster of peoples has a unique structure of its own which, however, survives through time as flexible double-existence-in-past-and-present, or as a new version that has absorbed the demands of the present, or been modified because different from synchronous form due to its difference in sequential order of stages through which original historical memory continues to live – and history is all these traits simultaneously. An examination of Mphahlele's handling of the idea of history as a facet of his broader concept of African humanism (in his writings) reveals that his view of history sees it as both eccentrically African and generically belonging to and modified at every stage of its continued life by histories of other social groups different from the cluster of African peoples who are embodiments of the consciousness he calls African humanism.

If milestone historical events such as the holocaust, colonisation and racial bigotry have impacted differently on different peoples of the world (using criteria such as whether one is European, Asian or African), it follows that the different peoples' creative negotiation of the impact of such events will vary. It is in this sense that Africans distinctively react in a manner Mphahlele defines as African humanist, which leads us to see African humanism not as an absolute or essentialist concept, but as a brand of existential/strategic essentialism that refers to objective behaviour emanating originally in its subjective form from a specific environment/history. As a result of the different kinds of historical impact on the various clusters of peoples European, Asian and African, myths (as the meeting point between art and history) will differ, and it is African myths derived in this distinctive manner which Mphahlele views as an aspect of African humanism.

The mythic fibre of the story emerges more clearly when the prolific village poet walks like a godsend into Sedibeng when Maredi is only about four years old, bringing with him from Mashona his tiny family and a wealth of orature, thus affecting for ever the environment in which the boy Maredi grows up (19). In fact, Mashabela is a greater incarnation of the village elder, profoundly imbued with African humanist qualities, for Mphahlele describes him as "a musician, poet and doctor, of Karanga stock" (19). The combination of music, poetry and healing in the practice of a single individual points to the African humanist orientation which looks at reality as an organic unity rather than as compartmentalised existence. Mashabela's description as a musician adumbrates the prophetic nature of his performances throughout the novel. This is so because Mphahlele describes the prophet as one who "sings, and in what he sings he repeats a number of things ... [meaning that he repeats] a number of notes … [and] one note echoes what you said before … [and because he is] speaking on behalf of a people … [he] speaks in a tone of certitude: he is sure he is right" ("African Literature" 271). This quotation from Mphahlele divulges the reliance of prophetic performance on repetition. More importantly, the way Mphahlele conceives of the nature and role of repetition is similar to Said's views on repetition. In the essay "On Repetition", Said subscribes to the thinking of theorists who see repetitions as "intelligent patterns that preserve the human race [in which] uses of repetitions conserve the field of activity [as well as] give it its shape and identity [which] renders repetitions … filiative and genealogical" ("On Repetition" 111, 114). Said's observation in this quotation stresses the centrality of patterns, self-preservation, conservation of cultural practices and identity and perpetuation of one's self-asserted consciousness and way of life, as the words "patterns", "preserve", "conserve" and "filiative" respectively signify. The very same ingredients are demonstrated by Mphahlele throughout his writings as pillars of his concept of African humanism as a consciousness and way of life.

This makes clear that the public recitations that Mashabela sings are prophetic exhortations to the people of Sedibeng and surrounding villages to follow what he is certain is the right path – to follow his myth of never-ending African humanism and its attribute to survive existential problems. His role as a poet invests him with special gifts that qualify him to prophesy because, according to Mphahlele, "poetry is a way of perceiving, a way of seeking to touch the Highest Reality beneath the surface of things" ("Notes Towards" 139). The "Highest Reality" the character Mashabela preaches is his view of African humanism as the true consciousness to be followed, which consciousness, according to Mphahlele, lies "beneath the surface of things" — that is: African humanism is a deep-lying consciousness that manifests itself in social behaviour.

Such a mythmaking explication of Mashabela's poetic recitals as prophetic suddenly opens our eyes to the reality that the song of the women in Maredi's dream, like Mashabela's recitals, is prophetic and that its clear message is that Maredi should go and look for his father, hence the women's insistence that he should identify himself by his father's family name, which he fails to do in the dream (2). I agree with the critic Reingard Nethersole that through devices such as the portrayal of the character Mashabela and the song of the women in Maredi's dream (which partly constitute the narrator in the novel), "Mphahlele's narrator assumes the position of teacher and sage …

[so that] the artificially created memorial universe in *Father Come Home* bears … traces of an oral tradition characterised by 'voice'" ("Places of" 504). That is why in the preceding paragraph of this study Mashabela is elucidated in Mphahlele's African humanist terms ("African Literature" 271) as a prophet "[who] sings, … speaking on behalf of a people" – which terms refer to mythmaking elements of the oral tradition. Mashabela's description by Mphahlele in these terms befits the stature accorded him by the writer Ruth Obee as "the African humanist voice" ("Father Come Home" 208). The oral tradition as an aspect of African cultures or Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is thus sustained in the fabric of the novel through Mashabela's intermittent oral performances. It is for the same snowballing effect to sustain an atmosphere of orature that Maredi responds to the prophetic voice of the women by resolving that "one of these days [he] must run away [to] go find [his] father" (11) in the *monologue* he habitually enters into each time he has acted to spite his selfish uncle Eliyase. As such acquisition of an acoustic existence by the narrator (in the many forms he manifests himself in in this narrative) is an item of the oral tradition, which assertion of the oral tradition as one aspect of Mphahlele's African humanism proves to be one of the central themes of the novel. Testimony to the primacy of the oral tradition as a central theme of the novel is the point that the message it conveys by means of the women's song in a dream (cited above) leads to the action that is central to the plot of the novel – that of Maredi setting out to search for his father. In keeping with the tenet of Mphahlele's African humanism that it inspires hope, when Dineo or Hunadi capitulate to the odds that seem stacked against Maredi's venture and advise him to obey Eliyase's minatory disposition without resistance, the response to the prophetic voice of the women in the dream instills confidence in him not to be daunted. Maredi's metaphorical search for his father or literally his search for "cultural memory" should be seen as self-affirmation wrought in symbolism, as Nethersole rightly observes about the cultural content of the character Mashabela's poetic chants in *Father Come Home* that "cultural memory for Mphahlele does not merely function as guarantor of endurance in suffering … [but] is regarded [also] as clarion call for self-affirmation" ("Places of" 509).

The indefinite time frame that the phrase "one of these days" (11) denotes is Mphahlele's tool to maintain tension in the reader's mind that should maintain interest in the entire fabric of the novel, to counteract the lax pace of the storyline – in this case effected by the repetitiveness of reprimands by the mother and Maredi's monologues about the resolve to run away. That the quarrels are repetitive and cyclic is revealed by Mphahlele's use of phrases such as "idea *would* not give him any peace" and "Hunadi *would* always say" (11, emphases added).

Despite Mashabela's special gift of prophecy that is esteemed within the African community of Sedibeng, Mphahlele portrays him as an ordinary resident of the village in the following words:

> Mashabela was tall, stringy, and walked with a slight limp. In many ways he, and his pregnant wife and five-year-old daughter a few strides behind him, seemed ordinary … But his arrival in Sedibeng ten years before had not been an ordinary event … [as] He played the mbira, seeming to project its notes through his sinewy hands, so that they seemed an extension of the instrument.

(*Father Come Home* 19)

That the sage and orature artist Mashabela is "ordinary" save for his artistry is a confirmation of Mphahlele's view that "Apart from the fact that the artist is the sensitive point of a society … we must stop talking about artists as if they were a bunch of bearded barefoot messiahs who have drunk the milk of paradise" ("The African Critic"). In other words, the writer or orature artist according to Mphahlele's African humanism is an equal participant in the life of the community he or she writes or performs for. Such a humble opinion of the writer within the community is shared by postcolonial writers like Edward Said, when he says of his autobiography in an interview that he has "resisted the use of" the word autobiography and calls it "a memoir, because, … [he is] not really a public figure … the way a politician would" call his own memoir an autobiography ("Edward Said Talks" 15).

Mythmaking continues when Maredi visits the people of Mashite (44). The humane hospitality with which the 'heathen' people of Mashite welcome Maredi with "nice beans and porridge" ironically contrasts with the 'Christian' hostility wreaked on Maredi by the obtrusive presence in his home of 'Christian' Eliyase (42). The image of nurture and nourishment elicited by "nice beans and porridge" symbolises the spiritual nourishment and nurture Maredi is about to receive from Nature in the bush. Mphahlele describes Maredi's experience in the bush in first person narration:

> I saw trees that seemed – it was like they were alive – as if the lianas were going to loosen their hold on the trees and on one another … I touched the lianas to feel – to feel if they were alive like an animal – my fingers trembled … I was woken up by a very loud shout from underneath the trees, and the lianas were moving, pulling their long, long bodies out of the tangle around the tree trunks, but I could not see where they were moving to … And I could hear the trees breathing a deep heavy sigh, as if they were now free … and now it sounds like – it is like the voice of Mashabela and the voice of Tintina together. (44 – 45)

The blurring of different life forms between fauna and flora in which both quiver with life points both to the Vital Force with which all nature is imbued and the organic unity of all things that constitute the universe. This is a feature of African humanism as Mphahlele defines it. A remark more relevant to make at this point is that the fauna and flora acquire folktale-like life in which stones and animals and plants can speak like humans. The creation of images that recall mythological and folktale creatures and tales is Mphahlele's way of giving African humanist resonance to his narrative writings because (according to him) the atmosphere of orature is rich with African humanist education for nourishment of one's inner resources. Of course the aura of Nature depicted in the passage above is intensified by the teenage boy's exhaustion that makes him fall asleep. It is during this sleep that he dreams his father is calling him and (upon waking up) runs back home among jeers by some villagers, who suspect that he might be off his head. The jeers abound with colloquialisms that are used more profoundly than in the dialogue of other narrative writings than *Father Come Home*, for such colloquialisms now not only give dramatic effect and naturalness to dialogue but proceed to convey decisive, epic pronouncements – expressions like "What is this child trying to do, *hao* – he is a bad omen for us, *jo-oh*!" (45). The colloquial expressions "*hao*" and "*jo-oh*" in this instance externalise shock, the impact of which affects the whole nation due to the

mythical stature of Maredi which is predetermined by the prophetic voices of Mashabela and Tintina. Hunadi's mythical song upon learning of Maredi's disappearance while grinding corn on the stone also suggests that Maredi's fate should be left to Nature, as she makes use of fiction-like speech by creatures like rabbit, tortoise, hedgehog, zebra and "wife of porcupine", and waxes prophetic in the phrases "I asked -- " and "Go and ask --" (55). This is the last time Hunadi is heard expressing herself before she dies an untimely death, which fact also gives an aura to her utterances here. It is significant that when Maredi fully recovers from sleep he recalls the sounds he heard during the reverie as those of Mashabela and Tintina. These two are both poets, with Tintina's career as a poet and prophet truncated by the mine accident.

