

**AFRICAN IDENTITY IN ES'KIA MPHAAHLELE'S
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AND FICTIONAL NOVELS: A LITERARY
INVESTIGATION**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH STUDIES** has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

MOGOBOYA M. J.



DATE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the theme of identity in Es'kia Mphahlele's fictional and autobiographical novels, with special attention given to the quest for the lost identity of African cultural and philosophical integrity. In other words, the revival of the core African experience and the efforts to preserve and promote things African. Mphahlele wrote most of his novels during the time when Africa was under colonial influence. His native land was under the abhorred apartheid system which sought to relegate the African experience to the background. In this sense, he was the voice of the people, reminding them of their past and giving them direction for the future.

Chapter One of the thesis outlines the background to the study, defines concepts and gives a survey of African literary identity. It also probes salient aspects which have influenced Mphahlele's perspective on African identity during his early years as a writer and socio-cultural activist. Approaches and methodology employed to examine Mphahlele's writings are also outlined.

Chapter Two synthesises the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The thesis adopts Afrocentricity as the basis of analysis, looking at aspects such as the African worldview, humanism (*ubuntu*) and collectivism. Views by different African literary critics on what African literature should entail in its distinctive definition are also discussed. Two main literary traditions, orality and the contemporary tradition, which give African literature its unique character as well as its phases are identified and brought to the fore.

Identity in African literature is discussed in detail in Chapters three and four where Mphahlele's literary works are closely examined. Chapter Five concludes the study and recommends that in order for Africa to forge ahead in her attempt to reclaim and promote her cultural identity, a new perspective must be cultivated and Mphahlele proposes hybridity, which is a harmonious co-existence of two or more cultural beliefs without one oppressing the other.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 CONTEXTUALISATION

1.1.1 Studies on identity

Identity is a broad concept to outline and, as such, complex to explore because it has many nuances of meaning. There are, therefore, diverse and divergent definitions attached to it. Bhabha (1990:1;4) describes this semantic ambivalence of identity:

The 'locality' of national culture (identity) is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it.

Bhabha considers identity (national, cultural, political) as "the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force". In other words, identity is an imaginary ideal whose necessity brings social cohesion within communities and nations.

Identity derives from the Latin term *idem*, which means the same. It is the state of having the same nature or character which defines one's absolute individuality. *Millennium World Book Dictionary* (2000:1048) defines identity as who people are or what things are, as well as which aspects form their individuality. In other words, identity encapsulates individual characteristics by which people or things can be identified, which means that people's or things' identity is their individuality and personality. *Encarta Dictionary* (1999:934) notes that identity deals with who people are or what things are, especially the name(s) people or things are known by. It

may also mean a person's essential self or a set of characteristics which people recognise as belonging uniquely to themselves and constituting their individual personality. On the other hand, *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (1996:669) defines identity as the state or quality of being a specified person or thing, which embraces who or what a person is. In other words, identity deals with one's quest to define their roots which means who one is, where they come from, and lastly, their vision for the future. It is a "process of identification" and self-definition (Raditlhalo, 2003:31). In his famous "I am an African" speech, the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki captures the essence of identity in that he contends that African identity defines who one is, where they come from, and where they are going. Castells (1997), in Bekker, Dodds and Khosa (2001:2) defines identity as referring to "people's source of meaning and experience" and to "the process of constructions of meaning [culture]". One's identity is, therefore, constructed and conceptualised from one's set of cultural beliefs. It is a sprout from one's historical, religious, and social values. This means that a group of people can be united in community and solidarity because of common linguistic, religious, historical, social, and political experiences that they share. Castells acknowledges that identity is a word full of shadows of meaning which can be narrowed down to two major kinds of identity, which are ethnic and national identities. These identities, one should point out, flow directly from the cultural beliefs of the community within which they operate. Identity, therefore, means, among other things, all the qualities, beliefs, and ideas which make people feel that they stand out from others. In other words, there are features or qualities embedded in identity which make people different from and differing with others. This means, therefore, that identity

“does not obliterate difference” (Hall, 1996:3). It is these outstanding features, traits, experiences, and attributes which serve as the tenets of people or things. The word “individuality”, one might argue, serves as the thread that weaves through these definitions. This investigation, therefore, serves to critically probe identity as delineated in the following literary works by Mphahlele:

- *Down Second Avenue* (1959) and *The Wanderers* (1971).
- *Chirundu* (1979) and *Afrika My Music: An Autobiography 1957-1983* (1984)

It sets out to examine Africa's search for and celebrate her identity by encouraging Africans to go back to their roots in order to adapt to the present and forge a meaningful future. This will help them better define themselves and the world around them. This is because proper self-knowledge tends to lead to a more informed and, therefore, a more effective actualisation of one's potential. It often triggers, stimulates and brings out the best in a person, which is what Africa desperately needs today.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Europeans annexed Africa in *circa* the seventeenth century, with an elaborate and conscious aim of expanding their empire in mind. There was cultural meeting as a result of this colonisation activity which led to cultural clash. This is because of the fact that when two cultures come into contact with each other, conflict inevitably ensues. Africans were subjugated and Western culture was imposed on them. As Roscoe (1970:1) points out Africans were regarded as having “no cultural traditions of their own, no religious, economic or or

political background worthy of serious attention". The European culture was mainly forced on the Africans through education. For example, European curriculum designers systematically developed curricula which instilled an inferiority complex in the Africans, the kind of education which would not develop them into innovative and self-reliant citizens. Rather, it promoted perpetual dependency on the Europeans. It did not equip them with the capacity to do things on their own and for themselves because it was modelled on European values and standards which were averse to African belief systems as Christie (1991:81) observes:

Missionary education usually had little respect for the local African culture. Local culture and history were not included in the school curriculum, and the curriculum was usually based on European schools.

Mission education was rooted in Christian values, and attempted to teach attitudes like patience, humility, piety, discipline and the value of hard work. Critics argue that these values helped to prepare black people to accept a subordinate position in society.

The levels of education which people received also affected their social position. Generally speaking, those blacks who attended school received only two or three years of basic education. This meant that they had limited social and economic opportunities. Critics argue that low levels of schooling, together with missionary values, prepared people for subordinate roles in society and in the workforce.

Even though a large number of Africans who went through this system of education got europeanised in terms of their outlook on life as well as their cultural disposition, some imbibed it with reservation. There were some Africans who were critical of the system to such an extent that they saw

through this European annexation facade. They started to raise their people's awareness against this system by employing a variety of approaches to oppose this colonial influence. Politicians used political rallies to sensitise their fellow men about the situation, teachers imparted political education to their learners, and musicians composed protesting lyrics in their songs while writers used the barrel of the pen to fight this imperial rule. It is in this context that Mphahlele also used the tool of writing to cry out against the injustices meted out to Africans at the same time to unearth positive African values and traditions and conscientise people about these values.

1.3 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.3.1 Autobiography

Autobiography derives from the Greek words *autos*, *bios*, and *graphein*. The prefix *auto-* means self, oneself, or by oneself. *Bios* means life while *graphein* refers to the word write. Put together, *autobiography*, therefore, means a detailed writing of one's own history. In other words, in an autobiography, writers narrate their stories with their own pens. It is a written record of one's own life by oneself. An autobiography is an independent branch/genre of literature. The term is sometimes used synonymously with memoirs, diaries, letters, and journals because their difference is thinly veiled. *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1972:29) defines autobiography as follows:

This type of writing is an account of oneself written by oneself. The author of an autobiography presents (or tries to present) a continuous narrative. What he considers the major (or most interesting)

events of his life. Usually, an autobiographer reveals about himself only what he is willing to have known or remembered.

Autobiographers are usually introspective when they chronicle "major (or most interesting) events of [their lives]". These epoch-making aspects of their lives are integral to their being, their identity. In other words, the self in them finds expression in the events. They "reveal" themselves, meaning they divulge who they are in terms of cultural, religious, social, and political convictions, a totality of their being. They are factual craftsmen, not fictitious artists. Thus, autobiographers record events which have occurred in their real lives, they do not invent them. They testify about them (events), hence this genre is alternatively called testimonial literature. Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995) and *Conversations with Myself* (2010) serve as classic examples.

1.3.2 Africanity

The Latin word *Africanus* denotes an African. Africans are people who, by nature, belong to Africa. They are natives of Africa by either history, culture, or consciousness, which means that they are indigenous to Africa and, as such, qualify to be called the original inhabitants of the continent. Africanity is, therefore, the consciousness of being African. It is the authentic Africanness in African people, which means that being an African is integral to their lives, their being. Africanness is embedded in their bloodstream, their nature. They epitomise the African experience which is their identity.