It is the musical instruments *mbira* and concertina played respectively by Mashabela and Tintina that join both as poets. Before the accident in the mines Tintina forms a trio with some of his friends and together they entertain mine workers with "ethnic songs from the northern Transvaal", with Tintina playing the concertina and the two friends playing a mouth organ and a flute (32). These should be understood to signify their traditional wisdom commensurate with Mphahlele's African humanism. The Rhodesian mine worker who becomes irritated and stabs Tintina's concertina with a knife during one of the mine performances should be seen as a dehumanised victim of industrial life whose spirituality is not powerful enough to survive the ravages of migrant labour (33). His irritation with the traditional brand of music played is actually an irritation with vestiges of his own traditional self which 'divorces itself' in the face of urbanisation. On the night of Maredi's return from Sukumakara, Tintina dashes the ailing concertina on a rock and for the first time plays the new instrument of *lepatata* or kudu horn (75). This is in front of the villagers, who dance traditional rhythms and feast on the slaughtered ox that has been offered by Tintina's sister Diketso (74). The hero's welcome Maredi receives this night is a re-birth not only for him but for the whole village – symbolised by wholesale feasting and the metamorphosis of Tintina's poetic instrument. As this feast takes place very close to Maredi and Dineo's reunion with Lemeko, it should be understood to be an epic celebration of national victory in which sons find their fathers and wives find their husbands.

The vast territories Maredi plods in his search for Lemeko serve to dress his actions more densely in mythical robes. He travels through bushes full of "marauding lions and jackals, and even mean buffalo" (62). At one time he walks within talking distance of a lion which he at first mistakes for a donkey and "at the very instant of his awareness, it was on its legs and making for the open veld in a clumsy fashion" (65). Congruous with the slow pace of the novel, these comings and goings through Sotoma and other bushes that throb, fable-like, with primeval predators, should be seen as an extended initiation for Maredi, since his earlier declaration to the late Hunadi that he "wants to go this winter" (3). The precariousness with which Maredi clings to manhood through these perilous territories graduates him into manhood, apart from forging him into a legendary figure of mythical dimensions.

When Mashabela's poetic recitals are described, Mphahlele reveals their cyclic recurrence by means of the words "Mashabela *would sing* the epic of warriors … to an

audience that had come into his large homestead" (20, emphasis added). These are not once-off performances. The common building blocks in Mashabela's singing and that of the women in Maredi's dream are the traditional components of orature such as myth and folktale. That is why the myth of the women's song, above, of an inquisitive and adventurous child born speaking and wanting to know its father's whereabouts, is able to repeat itself in Mashabela's lines of epic poetry, "for the newborn infant tonight/ will have become the/ stones and earth to build/ a grave for it" (22). The "it" denotes the status quo within African communities depicted in earlier lines as that in which "Our women have been left/ alone to scratch the earth for food/ like chickens" (22). By the time Mashabela enters the life of the Sedibeng people the equivalent of the mythical child, Maredi Tulamo, has already been born, speaking about tracing his lost father. What Mashabela's poetic lines now achieve is rationalisation – why sons must look for fathers, which is the situation in which women are left alone by husbands responding to urbanisation, leaving wives to try and scratch a living from diminishing, tired land. Typical of the hopefulness which Mphahlele regards as the spiritual resource that allows African traditions to survive, Mashabela's open-air performance invariably closes with lines such as "be that as it may, we know/ you ancestors are living" (23).

Just before Maredi, the boy's uncle Namedi and Dineo leave Sedibeng for good to join Lemeko, the sage Mashabela sings in words that perfect the epic stature of the protagonist and the drama of *Father Come Home*: "People of the nation!/ here is our son come back,/ sons shall seek their fathers,/ fathers shall seek their sons./Fathers shall go and return,/ sons shall do likewise./ I can say I feel the power of/ the waiting years – / when fathers will have found their sons/ and sons will have found their fathers/ and mothers will have found them all" (76, 77). The action described in the poetic lines corresponds with Maredi's, thereby merging public action with private action.

While resonances of traditional African cultures have been represented in Mphahlele's short stories, autobiographies and other novels to act as constituents of African humanist consciousness, the directness in linking fictional characters with the myth contained in the prophetic voice of the ideal African poet witnessed in *Father Come Home* is unprecedented. The mythical son of the women's and Mashabela's songs finds direct concretisation in the boy Maredi. This may be due to the capacity of the rural setting to sustain the plausibility of the actions of the prophetic poet. Such a prophetic poet might appear lunatic and out of place as soon as the story of *Down Second Avenue* moves from Maupaneng to Marabastad, or that of *Afrika My Music* to Denver, Colorado. The presence of white characters playing important roles in the drama of *The Wanderers* (such as the editor of *Bongo* magazine) might organically co-exist with such a prophetic African poet only for as long as it remained submerged or subdued. Otherwise such a characterisation might stand out as inorganic to the atmosphere of the novel as it (the characterisation) is mostly urban and metropolitan. As for *Chirundu*, the predominantly western conduct of characters like Chimba and Monde would not allow such an earthy, rural character as Mashabela to walk the metropolitan paths. At most, the urban setting of the novel can accommodate a character like Mashabela only as a caricatured yet sustained reminder of the characters' African humanist heritage, similarly to the way

aged characters like Mutiso are made use of. Predictably, Mutiso (in *Chirundu*) is less endowed with mythical resonance than Mashabela in the much later novel.

5.3.3 Uniqueness of Dialogue

When Hunadi and she resolve a petty quarrel one day, Dineo responds to Hunadi's apologies by appealing for harmony that will "let the ancestors sleep in peace and not be disturbed by words that stab like a spear" (48). Mphahlele has indicated the African humanist practice of talking over differences until they are resolved. Disturbance of one segment of the order leads to disruption of harmony and this includes disturbing the peace of the ancestors. This could lead to punishment by the gods. It is for this reason that, while pondering over Eliyase's mean temperament soon after Maredi's beating, Dineo and Hunadi reassure each other that Eliyase's wife does not bear children because "it is punishment" of Eliyase by "the ancestors" for his failing to bring together the Tulamo family as the only man remaining (11).

A similar regard for ancestors is sustained as the storyline develops. Following Maredi's exploration of the forbidden bush, as Dineo and Hunadi exchange greetings the following morning, Hunadi complains of insomnia and an indistinct malaise caused by ancestors who "travel in the night and visit [her] dreams and [do] not speak so that [she] can hear". She concludes by exclaiming in Sesotho sa Leboa, "*Ao*, what wonders!" (46) In this nightmare that forebodes her own death, Hunadi exhibits the African humanist view that ancestors communicate with the living on any important matter in order for wrongs to be atoned where possible. When Hunadi dies, Dineo explains to Maredi that "life without [one's] man is very heavy" and that the heartsore longing must have killed her (74). The indistinct message of her dreams referred to above is unravelled as having been a message too difficult to understand and unnecessary to understand, as her impending death is depicted as inevitable through the way Dineo rationalises it. Hunadi herself must be sensing the content of the ancestors' message when she exlaims by means of the Sotho colloquialism "*Ao*", which signifies bafflement. Unlike the way African-language colloquialisms have been used by characters in both rural and urban settings to express personal feelings of excitement, sorrow, wonderment and so forth (in Mphahlele's other works scrutinised in this study), in *Father Come Home* colloquialisms such as this convey prophetic messages that are pointers for the entire tribe or nation. That is why in the quotation above, Hunadi's dialogue at the point when it reaches the Sotho colloquial exclamation, acquires a plane beyond that of focusing on the dream and foretells her death by words that suggest its inscrutability: "what wonders!". It is because she has reached a point beyond which the human mind can fathom, because this is the meeting point of her own prophetic voice with that of Mashabela when he proclaims that "The land is gone,/ and all that has been left for us/ is grey sand and rock/ We walk with death in our legs,/ with famine and with locusts" (21) . Here the individual rises into the communal and epic, soaring too high for an individual mind to tame.

When Mashabela's aged daughter meets the 72-year-old Maredi at a wedding in Seshego and the two discuss the rumoured forced removal of Sedibeng and nearby villages to the west, uppermost in Maredi's mind is concern over what will happen to the graves of their

ancestors, especially those of Mashabela, Tintina and Hunadi (96). The old man Maredi Tulamo laments forced removals in the following emotive words: "I have seen enough sorrow in my life to blind the sun, when old people have to keep moving, leaving their land – land they have known and loved – moving to strange places, dragging behind them their souls, looking baffled and lost, leaving the burial grounds of their loved ones" (97). The enumeration of people who have been intimate with Batseba and Maredi in this dialogue precedes the mention of the people's graves in general. Attachment to home soil is suggested by means of such an intimate familiarisation of the graves Sedibeng people are about to be forcibly separated with. The anguish experienced by Africans is immense, due to their valuing of ancestral connection for which graves are the medium, whenever forced removals separate them from these shrines. This anguish is expressed powerfully by means of the phrase "dragging behind them their souls", which explains the strong, unbreakable bond between Africans and their ancestral land. Closure of the novel with this disturbing image of a people ever on the move is Mphahlele's way of highlighting that even as he returns home in his old age and is gratified by the way the rural, African-cultural milieu facilitates self-fulfilment in being useful to one's people, the horror of apartheid is still part of his people's "unbroken song".

Connectedness with relatives who have died as demonstrated in the lives of the characters portrayed above, is Mphahlele's way of representing a consciousness he calls African humanism. Ancestral connections are one of the many religious aspects of Mphahlele's concept. Witchcraft is another, although usually perceived as negative and mentioned by African writers as one item of the African heritage that must be abandoned. To create resonances of this shameful and thus clandestine tradition, Mphahlele assembles a medley of gossip regarding the Mashite bush (nicknamed Sotoma after the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah parable) in the following words: "We have always been told those people kill a man or child and take out parts of the body to give to the ancestors … Madira the grandmother of Tintina, as the people tell us, told the village that she saw a woman on a baboon come out of the woods one night" (39). So reminiscent of communal tap gossip in *Down Second Avenue*, the quotation above reinforces the already-explained "positive face" or "politeness" wants within African cultures which determine the desirability of expressed messages aligning with communally-agreed standpoints (in the way writers like Fraser and Matsumoto have defined the ideas of "face" or "politeness" wants as differing according to specific cultures). Mphahlele's deliberate removal of the identity of the speakers in this passage is an indication that these messages are not attributable to single individuals, but are a communal verdict. This is why not one character in all of Mphahlele's writing considered in this study has been quoted as challenging the opinion that witchcraft is evil.

When the sage Mashabela rebukes his neighbours in Sedibeng for denigrating the sacredness of the Mashite bush, it is not witchcraft he is defending. Being an African, there is no way Mashabela can oppose the community in traditionally agreed-upon opinion about some practices. What he is standing up against is the unwise, licentious heaping of all conceivable insults on the bush by 'Christian' Africans for the mere reason that the bush is holy ground for 'heathen' Africans. Mashabela publicly declares what he

is sure to be right in the following words (that echo the wisdom of Old Segone in *Down Second Avenue* on a similar division of the two sections of Maupaneng):

> Hear me, listen to me, you people … we must not play about with things that our small brains cannot understand simply because you think God is only on your side and against the others. That place you call Sotoma is holy ground for the people of Mashite, and all of us are children on the small finger of God whom our ancestors knew well, to whom they speak for us. (40)

While the message echoes that of the sage character in *Down Second Avenue*, also on the 'Christian' side of the village, for the first time Mphahlele lets a character speak in an overtly prophetic tone as the words "hear me, listen to me, you people" indicate.

With the concept African humanism allowed to materialise in the carnal form of Mashabela, it is not surprising that western Christianity acquires a human voice through the mouth of the lay preacher in Sedibeng, who routinely bellows antidotes to Mashabela's "darkness" in the following words:

> Listen not to creatures of darkness who pull you away to their heathen gods … The new Christ is come among us and I hear His words tell us to turn away from our ancestral ways, to touch the scars of the Crucifixion and be healed, be cleansed of our sins. Those poor souls of Mashite over there – I pity them, and let us pray that Sotoma, like the city of its name in the Bible, shall be razed to ashes even as Gomorrha was … The white man brought the light and we can read and write for ourselves and that knowledge and light mean power and the road to salvation. (40 - 41)

Comparably to the way in which African humanism is sung openly by the character Mashabela in a "compelling voice" (20), the lay preacher is also reciting "with his stentorian voice" to the Africans – but here it is a gospel that preaches everything which African humanism is not (40). It is not surprising, within the deeply rural and traditional environment of Sedibeng, for the lay preacher to speak almost like a ventriloquist with a voice that the soul cannot quite identify with because (being black) he is either hollow as far as self-knowledge is concerned or he is a mere marionette of the champions of a consciousness opposed to African humanism. This lay preacher is a far cry from the Zionist self-constituting worshipper to whom Mphahlele's earlier works (analysed in this study) have introduced us.

The lay preacher's words above are akin to the way Eliyase "who [is] so loud about being a Christian" writes off the boy Maredi: "He was always carrying on about Maredi's heathen habits: shouting in the streets, singing nonsense lyrics in the homestead and blowing a whistle at intervals" and: "He always spoke about Maredi as if the boy would one day, soon, release devastating thunder and hail and lightning that would flatten Sedibeng and the vast territory around" (41, 42). The intimations of damnation in hell created by images in the passage above conflict with African humanism in the way Mphahlele describes it, as composed of "beliefs [that] do not entertain punishment or reward in the after-life" ("The Fabric" 154).

Dialogue in this novel conjures up an African humanist atmosphere by means of traditional resonances accomplished through orature. This stylistic aspect weaving

through all of Mphahlele's narrative writings is deepened to the level of mythmaking that merges the private conflict and self-actualising action of the protagonist Maredi with the epic odyssey of a mythical son whose heroism rids the nation of the shackles of urbanisation, apartheid and colonisation. Sotho proverbs and idiomatic expressions slip readily into the texture of the dialogue to signify the harmony of protagonists and antagonists who are tied together at the underlying level by African humanist consciousness and differ only in some facets of their surface behaviour. The colloquialisms Mphahlele has been constantly employing in his works perform in this novel a more profound function than expression of private feelings and the adding of dramatic naturalness to dialogue. In *Father Come Home* colloquial expressions mark decisive transitions in the action of the central character, which coincides with similarly momentous forward movements in the emancipation of a whole people.

5.4 CLOSING REMARKS

Mphahlele's publicised intention to write *Father Come Home* as a truly rural novel in a slow pace commensurate with the contemplative aura of the milieu seems to have been achieved. The cyclic pace of Maredi Tulamo's repetitive acts of running away in search of his father only to come back is intensified by the repetitive movement of prophetic songs by Mashabela, Tintina, Hunadi and others. The routine quarrels with the obdurate Eliyase and the many strengthening conversations between Dineo and Hunadi add to the slow tempo at which the events of the novel progress.

The novel is a rich depository of instances of African religious practice as the general ethos of the people of Mashite in particular illustrates. Tied to this are the feasting behaviour and manners that exemplify surviving African humanist consciousness even among the 'Christians' who veil such consciousness beneath a thin veneer of western Christianity. Ways of making African philosophy (as invested in proverbs and idiomatic expressions) the criterion for one's dialogue to be accessible to fellow Africans pervade the work. Above all, concentration on self-constitution rather than pre-occupation with apartheid's oppression and its attempts at cultural annihilation lead to the actions of the characters (heightened by the natural phenomena displaying the immanence of the Supreme Being) exemplifying a distinctive African humanist identity and atmosphere that binds Africans of differing cultures together at the underlying level.

The prophetic voice kept alive by Mashabela threads throught the action of the novel to give the mundane characters' actions epic resonance. Mphahlele's works that were considered earlier in this study do not take the use of orature devices to prophetic/mythic heights, as they go only as far as reinforcing the African cultural context of incidents taking place within the literary texts. The use of orature by Mashabela and characters like Tintina and Hunadi typically sustains African humanist resonances in *Father Come Home*, but when their dialogues turn poetic through the repetitiveness and musical rhythm of the songs they sing, poetic/mythical sublimity is achieved. For the first time in Mphahlele's narrative writings, the poetic voice takes the foreground, in keeping with the cultural homogeneity unfolding at the centre of the novel.

The might of the poetic voice through which African humanist social practices are represented together with African interpretations of the impact of history results in western Christianity sometimes being cast in a satirical mould. The comic presentation is embodied in the actions of weak characters like Eleyase and the lay preacher of Sedibeng. Through Eleyase and the lay preacher's dispositions, for the first time in Mphahlele's works western Christianity is depicted not as a competing social force but as a crushed consciousness replaced by the more exuberantly vigorous traditional tapestry of religious practices as asserted by characters such as Mashabela, Tintina, Hunadi and Dineo. The likes of Eleyase, unlike 'Christian' African characters in earlier works like *Down Second Avenue* and "Mrs Plum", do not represent any self-constituting appropriation of western Christianity. Instead, what they represent is some kind of spiritual hollowness which portrays them either as puppets of western Christianity or as generally incompetent in their inability to adapt their African humanist consciousnesses

to the effects of colonialism. Because western Christian leaders and followers such as the lay preacher and Eleyase do not represent any sound variant of western Christianity, Mphahlele does not bother to contrast their actions with those of any charlatan religious leaders, as is the case in earlier works. In concurrence with the epic and racially homogeneous nature of the novel, what Mphahlele satirises in this text is the quack chief (38). As we learn from the dialogue of a Sedibeng elder which (as we now know) is a communal voice masquerading as individual opinion, this impersonating chief (Batsumi) has successfully lied to the Commissioner that "his ancestors were kings" after boredom with work in the kitchens of Pretoria (where he has even been a member of the fist-flying *malaeta*) (38). Mphahlele reveals that the quack chief Batsumi is an emasculated parody of the real traditional ruler by stating that "Apart from collecting taxes and trying cases of stock theft, wife-beating or family feuding, he had no real powers" (30). In fact, whether the Commissioner believes the lie or not (told by Batsumi about his being of royal blood and in line of succession) is of little consequence, for the latter's truth about filiation could not have been the concern of the Commissioner – who is only interested in Batsumi's affiliation with colonial political ideals. What would matter to the Commissioner (who symbolises colonisation) is a mere ascertainment whether Batsumi aligns himself with the operations of colonialism by which, as Stewart Crehan rightly states, "Ideological domination was filtered through the indigenous servants of colonial power" ("Master-Servant Narratives" 37). As an insinuation of Batsumi's affiliation with western values, one of the 'historical achievements' this chief will be remembered for is the occasion when he fawningly sends "dancers to Pretoria to entertain the Prince of Wales when he visited in 1925" (38).

In *Father Come Home,* another dimension has been added also to the use of colloquialism which in earlier works goes no further than bringing about African-language style dramatic naturalness in the characters' dialogue. This time, colloquial utterances reveal epic, decisive moments in the development of the mythical son's action, or resolution of the national dilemma of destruction by apartheid's urbanisation policies. An example is the occasion when an elder's dialogue starts colloquially with the word *Waaaiii* as it begins to express the contempt with which chief Batsumi is regarded by the community for stealing the position of traditional king – as well as desecration of this role by misusing it to prostrate in deference to the apartheid government of the time (38).

By means of the further dimensions mentioned above added in this text to Mphahlele's typical style, *Father Come Home* proves to be no mere repetition of Mphahlele's effective stylistic devices in exemplifying African humanist sensibility. The novel proves to be a stronger assertion and more intense representation of the concept, now in Mphahlele's fiction, too.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Opening Remarks

It is necessary to clarify the point that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is represented in his poetry, short stories, autobiographies and novels by means of stylistic tools that he typically employs to signify the Africans' distinctive paradigm of human existence. That is to say, Mphahlele uses style in his own unique way in order to lead the reader into perceiving the existence of Africans as a distinctive section of mankind that sets itself apart from other sections of mankind by means of original, creative, African ways of thinking and behaving. Apart from the African writers outside South Africa who have been forerunners in advocating such an assertion of the distinctiveness of African thinking, it is important to note that on the South African scene forerunners like Sol Plaatje appeared as far back as 1916, when he published Setswana proverbs "with literal translations and their European equivalents", followed soon by a collection of Setswana folktales whose value he felt was fast being eroded by "the spread of European ideas" (*A Vision of Order* 10). Mphahlele's African humanist perception on the role of the writer as that of aligning the individual voice with the communal has precedence (as Ursula Barnett writes, for example) as early as circa 1939, when the writer Herbert Dhlomo stated that "an artist must come out of himself and enter into the general emotion, thought and opinion of the people" (*A Vision of Order* 13). Of course Mphahlele, like his predecessors and contemporaries, sets Africans apart from other sections of mankind without denying that there are fundamental human traits Africans share in common with all mankind by virtue of belonging to the human species.