1.3.3 Citizenship

The word *citizen* derives from the French word *citeain* which originates from *cite*, meaning city. The French pronounce citizen as *citesein* which originally meant the inhabitant of a city. With time, the term developed different shades of meaning which encompassed, *inter alia*, a native of a state, or a naturalised member of it.

1.3.4 Nation

Nation as a term originates from the Latin word *natio* which means tribe. Tribe is defined by the *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (1996:1504) as a group of people, families, clans, or communities who share social, economic, political, and cultural ties. Such a group usually has a common ancestor, language and leader. A nation, therefore, is a group of people who have formed themselves into a race or a tribe on the basis of common descent, history, language or culture. These people are not necessarily bound by the clearly defined territorial limits of a state. Thus, they live and belong together, forming a single state.

1.3.5 Imperialism

Etymologically, the word imperialism comes from empire which in turn originates from the Latin word *imperium*, which means command. Imperialism, therefore, means a total command or illegal control of other states. The countries which are under occupation remain perennial subjects under the rule of the emperor (usually a despotic ruler of the empire). Imperialism may also refer to a policy of national territorial expansion in the form of supreme and extensive political domination.

Africa was among the victims of imperialism, hence her quest for the restoration of her identity, her original self.

1.3.6 Renaissance

The Latin prefix *re-* means again and the root *nasci-* means to be born. The French word *renaître* means rebirth. Renaissance, therefore, means the rebirth of human talent in its totality. It deals with a people's endeavour to regain their lost exuberance and vigour, and their tireless search for commonality. They attempt to rekindle all the abilities and capabilities bestowed on him by God. *Bloomsbury Guides to English Literature* (1992:2) notes:

Apart from the re-birth of knowledge, the Renaissance encompasses the valorizing of the individual, the centralization of power systems and the primacy of gold, as well as discoveries in the realms of science and the New World.

In the African context, renaissance means the development of renewed interest in the continent and its people after independence from imperial rule. It is the process of African self-re-definition and re-affirmation. African renaissance is transformative in nature in that it seeks to answer the following questions:

i) Who are Africans, where do they come from? What is their history and where are they going? ii) What constitutes the African renaissance, its objectives and implications nationally and internationally? iii) What is the history and destiny of national minorities in African renaissance? and iv) Why an African renaissance now? (Makgoba, 1999:ii).

African renaissance does not only address the rebirth and reconstruction of African "people and their destroyed heritages" but it also explores the "space in which all human beings find themselves in celebration of fulfilled lives" (Mugo, 1999:210) after independence. It encourages Africans to reflect on and be introspective about who they are, where they are going, and how they go there, in all spheres of human endeavour. Hoppers (2002:2) postulates further:

The African Renaissance aims at building a deeper understanding of Africa, its languages and its methods of development. It is a project that includes the rewriting of major tenets of history, both past and contemporary.

Thematic issues which postcolonial Africa is currently grappling with are, among other things, the reconstruction and development of the people's minds about who they really are. This process of trying to restore the African's human dignity has the following challenges which have to be dealt with: apathy, moral decay, corruption, debasement of standards, and nepotism. A large portion of the African population is steeped in these challenging and somewhat demeaning activities. Notwithstanding these problems, Africa does not have to despair and leave everything to chance. She has to strive to manage, circumvent and ultimately solve these social ills by advocating for renaissance, mainly through the rebirth and revival of her cultural values in the form of moral regeneration. In order for Africa to carve a niche in the world, she should first reclaim her identity by going back to her roots and embracing Africanity. This idea is aptly captured by David Diop (1998:73) in his poem "Africa":

Africa my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields

1.3.7 Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

IKSs embrace all cultural phenomena which define and advance a nation. This "cumulative body of knowledge" is usually generated over a period of time (Kaniki & Mphahlele 2002:03). They give a nation a distinct identity. Hoppers (2002:8-9) defines it as follows:

IKS represent both a national heritage and a national resource that should be protected, promoted, developed and, where appropriate, conserved. But it is also a resource that should be put at the service of the present and succeeding generations.

By way of a definition, the word *indigenous* refers to the root, something natural or innate [to]. It is an integral part of culture. *Indigenous knowledge systems* refer to the combination of knowledge systems encompassing technology, social, economic and philosophical learning, or educational, legal and governance systems. It is knowledge relating to the technological, social, institutional, scientific and developmental, including those used in the liberation struggles.