Such original implementation of fictional tools harnessed effectively by Mphahlele are wielded in such a way that they confirm his view that creative writing is the enterprise of playing with images and symbols. The distinctive stylistic features that are Mphahlele's medium for cumulatively defining in full what it is to be African humanist in consciousness (and in behaviour emanating from such consciousness) have been identified and demonstrated throughout this study. It is proper at this stage to recapitulate them so that they are put side by side and synergised by a single stroke into African humanist aesthetic criteria as projected by Mphahlele, alongside his view of art as a "compulsive cultural act".

Equally, it is important to remark, based on the investigations of this study, that African humanism as a sociological construct has grown and adapted itself to trends of human thought spanning, on the one hand, the period when it was first expressed directly in Mphahlele's expository pieces – such as the 1949 UNISA journal article he wrote while still a B A student ("The Unfinished Story"), as well as indirectly in his 1946 collection of short stories *Man Must Live and Other Stories* – and, on the other hand, the present period. The concept of African humanism has developed because it has had to interrogate topical issues from time to time. It comes as no surprise that Mphahlele's concept of African humanism has adapted itself to the theoretical context within which it has thrived, for as early as the publication dates of the examples cited above Mphahlele expresses himself either polemically or in fiction in relation to current thought. That is

why in his formative years as a thinker and literary artist he laments (in his polemical essays) the inadequate portrayal of African characters in the South African literature of the time. Such a defective handling of black characters in South African literature was one of the many indices of the prevailing philosophical attitudes of the time. As a writer of short stories, Mphahlele during the 1940s consciously counteracts the unsatisfactory portrayal of black characters in the fiction of other writers by infusing his African characters with the distinctive mode of thinking and existence he has called African humanism.

In Mphahlele's view on the intellectual context of the late 1940s, which continues to be the focus of his entire corpus of expository and narrative writings ever since, African characters had been portrayed as though they were baseless, floating, carnal beings whose existence had no roots in any distinctive world-view that (without being backward or 'heathen') differed from that of the whites who (after colonisation) had been the sole deciders of norms. The 1950s Africanist theoretical context that radically sought to ascribe milestone achievements of mankind on the globe to Africans is reflected in the celebration of self-determined national consciousness Africans are capable of – as in his 1960 essay "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence".

Mphahlele's definition of African humanism by means of denying the applicability of the conception of Africans as either 'backward' or 'heathen' is developed in the seventies by his describing in detail what characterised and stimulated crystallisation of the peculiar existential outlook of Africans. That is why his 1978 essay "African Identity – Nationalism – The African Personality – Negritude", Mphahlele lauds the negritudinists' "quest for African identity … [that] was to give birth to both political and cultural nationalism" (44). This makes clear that the search for African identity took the form of movements such as negritude and was motivated by the desire to achieve political and cultural nationalism. The broad term "African identity" Mphahlele has been considering since his earliest essay thus started in the 1960s to assume the more specific dimension of "nationalism" and developed in the 1970s to be described in terms of its constituent dimensions of "political" and "cultural" nationalism. The idea of a strong, well-defined nationalism as the starting point towards a world-wide definition of Africans is thus developed from its beginnings within Mphahlele's theory in the 1960s as the previously cited 1960 essay demonstrates, by means of the improved articulation I have just demonstrated.

Equally developed in the 1970s is the articulation of Mphahlele's association of African humanist consciousness with the Afrocentric attitude African theorists adopted since the late 19th century when Pan Africanism started taking shape. Testimony to this is his 1978 remark that the negritudinists' definition of a unique African identity would not have been possible "without a deliberate return to the source to harness and give expression to Africa's cultural resources that had been *distorted* and denigrated, or at best repressed" ("African Identity" 44, emphasis added). The theoretical attitude Mphahlele affirms in this quotation is the central feature of Afrocentrism, as I have already shown earlier in this study. Mphahlele's original intention to illustrate African humanist social existence as equal to any other group identity of whatever distinctive cultural grouping gains from a

denser texture in the 1970s enriched by the addition of more of its defining characteristics by which it is known today. An example is Mphahlele's description in 1971 of African humanism as originating from being a religious "state of mind producing moral action" ("The Fabric" 154). According to Mphahlele's concept of African humanism as expressed in this 1971 essay, all aspects of African humanist thinking and behaviour are "religion at work" ("The Fabric" 154). According to his later 1987 essay, justification for describing African humanism thus is the fact that "religion in traditional Africa permeates all life" ("Social Work" 242). In this way, some of the features of Mphahlele's African humanism mentioned in his earlier essays are reinforced in new contexts within which his essays of the eighties are written. This is in addition to the eighties essays being involved in global African theoretical debates of the era including stances on essentialism.

The 1990s is a period during which Mphahlele made his theory of African humanism more circumscribed by mentioning its cosmology, sometimes in a direct didactic method as in his 1992 essay entitled "Notes Towards an Introduction to African Humanism: A Personal Enquiry" (137). At times he explicated his concept of African humanism in a discursively integrative way while giving his analysis of the way it interacts with modern day institutions such as globalised economics and higher education, as in the 1997 essay "Knowledge, Its Nature and Role in the Process of Change" (167). This trend is continued in his essays spanning 2000 and 2004, but with a less frequent overt use of the term "African humanism" and by asserting the potency and relevance of African humanism in resolving day to day challenges in subtler characterisations of the philosophy – as demonstrated in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Throughout these critical environments, issues that Mphahlele and fellow theorists considered are reflected in the themes of the former's narrative writings within each epoch.

Such an anchoring of an author's personal philosophical stance and literary practice within the ambient intellectual debate warrants a selective survey of the way African humanism tackles topical issues from the 1940s to the present time. This study has been scrutinising Mphahlele's representations of African humanism in response (implicitly or explicitly) to those aspects of intellectual debate within which it has been conceived and refined, such as negritude, Black Consciousness, Afrocentrism, racism and essentialism. As I mention in the Introduction of this dissertation, in delineating his concept of African humanism Mphahlele never sought to pass off an eclectic combination of existing theories as an original concept.

In keeping with his endorsement of African humanism as a consiousness and way of life that respects diversity, he interrogated the views of negritudist, Pan African, Black Consciousness and postcolonial theorists without attempting to obscure their distinctness. What he did was to look critically at these theories, reject some of their aspects and reconstitute those aspects he partially embraced to align with his own distinct concept of African humanism. The result was always that no unmediated re-surfacing of an aspect of the theory he reacted to would occur in his constantly adapting concept of African humanism, as this would undermine the validity and distinctness of such tenets distilled from other writers' theories. From existing theories he used some aspects to create new

views of his own, after which his concept continued to co-exist respectfully with other people's theories. Evidence of this today is that some of the theories Mphahlele developed side by side with those of Black Consciousness and Pan Africanism still exist in their updated, modified ways in as much as his concept of African humanism still fills the gap it has historically been bridging while growing in graceful neighbourhood with these related perspectives. The lacuna that Mphahlele's philosophy of African humanism fills and always has filled is the absence before his theoretical intervention of an Afrocentrism that does not deny the distinctive nature of non-Africans as members of differing cultural clusters – while at the same time rectifying misperceptions about Africanness that some non-Africans may harbour, as Afrocentrists in general set out to do. The Pan Africanist aspect of his concept of African humanism is used by Mphahlele to castigate fellow Africans who act contrary to the values that would be upheld according to the African humanist ethos. Some Pan Africanists associated with Africanist tributaries of thought other than Mphahlele's African humanism fall into the trap of theorising narrowly about Africanism. Such a weakness often leads them to attribute their own failure (emanating from incapacity in balancing western lifestyles with Africanist ones) to sometimes anachronistically cited attitudes generally known to have been those of imperialist non-Africans. While today as in the past *some* conservative Black Consciousness exponents have degenerated or are degenerating into racist attitudes expressed in slogans like "drive the white man to the sea" or "Africa for the Africans" – that result from failure to describe Africanism in rigorously thought-out ways rather than emotionally superficial ones – Mphahlele's African humanism still satisfies the need to describe Africanness in scrupulous, methodologically exacting and unsentimental ways. Even supposedly progressive adherents to Pan Africanism and Black Consciousness today still speak about *botho/ubuntu* and characterise an "African" in poorly defined ways that metamorphose from situation to situation because they serve selfish interests, while Mphahlele distinguishes African humanism from such facile definitions of Africanness. The intellectualism that often characterises the speeches and writings of some African leaders today in attempting to circumscribe ideas such as the "African Union", "African Renaissance", "African peer review mechanism" and "reconstruction and development" could acquire a more pragmatic sobriety by learning from Mphahlele's philosophically solid yet complex and flexible philosophy of African humanism. Even today it can serve as a moral touchstone.

African humanism as elaborated by Mphahlele should be used to help steer sociopolitical debates that necessarily occur as well as grapple with the existential challenges both Africans and non-Africans are facing today – as it used to throughout its passage in history.

6.2 LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF AFRICAN HUMANISM

A close look at Mphahlele's poetry reveals that when writing in this genre he also looks at life from the perspective of what he calls African humanism. In "Dedication to Voices in the Whirlwind" (*The Unbroken Song*), the alienation of exile is expressed in ways that assert Mphahlele's African humanist outlook, as when he pays tribute to the Africans' resilience by writing in order to intimate his empathy with poets like Dennis Brutus and Keorapetse Kgositsile. What Mphahlele does in this poem is to celebrate the survival of African humanist outlook, exemplified by his enduring view of the African writer as incapable of writing in isolation from the community of other writers and (especially) of fellow Africans. This poem draws strength from Mphahlele's notion of the resilience of African humanist consciousness displayed by fellow exiles joining him in the agony of exile from a wide spectrum of varying host countries. The poems "Vignettes" and "Death" from the same collection respectively transform American pastoral beauty into the inspiring myth of the unbroken song of African existence that is driven by agency and an inclination towards self-definition. "Death", for instance, departs from the private sorrow emanating from lamenting the untimely deaths of a mother and a brother, to sneering at murderous apartheid's own suicidal aspects. The author achieves this by using the image of the dead former South African leader H.F. Verwoerd who is one of the architects of apartheid and dies at the hands of Tsafendas and (probably) other white conspirators. Rather than stagnantly overworking the exposure of apartheid's brutality, the author's tone urges fellow Africans suffering under the system to learn lessons from it and prepare their postcolonial temperament in advance for an outlook that will avoid the suicidal pitfalls of apartheid and respect the sacredness of human life – thereby preserving mankind (themselves subsumed) rather than engaging in internecine conflict. The poetry thus postulates introspection as one of the means to reach a sound self-definition that transcends the blinkers of transient apartheid.