Indigenous knowledge, therefore, is an important aspect of people's identity as it is linked to their socio-cultural roots.

1.4 AFRICAN LITERARY IDENTITY: A SURVEY

Having proposed the working definitions of a number of terms which are of critical importance to this study, including the definition of identity, one can safely posit that African literary identity encapsulates all the aspects which help particularise and characterise African literature. This is because uniqueness and distinctiveness are dovetailed in identity. In other words, African literature cannot be what it is and be named as such without possessing individual salient features which make it deserve the name. These distinctive features, which are its hallmarks, serve as the specific aspects which make it stand out from other literatures. These literary features are, among others, orality and commitment (Cloete, 1996:36).

Literature is a carrier of culture in that those who are engaged in the process of recreating people's lives through writing shape their narrative using lived experiences which are unique and specific. Chabal, Augel, Brookshaw, Leite and Shaw (1996:4) indicate:

Literature is a central component of the cultural identity of all modern nation-states, even when it is evidently much more than that. From this perspective, therefore, modern literature is best understood historically as one of the most important forms of cultural output in and through which a nation-state comes to be identified. We speak thus of Russian, French or Norwegian literature in a way which we all understand to be a reference both to a specific literature from a particular national cultural tradition. This seems straightforward enough but it is straightforward only because we already 'know' what Russia, France or Norway *and Africa* [researcher's italics] are and because we accept that these countries do have a "national" cultural tradition.

By stating that "literature is a central component of cultural identity", Chabal *et al.* mean that literature gives expression to culture and that culture defines people's identity. It gives them perspective on life, a philosophy of life which Mazrui (2004:18) calls "lenses of perception and cognition". The way in which people perceive the world around them is greatly influenced by their cultural consciousness. This influence includes the impact cultural convictions have on the people's emotional and mental faculties, and the manner in which they appreciate things. On the emotional level, it means that people appreciate things through cultural lenses in the same way as they reason them out from the same cultural background. Culture, therefore, determines and defines who a collective of people are, in other words, what their identity is. It should, however, be noted that though African literature is essentially distinct from other world literatures, it still shares certain general literary principles with them, thereby making it interwoven with them.

A large number of African writers, such as Mphahlele, Ngugi, and Achebe regard African literary identity as exploring the nature of what African literature is, its function in society, the approach which should be adopted when assessing it, and the role of language in African literature. It examines the content of African literature in terms of its context. In other words, its content must naturally flow from its context and not the other way round. This means that its context should inform its content. Enshrined in the context of African literature should be the Africans' belief and value systems, their behavioural patterns, and history. African literary identity also examines whether or not African literature exudes the African idiom. It also explores the ways in which the content can be efficaciously appraised and appreciated.

It acknowledges that the value system found in African literature differs from, for example, that one found in European literature in the same way as the needs and aspirations of Africans differ from those of the Europeans. This is because, in the words of Makgoba, Shope, and Mazwai (1999:x):

As African people we socialize, speak, dance, make music, make art, write poetry, and value and appreciate in manners that are distinct from those of Orientals, Europeans and Americans, by virtue of our history, experiences, exposure and socialisation. Cultures are not fixed or stagnant entities. Our African culture has been affected and has benefited from interaction with others; but remains African.

Makgoba *et al.* (1999) admit that Africans have a culture and a history which define their identity and that this identity should serve as a basis for attempting to promote and preserve positive values from Africa's past. Thus, Africans should interact with the globe from the African platform. In other words, African culture should be interactive, transformative, and dynamic because it is an integral part of world cultures which influence one another without changing the essence of one another's fibre. In as much as the British literature is a sovereign entity which makes a unique contribution to the international community about problems which face humanity today, so should African literature. In order for it to carve a niche for itself, co-exist with other world literatures, and contribute meaningfully to global literary development, people have to understand what its qualities are, where it emanates from, and where it is going, which means its identity. In its attempt to preserve and celebrate the African heritage, African literature should, however, not compromise the generally acceptable global standards of lit-