A zeal for life visible in short story characters like Khalima Zungu in "Man Must Live" permeates the short stories and other genres as Mphahlele's way of exemplifying the aspect of African humanism that he sees as the Africans' general poise and ability to celebrate life or live life to its fullest, such as siring children when called upon to do so by the position of head of family. While such a celebration of life in the earlier stories exposes a ludicrous mimicry in characters such as the policeman Zungu, in portrayal of characters of the later stories it testifies to what Mphahlele sees as the African humanist propensity towards a self-defining counterdiscourse to the oppressor's, such as Karabo's refusal to live life in keeping with the assumptions of Mrs Plum and other liberals, revealed stylistically, as a critic like Crehan observes, by devices such as Karabo's adherence "to a naturalistic register … suggesting the servant's growing awareness or movement towards self-emancipation" ("Master-Servant Narratives" 39). That what is regarded as normal by Mrs Plum and Kate is seen to be abnormal by Karabo and the other servants is observed by this and other critics, exemplified in his (Crehan's) indicating affiliative markers by their absence in terms like "Dick's rage at the way Mrs Plum pampers and talks to her two dogs", "Treating animals like people is disgusting" and treating the two dogs like people "demeans Dick and Karabo as human beings" (50). Similarly, the policeman Tefo in "Down the Quiet Street" defies the stereotype of a

caricatured black policeman and relates humanely to the residents of Newclare township as a rounded man living life to the full – exemplified by his romantic liaison and eventual marriage with one of the Newclare widows.

Black women are portrayed in Mphahlele's writings as stronger than men and central to the economic and social survival of the family and the nation. That is why Naledi "[decides] she can have [Steve Cartwright] as a husband" without entering into formal marriage with him, in keeping with her own African customs around widowhood rather than acquiring Steve's cultural practices (*The Wanderers* 194). It is (in this way) not a surprise when she later describes her married life to Timi in such a way that the life of the Cartwright family seems to revolve around her own vantage point, as follows: "They're fine. Felix doesn't do much … [because] the stroke wore him out … My mother-in-law's still full of beans … I couldn't have wished for a better father-in-law. I think my mother-in-law is good to me only because she'd lose the battle against those she loves and who love me" (223). Yet Naledi does not stand up against males in the near-militant way some feminists would advocate. As an agent of change, Naledi does not herald change in husband-wife relations along the lines of an anti-sexist or anti-paternalistic struggle. Her stand is in terms of political and cultural, national consciousness that promotes change in seeing people entering marriage in non-racial terms, acknowledging without conflict each other's distinctive sociocultural consciousness. The "private affairs are a public matter" in terms of "national allegory", in Crehan's terms (50) because the marriage is antithetical to that in which the white husband would represent the colonial domination of Europe, whereas the black wife would enact obliteration of Africanness. Like Tirenje in *Chirundu* (though there with a shift of the "national allegory" towards relations of the alienated emerging black middle class, who fail to merge with the persistently African humanist ethos of the post-independence masses), she relates with calm dignity to her husband and ensures that she remains in her position that is central to the life of the husband and his family by asserting the African humanist view of a woman as central and not peripheral in the life of her husband, of the family and of the nation. Tirenje's resort in *Chirundu* to statutory law inherited from colonialism after Chimba has married Monde in traditional Bemba law is her way of demonstrating that the African humanism within her is adaptable to postcolonial change and does not fall in the trap of rigidly rejecting everything that has to do with western cultures. African humanism, being based in traditional African cultures that regard the social position of a woman as sacred, does not need the antidote of ideological feminism to accord women the respectable position that belongs to them in society. It is for this reason that the critics Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale and Thuynsma remark that Mphahlele's work "shows a keen awareness of the strength of black women, yet he certainly does not develop his women characters as feminist scholars would prefer" (*Eskia* 454). In the same way that Mphahlele frowns upon the weakness of ideological variants of African humanism such as Black Consciousness in its extremely political formulations, it is not strange that he does not detract from the more complete and powerful definition of the place of a woman in African humanist terms by narrowing it down to the sometimes ideological extremism of some variants of feminist thinking.

Mphahlele regards resonances (which include momentous historical events) as crucial to literature in the sense of its being an aspect of African humanist aesthetics. It is with the intention of illustrating this point that the imagery within the dialogue of Mphahlele's characters recreates orature. For this reason, when Uncle in the short story "Grieg on a Stolen Piano" (*In Corner B*) flees from his home to the town of Pietersburg and later from Pietersburg to Pretoria, the terrain he traverses contains exuberant nature imbued with predators and other animals which (as is the case with the protagonists in folktales) do not hurt him. With the same effect of fabricating specifically African resonances, the main character Maredi Tulamo in *Father Come Home* saunters in the confused search for his father, through bushes in the company of the iguana, buffalo, zebras, tigers, lions and other animals, a setting in which a gigantic lion one day scampers off the middle of the road so that he may pass. It is in order to achieve the same effect that historical resonances such as the Africans' survival tactics – to counteract the alienation of exile, overall racial bias, the subtle dubiousness of liberalism with regard to the liberation of Africans and apartheid's conquering mechanisms such as segregated urbanisation and migrant labour – are painted by means of symbols and metaphors in all of Mphahlele's writing in order to create a uniquely African historical perspective. Interspersing colloquial African language forms in the characters' dialogue is tied (with regard to effect) to historical resonances in works like *Father Come Home*, in that it marks pointers to watershed actions of central characters. Mphahlele increases the intensity of resonances in his narrative writings by means of African language proverbs and idiomatic expressions which in themselves can be seen as encoded accounts of Africans' ways of coping with existential challenges in the past, methods of survival whose use in present times maintains the "unbroken song" of African existence.

Mphahlele's use of oral traditions to effect resonances accomplishes what the theorist Phaswane Mpe singles out as the proper occupation of literary commentators, in the following words:

> Instead of seeing oral forms in written texts as an unproblematic mirroring of extant oral traditions, we need to ask how writers solve the manifest problems that come with this project. How, for example, does one deal with representing oral forms of one language in another? What are the aesthetic, ideological and political possibilities that are opened up by such representations of orality? (77)

For Mphahlele, the use of orature explores the politico-aesthetic possibility of tempering latent hegemonic predeterminations, to which his writing in the medium of English would otherwise expose itself, with inherently African cultural modes of thought and expression. In the ideological sphere, the device comprehensively abrogates English from propagating imperialist consciousness towards embodying and asserting African humanism as a consciousness and a way of life. Mpe's observation that Plaatje's "perception of orality tends to be ambiguous" (88) is justified by his equally accurate discernment of the feature of Plaatje's works of using "Shakespeare and the Bible … [as] major imaginative templates through which he recast Setswana oral forms in English" (78). Unlike the seemingly derogatory way Mpe views Plaatje's ambiguity -- in the sense of his being inconsistent in his avowed mission of reversing the imperialist process whereby "Sechuana folk-tales, … with the spread of European ideas, are fast being forgotten" (75) -- I see it as an enriching ambiguity symptomatic of the author's

accession to the existence of a hybrid culture that is a corollary of the experience of colonisation. In this respect Plaatje shows a similarity of technique with Mphahlele, although the former did not concern himself as the latter does with defining and articulating such a legacy of altered consciousness within Africans in the wake of the Natives' Land Act of 1913 and other apartheid pieces of legislation. Mpe further remarks that Plaatje's "perception of orality tends … at times [to be] even self-contradictory", for the reason that "[he] offered, at times, an evolutionist model, which suggests a gradual decimation of orality" (88). What should be added is perhaps the possibility that as "an allegorical indictment of the Natives' Land Act of 1913" (75), *Mhudi*'s intimation of literacy (as a symbol of the aggressive expansionism of imperial subjection) devouring orality (which symbolises the enduring distinctive cultural identity of Africans) is a warning about whites poised at this time in history to wipe out black culture. In the same vein, the "dialectic of cross-referencing and complementarity" should not be seen as a pointing to unmediated acculturation of the Batswana in the face of conquest by whites. It should be understood to hint at Plaatje's assertion of a stand equivalent to the "integrated vision" or counterpointing of the consciousness of the oppressor with that of the oppressed (in Said's terms) – the point a theorist like Fanon proposes in remarking that "It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows" ("On National Culture" 199). In other words, it is proper for orality (as an ingredient of the "national consciousness" of the Batswana in *Mhudi*) to co-exist in a dialectic relationship with some ingredients of international consciousness (assuming the form of the culture of the whites in the novel who are out to dispossess the Barolong of land). The openness of Plaatje's motives (in his use of orality) to a myriad of interpretations is understandable, considering that he did not follow such a style with theoretical explanation as Mphahlele has done. In the case of Mphahlele, oral literary devices are used in keeping with his concept of African humanism, as indicated above, to evoke resonances that collectively consolidate an African humanist "perspective".

Resonances arrived at in ways enumerated above are at times employed by Mphahlele in combination with poetic devices such as rhythm and refrain to increase their impact from merely enhancing an African perspective to the forging of myth. Myth is tied to the orientation of African humanism to inspire hope for the future and to reinforce the attitude that life (according to the concept of African humanism) continues to survive beyond physical death of individuals and peoples. An individual whose expression reaches mythic heights speaks *ipso facto* with a prophetic voice. Prophecy is the ability to speak to one's people with resolute conviction and to direct their lives towards what one single-mindedly believes to be the right destiny. Harmoniously with the way Mphahlele has described the irony of African existence as "a dialogue of two selves" (i.e. simultaneous psychological occupation with both the present and the past or the contiguous and the distant), the community poet succeeds in achieving mythmaking by means of alternating emphases on the present and the past or the contiguous and the distant. One example is the character Mashabela's ability (in *Father Come Home*) to slip into and out of the present and past by juxtaposing the mythical plot of the village boy who *was* born speaking and wanting to know the whereabouts of his father with the *unfolding* plot of Maredi Tulamo's search for his father Lemeko. In this way the juxtaposition of a past event (signified by the word *was*) with a present one (which the

word *unfolding* points to) removes the distance between past and present, distant and contiguous.

Mythmaking invests action with the aura of religion in that (like religion) it fixates on a visionary object or being whose existence cannot be tested empirically. Perhaps this explains why in *Father Come Home* the prophetic lines of the sage Mashabela championing a return to modes of piety such as ancestral reverence and recognition of the holiness of oracles and shrines are pitted in import against the preachings of a Christian lay preacher who declares traditional practices to be heathen conduct deserving of a grilling in hell in the after-life. Significantly, Mashabela, Dineo, Hunadi and other 'Christian' characters of the novel reside in the 'Christian' side of the villages. Their African humanist way of relating to God, different as it appears to the practices of western Christianity, is a hybrid kind of traditional religion into which the effects of colonial Christianity have been absorbed. Their Christianity is so tamed by the rural, traditional environment that, should it occupy any prominence above marginality in the mainstream, it would be as outlandish as the cacophonous image of Mphahlele's real-life maternal grandfather who "would herd cattle with a Bible in his hand" as early as the close of the nineteenth century (*Exiles and Homecomings* 31). In fact, the hybrid Christianity of Mashabela and other Africans living in Sedibeng should be understood as being a perfected form of attempts in Mphahlele's earlier works (like *Down Second Avenue* and "Mrs Plum") by Zionist or messianic preachers to abrogate Christianity by re-defining it as an African humanist variety of humane religious practice.

The aspects of African humanism mentioned in this part have been demonstrated throughout this study as having been represented in the characterisation, theme and style of the scrutinised texts. In writing these narrative texts in the ways demonstrated above, Mphahlele qualifies himself as an African writer in the sense of writing in a manner which relates to the existential status and challenges of being African. He is an Afrocentric writer in that the stylistic features cited above are consonant with and portray a view of reality from the African perspective that challenges norms imposed by the non-African "centre". His position as an Afrocentric writer *ipso facto* groups him globally with postcolonial writers whose project it is to appropriate formerly colonised reality and consciously undertake the task of self-constitution. Above all he has proved himself an African humanist who embodies all the attributes enumerated above as well as earning the description of a Pan Africanist or Black Consciousness thinker in that his spiritual position and his praxis inevitably pre-suppose, without degenerating into extremist ideology, pride in being African – shared across the continent and in the diaspora. Such a position adopted by Mphahlele naturally subsumes the negritude consciousness and disposition, barring the initial narrowness of its scope.

Mphahlele's divergences from other writers of the fifties and African writers in general are evident in two more ways. He handles setting and themes commonly shared by African writers (such as master-servant relations) differently from his compatriots. While for writers like Themba and Motsisi "Sophiatown in Johannesburg [is] a juxtaposition of dream and myth with reality [and] has inspired … [them] to use [it] as a symbolic reference point" (Gready, "Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties" 140), and for black writers

of that period generally “Sophiatown had gathered almost mythological import in the literature as a romantic, bohemian world … of its petty-bourgeois professional classes” (Chapman, “Identity and the Apartheid State” 238), Mphahlele stands out as one writer the setting of whose narratives will not be remembered for immortalising the township of Sophiatown. Considering that in social stature he was not different from, and actually was counted among the “ ‘new African’ teachers, nurses, lawyers, musicians and journalists, who were usually also creative writers, [who] rubbed shoulders in [Sophiatown] shebeens with the other products of rapid urbanisation” (Chapman, “Identity and the Apartheid State” 238), his deviation from the stock exploitation of Sophiatown as fictional milieu should be seen as revolutionary. From among the townships constituting “Western Areas” and including Sophiatown (Gready 157) in Johannesburg, Mphahlele uses Newclare, which is much less favoured by his contemporaries as narrative milieu; his other famous setting of Marabastad in Pretoria is mentioned even less frequently in collective works of the other writers of the *Drum* generation. Due to the high concentration of the black socialites in Sophiatown mentioned above, it is clear that townships like Newclare and Marabastad were associated with the lowly and poor among blacks, and looked down upon. For this reason, Mphahlele’s single-minded vivid immortalisation of these two townships in a way that is infused with intimate love is a sign not only of his dissociation from elitist attitudes, but is testimony also of his intention to empower the downtrodden even within black social stratifications. This is in keeping with African writers’ tendency towards championing the cause of the oppressed, which in the case of other writers mentioned above ironically proves to be a racial undertaking, in that they appreciate the significance of such a stance only when whites come into the picture. This further counts in his favour as an innovator or a “beginner” (in terms of Said’s theory), because it defines the sameness simultaneously with the difference of his repetition of what is affiliatively the common concern of his contemporaries.

Consistently with his genuinely non-racial position (demonstrated above), Mphahlele utilises his concept of African humanism to resolve the contradictory position regarding the morality of the fiction produced by some African writers in which, according to Crehan, “emancipation … looks less like a new dispensation than the Law of the indigenous Father returning to take the place of the usurping Law of the colonial Father; less like freedom than a more homely form of state repression” (39). Crehan perceptively observes that for the writings of the latter, “The desire generated through contact with the racial and cultural other … must be disavowed in favour of a return to African culture and traditions” (39). As shown in the analysis of Mphahlele’s narrative writings (in this study), Mphahlele’s projection of African humanism as the appropriate consciousness with which Africans should counteract the pernicious effects of cultural colonisation is not contingent upon a wholesale rejection of European ways of life. Rather, it is dependent for its survival upon a judicious appropriation of some aspects of European mores which results untimately in neither a purely African nor a purely European sensibility characterising the behaviour of the postcolonial African humanist citizen.

6.3 African Humanism and Current Challenges

In positing African humanism as the distinctive identity of one cluster out of many other internally cohering groups of peoples within the broad ambit of humankind, Mphahlele has had to respond to several challenges by detractors of his theory. As he writes in his 1971 essay "The Fabric of African Culture and Religious Beliefs", he recognises that "it is often argued that African belief used to be shared by the white man when he was largely pastoral, i.e. before the 18th century" ("The Fabric" 154).

Implications of the view expressed above include the notion that "what the African believes in and practices is not uniquely his" as he "is merely a pre-industrial person" ("The Fabric" 154). What might lend credence to the above challenge to Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is the historical fact that prior to the Renaissance juncture in history – when the Western humanists drew a line between the intellect and God – the earliest Western humanists "were devout Christians" though "their interest in the classics was not religiously inspired" ("The Fabric" 155).

Western humanism and African humanism (in the way Mphahlele explains above) were closer together in the past by virtue of their base in religious belief, yet not indentical, as even at that stage Western interest in art was not religiously inspired – whereas to this day artistic impulses and concretisations within African humanism are an organic extension of religious behaviour. This means that the spirituality of Western humanists became gradually marginalised while it was intellect that was allowed detached growth and indulgence, ever since the initial theorisation of its separation from religious existence by interest in the classics. Mphahlele sees the Western humanists' draining of spirituality as having been so radical as being today in the position of "only making allowances for man's emotions", which contrasts with the nature of African humanism, as it "still has a religious base" today ("The Fabric" 155). This would be the reason for 'Christian' characters who fail to abrogate western Christianity (such as Eleyase and the lay preacher of Sedibeng in a work like *Father Come Home*) showing all emotion and no moral sense. If morality, according to Mphahlele, is a product of religious consciousness (as revealed by his statement that "African humanism was originally a religious state of mind producing moral action" – "The Fabric" 154), then a person whose African humanist religious consciousness is feeble will prove wanting in moral sense.

The important point to note from Mphahlele's comparison of Western and African humanisms is that original separation of intellect from religion has marked Western humanism as differing from African humanism, which up to now still retains religion as the matrix of all human behaviour. His conception of all activities by Africans unfolding against the backdrop of religion is affirmed by the way he sees even African arts and crafts as concretisation of a religious impulse. In his 1995 "Address at the Opening of Community Arts Come Together Exhibition", he traces the evolution of present day African art to the days when Africans "had greater appeal as artists when [their] creations were ritualistic, inspired by the gods and ancestral spirits as intercessors between [them] and the Supreme Being" (269). In an earlier address delivered in 1985, he sketches how such a religious basis for art survives in African literature and craftsmanship today, in

which African artists “have braved the world of new concepts, new social political statements, while they try at the same time to recapture the essence of Africanness as a distinctive experience” (“Images of Africa” 69). In order for this social feature to be democratically enlisted, Mphahlele looks forward to “a climate of political freedom, when there will be freedom of association” in which “the African can hold his cultural destiny in his own hands” on the South African scene — a climate in which “the proper meeting point between [Western humanism] and African humanism” (“The Fabric” 155) will take place. It is important to understand that according to Mphahlele the crystallisation and recognition of the existence and distinctiveness of a cluster of peoples whose thinking and broadly-defined collective lifestyle is African humanist is a pre-condition for “the proper meeting point” between Africans, Europeans and peoples of other identities, hence his careful qualification that not only should the meeting point happen, but it should be a “*proper* meeting point” (“The Fabric” 155, emphasis added). This means that the way Africans make sense of western norms and values should not be in the way prescribed by the coloniser but should be in the way the African himself or herself abrogates or adopts the western norms and values from his or her own African humanist perspective. This would be the reason for Mphahlele to create characters like Chimba and Tirenje (in *Chirundu*), for example, in order to contrast the successful way in which Tirenje’s African humanist subjectivity empowers her to reclaim her centrality in Chimba’s life despite the husband’s illusion that he himself is in control, with the dismal way in which the husband Chimba fails to manage the “meeting point” between his African humanist consciousness and colonial consciousness.

The explanation above of African humanism as a tool with which the African must meet other peoples or clusters of peoples without his or her integrity compromised, clarifies that Mphahlele expects African humanism to adapt and re-adapt itself indefinitely as it moves through time. The most crucial mission at this time, however, is to define African humanism and to have Africans and people of other identities acknowledge its substantive existence as a distinctive identity among other such distinctive identities of other groups in the world. There is no doubt that African humanism retains its core while changing from time to time as far as it has to accommodate world-views differing from it. As for the possibility of Africans one day losing their distinctive identity to be identical with Western humanists, this seems unlikely when one considers that the core of African humanism has survived to this day. Also, the pre-Renaissance differences between these two humanisms (as Mphahlele has explained) make us aware that here we are not dealing with a single phenomenon which has bifurcated along the way. If this were the case it would make sense to forsee a re-merging after the factors leading to the bifurcation, such as movement through differing environments, would have ceased to exist. The dynamic propensity of African humanism in adapting itself as the environment changes also discounts the possibility of its ever fossilising into a relic of the past, unlike what would be the case if it were a static, rigid concept that ignores the present to fixate in the past. Mphahlele does not dimiss the possibility of Western and African humanisms one day imploding into a single consciousness once Africans have completely recovered from their pre-industrial imprisonment, nor does he agree that it will necessarily happen. Understandably, Mpahlele is concerned with that which obtains now, which he senses is not fully appreciated nor given due recognition. This explains why he makes statements

such as the following: "Whether or not the African will change is not important, even though it is possible" ("The Fabric" 154).

African humanism would render itself vulnerable to extinction only if it were not dynamic. It would seem that this concept's non-essentialist nature is among the qualities that favour it in this regard. Writers like Conversi have indicated that absolute "essentialism is often identifiable by the sustained and totalising description of entire groups in a hypostatising manner as cohesive entities that appear to be trapped in their historical legacy" ("Resisting Primordialism" 271). African humanism in the way Mphahlele defines it is not guilty of this accusation by Conversi, as it makes use of the concept of African cultures with the concession that they differ at the behavioural level and are tied together by African humanist consciousness only at an underlying level. This is one of the reasons why Mphahlele's work always highlights historical perspective, to emphasise that Africans or Europeans are described as and behave as they are shaped by historical events. This serves to distinguish individual features of people belonging to any group from the objective cultural traits belonging to the entire distinctive cluster of peoples that have been brought about by historical events.