erary excellence and, thereby run the risk of being pushed to the periphery and be ostracised because of its shoddiness. It should struggle to uphold and conserve values and needs which are special and integral to the African environments and societies. This will enable Africans, who are its primary consumers, to gain insight into their heritage and culture, and, thereby attain knowledge of who they are. This knowledge will resultantly rehabilitate them from the deracination of self-pride and self-confidence inflicted on them by the colonial powers. Awareness of one's identity will make one shrug off feelings of inadequacy. Thus, if Africans are able to give identity to their literature and treasure it, they will be enhancing the chances of African prosperity because it will start to influence the world. Having said that, one can, therefore, contend that in order for African literature to be a credit to itself and its consumers, it should not ape other literatures, but should take its rightful place in the world for what it is. Mokgoatšana (1999:1) postulates that African identity is three-pronged: the first kind of African identity is textual in the sense that African literature wants to extricate itself from being an appendage of European literature through putting the African experience at the centre. Furthermore, it seeks to pronounce itself as sovereign but integral to the whole corpus of world literature. This is because, to many Europeans, African literature of English expression belongs to the Great Tradition of English literature. As these European critics see it, Africa does not have a language, culture, history, and civilisation of its own. The second one is self or individual identity, which is epitomised by alienation and whose aim is to re-create and re-discover the self while the last one is a broader national identity which articulates the collective. It is these three

types of identity which Es'kia strives to achieve in his works, and which this study sets out to investigate.

1.5 FORMATIVE INFLUENCES ON MPHAHLELE'S PERSPECTIVE ON AFRICA IDENTITY

Es'kia Mphahlele has emerged as one of the most distinguished and refined writers, critics, and academics South Africa and Africa have ever produced. He is among the pioneers of South African and African literature as a distinct craft with a unique identity while also being an organic part of world literature. Mzamane (1989:53) remarks that "Mphahlele's pioneering place in African literature of English expression is assured" to indicate that he is one of the main founders of African literature written in English. Ogude, Raditlhalo, Ramakuela, Ramogale, and Thuynsma (2002:453) in *Es'kia* (2002) confirm that Mphahlele was formerly known as Ezekiel Mphahlele but because of his quest and struggle for self-identity as an African, he changed his Hebrew name to Es'kia or Zeke, as his friends would affectionately call him:

Prior to 1979 he published as Ezekiel Mphahlele. Upon his return, after twenty years in exile, came a name change to Es'kia Mphahlele. Although only privately dramatic, this name change underscores an unusually heavy dependence on personal experience, a strong folk-sensitivity and frequent wrestling with the condition of exile.

Mphahlele changed his name in order to satisfy his sense of "folk-sensitivity", which means his quest for his African roots, a custom which developed when African writers started to assert their African identity. He did this name-change in harmony with his fellow African literary craftsmen such as the Ghanaian George-Awoonor Williams, to Kofi Awoonor, the

celebrated Kenyan writer James Ngugi, to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and the Nigerian Albert Chinualumogu to Chinua Achebe. Cook and Okenimkpe (1997:195), for example, testify to Ngugi's declaration of his African personality:

It was to vindicate his deepening commitment to indigenous African culture that, in 1970, Ngugi abandoned his Christian name, James. As Ime Ikiddeh relates in the Foreword to *Homecoming*, Ngugi had been rebuked by a church elder in his audience at his address to the Fifth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in March 1970, for the impiety and blasphemy of impudently denouncing the Christian church while he bore a Christian name as a testimony to his faith. Thereafter, Ngugi has permanently given up the name, perceiving its incompatibility with his increasingly radical turning away from an alien scale of values.

The title, *Homecoming*, shows Ngugi's quest for identity, for his roots. It also suggests that Africans, wherever they might be, feel comfortable when they are at home.

In his reaffirmation of his African identity and image, Achebe (1988:33-34) declares:

I was baptized Albert Chinualumogu. I dropped the tribute to Victorian England when I went to the university although you might find some early acquaintances still calling me by it. The earliest of them - my mother - certainly stuck to it to the bitter end. So if anyone asks you what her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria had in common with Chinua Achebe, the answer is: They both lost Albert! As for the second name, which in the manner of my people is a full-length philosophical statement, I simply cut it in two, making it more businesslike without, I hope, losing the general drift of its meaning.