The problem of essentialism does not end with homogenisation of designated and described groups. That is why Conversi goes on to link essentialism with historical and cultural determinism (272-273). To him, the problem with cultural essentialism arises when the distinction between objective ethnicity and subjective culture is blurred, which could lead to unfortunate essentialising of the (imaginary) enemy and could end in blanket condemnation of individual misdeeds and their attribution to entire groups (274). Mphahlele's (now famous) definition of African humanism as welcoming whites and people of other races even during apartheid provided that the consciousness of whites can voluntarily adapt to coincide with that of African humanists reveals that his concept does not totalise peoples who apparently or by definition fall outside its fold. In other words, Mphahlele's concept of African humanism is not racist. Such a nonracist aspect comes as no surprise when one remembers that the concept of African humanism aligns itself with postcolonial or modern modes of thought which include nonracialsm. Said, as one of the foremost postcolonial writers, has demonstrated his non-racist stance in remarks such as the following: "To reintegrate himself with worldly actuality, the critic of texts ought to be investigating the system of discourse by which the "world" is divided, administered, plundered, by which humanity is thrust into pigeonholes, by which "we" are "human" and "they" are not, and so forth" ("Beginnings" 26). Said's implicit concern in this quotation with proper relations between peoples who are classifiable as Europeans and those regarded as non-European is similar to that displayed by Mphahlele in the texts discussed presently. Mphahlele being an Afrocentric writer from whose consciousness the implications of the encounter between Europe and Africa is bound not likely to fade, it is not surprising that he shows a concern for proper relations between Europeans and Africans like other Afrocentric writers, as shown by Fanon expressing regret at racist interrelations by exhorting : "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 231). Fanon's valuing of the need for the Africans to "explain the other to [themselves]" should be understood properly to mean that Africans should accommodate

non-Africanness in their negotiation of multiracial co-existence. Fanon associates racism with failure on the part of the oppressed elite and the masses who follow them, to educate themselves about each detail of the intellectual context within which the struggle for liberation takes place, in the following words:

> The settler is not simply the man that must be killed. Many members of the mass of colonialists reveal themselves to be much, much nearer to the national struggle than certain sons of the nation. The barriers of blood and race-prejudice are broken down on both sides. In the same way, not every Negro or Moslem is issued automatically with a hall-mark of genuineness; and the gun or the knife is not inevitably reached for when a settler makes his appearance.
>
> ("Spontaneity" 116 - 7)

In Mphahlele's literary texts a representation of the non-racial aspect of African humanism is exemplified, *inter alia*, by the marriage (already hinted at elsewhere) between the editor of *Bongo* magazine, Steve Cartwright, with the black widow Naledi (in *The Wanderers*). This confirms what Mphahlele has affirmed in expository writing: "Africans believe in marriage based on compatibility. There must be good marriages between white and white and good marriages between white and black as well. The colour doesn't matter. It depends on circumstances" (*Exiles and Homecomings* 19). This is a significant development after most white characters in Mphahlele's earlier works have been depicted almost as avators of complete prejudice associated collectively with whites under apartheid. With the portrayal of the white character Steve Cartwright as someone marrying with Naledi purely on the basis of their compatibility as persons, Mphahlele is perfecting his superannuation of protest literature and its weaknesses that include attitudes which could be said to border on racism. Mphahlele here is demonstrating an effort to plunge through racial stereotyping, in order to study and understand whites as people. Such an orientation clinches Mphahlele as a genuine postcolonial writer. From the example of work by postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said (as analysed by Khalidi), a postcolonial writer like Mphahlele has of neccesity to make a conscious effort to understand all members of humanity thoroughly, including those that could be regarded as the enemy. Khalidi has described such an attitude in the postcolonial theorist Edward Said in the remark that "There are other reasons for Said's influence on Palestinian politics, namely his ability to bring to Palestinian political deliberations a profound understanding of American society and culture, and an acute awareness of how to speak to the American public" ("Said and American Public Sphere" 160).

Failure by any postcolonial critic to remember the point Khalidi makes of Edward Said (in the quotation above) will defeat the very end of the mission to liberate oneself from the past weaknesses resulting from colonialism. It is for this reason that Ndebele once remarked that one major weakness of post-protest literature in South Africa was that: "Although the new writing has begun to make a move away from that pre-occupation with the 'other', it is still rooted in the emotional and intellectual polarities of South African oppression …" ("Redefining" 64). It is in order for postcolonial orientation as exemplified above by means of Said's lifework and as encouraged in the quotation of Ndebele (above) to be promoted that the depicted marriage of Cartwright and Naledi is a

great contribution by Mphahlele, further developing South Afican literature by Africans. This is because the portrayal of such a crosscultural marriage is shown to be based on human affection and attraction free from racial stereotyping and polarisation. What further marks Mphahlele's development as a writer and theorist apart from the non-racialism he displays in the writing of such works as *The Wanderers* is that in later works (including *Father Come Home)* he seems to maintain this stance with even greater intensity.

An example of such a more noticeable move away from racial stereotyping is an incident in which the central character Maredi (in *Father Come Home*) finds on the farm of the Afrikaner farmer Du Plessis "a white labourer who … lived in a mud shack no better than those for the black labourers … [and] all of them, the [black and white workers] and [the boss] Du Plessis, were human towards him" (*Father Come Home* 68). This part of the novel depicts how blacks and whites, probably in the envisaged new South Africa beyond apartheid, for the first time could forget about the colour of one's skin and relate as humans according to who is boss and who is servant, as well as according to who deserves hospitable kindness due to being a strange saunterer, and who should extend welcoming hands to protect the emotional vulnerability of the newcomer. By writing like this about Maredi, Du Plessis and other workers on the farm (*Father Come Home* 68), according to Ndebele's theory Mphahlele can be seen as consolidating a literary trend that moves away from the flaw described (by Ndebele) in the following words:

> What we have … is protest literature that merely changed emphasis: from the moral evil of apartheid, to the existential and moral worth of blackness … [to the point of turning] into a pathology: when objective conditions no longer justify or support an entirely emotional or moral attitude. ("Redefining"64)

Postcolonial resistance to racial polarisation as exemplified by Ndebele's view in the quotation above is shared by other writers like Edward Said. Expressing his revulsion against polarising partisanship which Palestinian thinkers may be trapped (considering the scale of oppression of Palestinians by Israel), Said has remarked that "If there's a report about Israeli torture in the prisons, legal torture, and the Palestinians do torture, why are we excused? We shouldn't be. Torture is bad, whoever does it" ("Edward Said Talks" 29).

However, moving away from racial pigeonholing is not the only challenge Mphahlele and other Afrocentric writers face. Apart from a cultural determinism that may move to the extreme of totalising racist weaknesses, according to Conversi, historical determinism also leads perniciously to absolute essentialism, due to its view that "the past has got a hold on the present, and that we cannot escape its grasp" (275). Mphahlele as the proponent of African humanism differs from African schools of thought such as the negritudinists in their initial, radical stages, precisely because negritude romanticised traditional Africa and as such paralysed Africans, prevented them from freely shaping the present and the future with the fear that this would efface Africanism. It is this kind of imprisonment in the African past that Fanon detests, as in his expression that he is "not the slave of the Slavery that dehumanised [his] ancestors" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 230). The cultural heterogeneity of peoples described as African humanists as well as the accommodative nature of African humanism take care of genuine concerns of writers like

Mbembe when he remarks that at worst essentialism may lead to a canonising of difference and elimination of the plurality and ambivalence of custom ("African Modes of Self-Writing" 247).

African humanist accommodation of what Mbembe has called "plurality and ambivalence of custom" also finds incarnation in characters like the Irish teacher Corkery in *Chirundu*, who is accepted and loved immensely by Tirenje and other learners although he makes clear that he neither comprehends fully what it is to be an African nor is he an African humanist – Tirenje describes him as "one of that rare breed of Europeans … who was ready to listen to his students, to learn from them" (*Chirundu* 29). Tirenje and other students' love for Corkery signify their African humanist embracement of plurality. Moreover, the lauded ambivalence of African humanist and colonial religious conduct as evinced in characters such as Hunadi, Dineo and Mashabela in *Father Come Home* is Mphahlele's way of making clear that African humanism counts in the "ambivalence of custom" as a constituent of the atmosphere within which it will assert its own existence. In is the environment in which pluralism is not welcome which Mphahlele writes against, as follows: "So much has been written on the Bantu, but I have always felt something seriously wanting in such literature. I told myself there must surely be much more to be said than the mere recounting of incident: about the loves and hates of my people; their desires; their poverty and affluence; their achievements and failures …" ("Unfinished Story" 31). To write about Africans as if their lives are not full and multidimensional is to deny their distinctive existence which would enrich the pluralistic fabric of human society. What Mphahlele demands in the citation above is recognition that Africans do not exist as splintered individuals lacking depth but as rounded individuals of profound behaviour who represent the depth of their identity as distinctive cultural groups. To deny the African such an identity is to wallow in the self-conceit that Africans can be altered into creatures that fit within the objectives of the coloniser. The African writer Chinua Achebe highlights the subjectivity of Africans that Mphahlele reclaims in the citation above when he states that "for a society to function smoothly and effectively its members must share certain basic tenets of belief and norms of behaviour" (*Hopes* 100). What is also of importance is the converse of Mphahlele's demand for a multidimensional depiction of African lives in fiction. African humanism by Mphahlele's own definition being based among other consideration on non-racialism, the implication of such a demand on Africans extends to the concession that in his own writings Mphahlele will ensure that non-African characters are depicted as multidimensional, too.

It follows from the above explication of African humanism that the concept's proneness to appropriation makes it amenable to future-directed theories like the Multiculturalism suggested by Mazrui (2004). Mazrui describes Multiculturalism as "pluralistic, seeking to represent diverse cultures: latino, … Asian, African, native American and women (sic), so multiculturalism is pluralistic…" ("Global Africa" 17). A thorough understanding of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism makes one understand that it is ready to participate in any multicultural situation as long as it plays a role as a distinctive participant in that complex of multiple participants. In itself, African humanism is a

multicultural concept in that it does not seek to homogenise the diversity of African cultures.