This name-changing experience, which serves as a manifestation of their attempt to go back to their authentic African roots, was not a phenomenon exclusive to writers and musicians but to politicians as well, as politicians such as Zairean Mobutu changed his name from Joseph Desire Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga. Ordinary Africans, one might contend, were greatly influenced by their leaders (writers, musicians, and politicians), who also served as their role models, into changing their European names into African ones as part of the African renaissance. Today names such as Thabo, Kgalema, Mbazima, Kwame, Siphon, Emeka, and Kofi dominate the African scene, the aim being to decolonise the African mind, as Ngugi (1986:1-3) would say, to rediscover their eroded identity and take pride in it. This will help reassure them into playing a central role in deciding Africa's destiny. Makgoba in Makgoba et al, (1999:xii) asserts:

The African renaissance is a unique opportunity for Africans to define ourselves and our agenda according to our own realities and taking into account the realities of the world around us. It is about Africans being agents of our own history and masters of our own destiny.

The quest for African identity is further reflected in a large number of countries changing their names after attaining independence: Southern Rhodesia was changed to Zimbabwe, Northern Rhodesia to Zambia, Gold Coast to Ghana, Bechuanaland Protectorate to Botswana, Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, and Nyasaland to Malawi. The names of some cities were also renamed to line up with Africa's identity. Pietersburg was changed to Polokwane, Lourenço Marques became Maputo, Warm-

baths was renamed Belabela, while Salisbury became Harare and others.

1.6 MPHAHLELE'S EARLY YEARS

Mphahlele was born in 1919 in Marabastad, South of Pretoria, South Africa. Like Sophiatown in Johannesburg, District Six in Cape Town, and Fordsburg in Johannesburg, Marabastad was, during the repressive apartheid years, a squalid enclave for people of colour. Es'kia grew up in a dysfunctional family where his father was harsh and uncaring. He would terrorise the whole family and mercilessly brutalise his mother, often with the children helplessly watching. There were three children in the family - two boys, himself, and his bother Solomon who died in 1965, and one girl, Thabitha, who was affectionately known as Girlie. At the tender age of five, Mphahlele and his siblings were taken to live with his equally tyrannical paternal grandmother at Ga-Mphahlele, in a tiny rural village called Maupaneng on the outskirts of the city of Polokwane, in the now Limpopo Province. Maupaneng is now extinct and the people who used to live there are scattered around other villages in Ga-Mphahlele, the nearest to the former Maupaneng being Matlading, Ga-Maleka, and Seleteng. Some of the other villagers, including Mphahlele, trekked to Lebowakgomo, a peri-urban township established near Ga-Mphahlele, approximately a hundred kilometres away from Polokwane. His life as a goatherd and shepherd, under his oppressive grandmother, was traumatic and miserable. It was only at the age of fourteen, which was after nine years of laborious life, that Mphahlele returned to Marabastad where he was reunited with his stoical mother Eva. His problems, however, did not become any less because in Marabastad he experienced at first hand the atrocities and the indignities of apartheid

and saw how his people were struggling to forge ahead, notwithstanding. Police brutality was an everyday occurrence. Disenfranchisement, unfair labour practices, and other infamous segregatory laws suffocated and saturated his consciousness.

Taking into consideration Mphahlele's biographical account, it is understandable why he embarked on a rigorous quest for African identity in his works. This search takes place on two levels: first, on the level of self-identity within his family, the Mphahlele family, and second, his identity as a South African and an African (continental identity). He earnestly searches for self-identity because, to begin with, his disjointed family background did not offer him any role model, somebody to look up to and rely on for advice and admiration in times of need as his father, with whom he had to bond as a boy, was, in most instances, drunk. This plunged the young Mphahlele into an identity crisis as his paternal family had similar behavioural patterns. In his father, Mphahlele virtually had no father figure to look up to. In other words, he had a father he actually did not have. Another kind of identity which Mphahlele fervently searches for in his works is African national identity which was eroded by the colonial experience. He contends that African national solidarity can be restored through cultural and moral regeneration which can be achieved through the pursuit of African humanism. Mphahlele stresses that African identity was eroded by political imbalance which found a clarion expression in the uneven distribution of resources, with land and education being the most obvious cases in point. Africans were pushed to the ghettos with little or no space to manoeuvre (landless), where they lived under sleazy conditions while their white counterparts owned big arable farms and lived in palatial

houses in leafy suburbs. Whites received privileged education while Africans were restricted to inferior education. These are some of the stereotypes which Mphahlele challenges and which, he posits, can be successfully overcome through the advocacy of African cultural renewal and regeneration, the reclamation of Africanity through African humanism.