One distinction African humanism takes along if it has to join any multicontinental or multiracial forum is its notion of dialogue within African cultures – whether adapted to modern times to a great degree or not – as simultaneously individual and communal. A speaker within African humanist contexts may be expressing his or her own views, but always these views are expressed after attempts on the part of the speaker to determine communal opinion on the matter spoken about as well as efforts made to express oneself in such a way that there is concord between what one says and the community's verdict on the issue. In the discipline of Linguistics Mphahlele would thus align himself with writers like Candlin in his remark that the performance of speech acts depends on "culturally-specific appropriateness criteria" (see Schmidt & Richards 1980, 141). To speak is to perform speech acts, as writers like Hymes (1972) and Schmidt and Richards (1980) have explained. While Matsumoto demonstrates by the example of Japanese that the sociolinguistic appropriateness of speech acts is determined in terms of a specific culture, Mphahlele's insight into the appropriateness or acceptability of dialogue within African communities would support Matsumoto's view by giving examples of speech acts among Africans ("Reexamination of the Universality of Face" 403). This entails (in terms of Mphahlele's exemplification in fiction of African humanist dialogue) that dialogue necessarily reveals the societal voice in addition to revealing the individual voice. Dialogue by different characters will have this quality of combining the private and public voices, but the exact manner of combining the two will still differ from character to character – as exemplified in *Father Come Home*, for instance, by the varying poetic qualities of Hunadi's and Mashabela's speeches.

It would seem that Mphahlele has achieved what he avows in stating that there is a "need to evolve another kind of narrative by way of domesticating the novel … in its present form" in an atmosphere where "autobiography should be encouraged [while] epic forms should be revived ("The African Critic" 386). His extension of representations of African humanist consciousness and existence in the texture of his poetry and prose (as this study illustrates), spills over to the form of the genres in which the poem, autobiography, short story and novel invariably centralise the epic author-protagonist – either through direct characterisation or by means of a cryptic, continually surfacing character employed to sustain awareness of an underlying African humanist consciousness. Mphahlele's success in this regard is found in the assessments of those critics who hold normative views of the forms of literary genres, as when Ursula Barnett castigates the "loosely woven and somewhat rambling" plot of *The Wanderers* (*A Vision of Order* 143). Because of the same perspective that contrasts with an African humanist one (as Mphahlele defines it), Barnett goes on to lament that "Chirundu as a person is not sufficiently clearly defined [to] provide a sufficiently strong vehicle for the theme" (149). This critic probably falls short of detecting the autobiographical element whereby reminders of Chirundu's youthful African humanist personality (which survives only in a mangled state) is sustained throughout the novel in order to sensitise the reader to his later degeneration as measured by this standard. Where some of Mphahlele's short stories appear to counterpoise the protagonist with African humanism as some kind of

hidden allegorical character, they are evidently loose in structure and lax in their portrayal of the main character, precisely because of the same submerged positioning of anonymous African humanist consciousness as the concealed protagonist, consonant with Mphahlele's position that African humanism is at the heart of all activity within African societies. It is the foregrounding of the enduring, adaptive vitality of African cultural existence in its broadest totality that Mphahlele begins to adopt as a literary approach in the writing of *Man Must Live and Other Stories*, and continues to sustain in later poetry and prose writings, a practice which has solicited praises, as Lewis Nkosi remarks, from right-wing journals such as *Trek* for "not giving … economic or political theories about human beings, but real people giving and taking" (in *Tasks and Masks* 93). The subterfuge of "economic and political theories about human beings" used by *Trek* actually refers to a foregrounding of apartheid which they are happy not to see in Mphahlele's early stories. What evades the commentators is that what they regard as writing on "real people giving and taking" is the beginning of Mphahlele's (even worthier) consolidation of the concept of African humanism which he bases on lives of ordinary men and women. It is interesting, too, how such praise by *Trek* commentators gets outdated when "economic or political theories about [Africans]" start appearing more intensely as Mphahlele foregrounds apartheid in his other writings following *Man Must Live and Other Stories*, alongside his representation of African humanism. It is probably disappointment at the marginalisation of the theme of spectacular apartheid which leads the "left-wing *Guardian*" to complain, as Lewis Nkosi goes on to observe, "that the author … has had the gods of his fathers exorcised by misionaries" (93). If this were true, however, Mphahlele would diminish the theme of apartheid without setting out to assert the worthiness of a distinctly African consciousness and way of life.

A more enlightened assessment would present reviewers such as those in the *Guardian* with evidence of African humanist thinking in Mphahlele's texts, as in the case of village men who concur in "The Leaves were Falling" that the village needs a preacher like Katsane "who can preach, instead of howling against [their] sinfulness" (14). The African humanist inclination to appropriate western Christianity to suit the villagers' traditional religious beliefs and practices is displayed in this dialogue, albeit in an inchoate, feeble form consistent with the early chronological position of *Man Must Live* in Mphahlele's career as a writer.

This and other examples cited above should suffice to demonstrate that Mphahlele has instanced African humanism not only in the content of his narrative writings, but in the wrenching of the normative forms of literary genres from the spell of the assumptions of the "centre".

6.4 CLOSING REMARKS

It is hoped that this study has highlighted the difficulties Mphahlele has had to face in defining the concept of African humanism, such as having to refine and define his own ascription of meanings of words like "African" and "humanism", and to the expression that combines them. Mphahlele's critics and would-be advisors should strive for a better understanding of the true nature and scope of his achievement, because its coherence and variousness should succeed in allaying unfounded fears. Clarification of Mphahlele's concept of African humanism, and the dissemination of this idea through local communities and in the minds of individuals, should result at the social level in more harmony between people of different races and religions in the South African context in particular.

For those who may have been facing a barrier preventing them from plumbing the richness of meaning hidden beneath the surface of some expressions in Mphahlele's narrative writings, a re-reading of such works in conjunction with the present study should enable them to read hitherto apparently jejune parts of the texts more fruitfully and with greater comprehension. The major approach this study proposes is that readers of African literature written (like Mphahlele's texts) in English need to acquaint themselves with the African cultural varieties represented in the works, the starting point of which should be a study of the mother tongue/home language or native culture of the author, which invariably informs the syntactic structure and content of crucial expressions in the works. In Mphahlele's case, it would benefit any of his readers immensely if they were to make conscious efforts to study his mother tongue of Sepedi/Northern Sotho/Sesotho sa Leboa. The reason is that, although his narrative texts are written in English, they are throughout imbued with the cultural vision embedded primarily in the author's mother tongue. The Northern Sotho language, complete with its sociolinguistic appropriateness criteria, is the vehicle by means of which Mphahlele exemplifies the philosophy of African humanism. As this study shows, the existence of African humanist consciousness across African cultural clusters does not deny the fact that different African peoples do and will always display local(ised) identities. That is why it will be helpful to immerse oneself for example in the sociolinguistic praxis of the relatively small cultural group of the Northern Sotho-speaking communities, as a gateway to developing a fuller understanding of the African humanist outlook in all its intricate complexity. Mphahlele's use of Northern Sotho linguistic bedrock in his English narrative texts is especially concentrated in dialogue, oral literary devices and imagery.

Within the limited demarcations of the scope of this study it has been exemplified that the reading of African writers such as Mphahlele will be more rewarding if accompanied with a grasp of what African humanism (as a consciousness and a way of life) entails. This is mentioned as a polite way of projecting that any study of African literature at an advanced level should be accompanied by the learning of the concept of African humanism. Of course this puts demands on those faculties and departments in Higher Education institutions dealing with philosophy to dedicate more efforts towards satisfying the potential demand for learning support materials not just on African philosophy but also on African humanism in particular. It is hoped that, generally and in addition to the

specific benefits mentioned above, the didactic sphere can be transformed in an enriching manner if the methodological approaches exemplified in this study are accepted as some of the many alternatives that should be applied in conjunction, in order for the learner's creative approach to learning to be enhanced.

In short, a multilingual, multicultural approach to the study of Mphahlele's narrative writings and to the study of literature in general is recommended. More importantly, African readers of texts written to signify cultures other than those of the Africans, and vice versa, should do such reading with the accompanying, conscious effort to learn about the represented cultures beyond the reading of the works of art, in order to deepen mutual understanding of various peoples and to move towards the ideal state of mutually-respecting pluralistic co-existence. Following this, wounds should also be healed for those who have been bearing grudges after mistaking group attitudes for individual traits, or the obverse.

Serious questions also arise from the demonstrations of this study regarding linguistic-cultural accessibility of narrative writings, translation and choice of the language in which a work should originally be written. It is worth considering whether it is best or not for a writer setting out to create a work (within a multilingual environment like that of South Africa, where cultural interaction should be encouraged), to write originally in an African language and then translate forward into English, or write in English first and then translate backward into the mother tongue/home language. Is it worthwhile to avoid having to make the above choices by writing in a kind of English which is readily accessible to speakers of indigenous languages through employing cultural mediators like the devices Mphahlele uses? In this way native speakers of the medium language will also fully access the texts when accompanied by the extra effort of expanding their cultural awareness, as this study proposes. Is anything lost by not writing straight away in an indigenous language, following with a translated version of the work? To us, any translation will come back to the kind of English one finds in Mphahlele's narratives if culture-specific meaning is not to be lost. The route proposed by this study is to encourage both original works in indigenous languages and in English, for the native speakers of the languages, to be produced. The works written by mother tongue speakers of English should then immediately be available for reading, accompanied by the approach of excavating the sociolinguistic cultural context, as suggested above. For non-native speakers writing originally in indigenous languages and then translating into English, a good translation such as is used implicitly by Mphahlele in his works should follow. As for non-native speakers writing originally in English, cultural mediation should imbue the writing in their texts from the outset, as in Mphahlele's oeuvre. The reading of such a simultaneous or subsequent translation should also be approached as the study proposes in order for access to be complete. The assumption underlying all these recommendations is that for an effective non-native speaker, the use of a second language in writing literary texts will always remain at the interlanguage level despite the polished surface appearance of the texture of such works. This is congruous with the general postcolonial drift towards the appropriation of English and other languages of powerful countries as well as with the self-constituting attitude prevalent among less

powerful nations of the world. For this reason, sociolinguistic appropriateness will always be premised on the indigenous consciousness which the work embodies.

Recognition of this truth is a resource for multicultural, mutual understanding rather than a hindrance, and Mphahlele's writings are exemplary in demonstrating the practicability, as well as the profound social importance, of this technique. It also facilitates cross-linguistic understanding in the multilingual society that South Africa is, in which mastery of the mother tongue or culture should be seen as a gateway to respecting and learning as many as possible of the languages spoken by our compatriots. Needless to say, such learning of our neighbours' mother tongues or home languages entails learning about their cultures as well, whether at the day to day verbally communicative level, or in engaging with the literatures that have emerged from and are being created from within these various linguistic cultures.

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