Mphahlele attended school in Marabastad and went on to obtain a teachers' certificate at Adams College in Natal in 1940. One avid reader that he was, Mphahlele obtained his matriculation certificate two years later while working as a teacher and shorthand typist at the Ezenzeleni Institute for the Blind in Roodepoort, West of Johannesburg city centre. From Ezenzeleni, he went to Orlando High School where he taught English and Afrikaans. He went back to Ezenzeleni in 1952, after having been banned from teaching for engaging in a campaign against Bantu education policies, to take up a post as a secretary. In 1954 he left Ezenzeleni for Lesotho, then Bechuanaland Protectorate, to become a teacher. That was his first self-imposed exilic stint. From Bechuanaland Protectorate, he returned to South Africa to take up a post as journalist at *Drum* magazine in Johannesburg. There, he distinguished himself as a writer of note in his reporting, as a sub-editor, and as a fiction editor. Journalism, however, did not offer him adequate fulfilment until he went into his second self-imposed exile in 1957, which lasted for twenty years. He came back home in 1977. His life in exile stretched from Nigeria, Kenya, France, Zambia, including a double sojourn in the United States of America. Thus, Mphahlele's hop from one job to the next and from one place to the other justifies his search for "it" in Okara's (1964:23) words, a search for fulfilment, for the truth about himself and his

identity as an African. His quest for identity, therefore, becomes a search to define his true self and his roots.

Mphahlele's academic achievements are illustrious, quite commensurate with the industrious man he was. He was awarded a B.A. degree in 1949, followed by a B.A. Honours degree in 1955. He fulfilled the requirements for a degree of Master of Arts (*cum laude*) in 1957. Mphahlele was the first black South African to be awarded an M.A. degree with distinction by the University of South Africa. It is noteworthy that Mphahlele obtained these three degrees by correspondence, a feat which requires resilience and perseverance. He went on to obtain a PhD degree from the University of Denver, followed by a string of honorary doctorates from universities here at home and abroad. He got a Doctor of Humane Letters from the Universities of Pennsylvania (1982) and Colorado (1994) respectively. The Universities of Natal (1983) and Rhodes (1986) too awarded him honorary degrees of Doctor of Literature. In recognition of his cultural activism and contribution to the development of the French language, the French government awarded him the *Ordre des Palmes*. The former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, awarded him the *Order of the Southern Cross* in 2000. All these awards are an acknowledgement of his intellectual contribution, found in his two seminal works, *The African Image* (1974) and *Voices in the Whirlwind* (1972) which are called his "intellectual autobiographies" (Ramogale 2008:1), to resistance to oppression in South Africa, Africa, and the world at large. They are a recognition of his African literary scholarship and achievement, his contribution to developing African literature into the autonomous colossus that it is today by rewriting her history with a full understanding of the role he should play as a writer in his society. He started to correctly and con-

sciously redefine and record his cultural identity in line with the masses of African people by putting right the distortions and stereotypes which imperial education has inculcated in the minds of his people. His works are, therefore, an embodiment of the colonial and post-colonial experiences in South Africa and Africa as a whole. They cry out for the rehabilitation and recovery of Africa's identity and total emancipation from the colonial and neo-colonial stranglehold.

1.7 AIMS OF THE STUDY

Identity, as an area of research, is a vast field to traverse. This is because of the fact that identities are constructs which are bound by time and space. In other words, a person can have multiple identities in one given space and time. It is for this reason that one wonders whether there is still a pure cultural identity, bearing in mind the fact that there is no culture which can remain untainted after coming into contact with another culture. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how Mphahlele uses the theme of cultural and literary identity as a rallying point to galvanise Africans about who they are. It is a textual study which is aimed at uncovering how Mphahlele uses the (epitome of the) self through his autobiography and semi-autobiography to make Africans live in the consciousness of their identity. It looks into how Africans manage to survive today and convincingly project their future in the midst of the erosion of their history by imperialism. It furthermore probes how Mphahlele manages to navigate through these complexities in order to help bring back hope to the hopeless Africans. The following aspects of identity are investigated:

- 1.7.1 Critical revision and review of past and present views on African literary identity and criticism.
- 1.7.2 Contribution towards conscientising Africans about their identity.
- 1.7.3 Critical analysis of Mphahlele's literary works in an effort to gain insight into how he handles African identity as a theme. This assisted immensely in the development and expansion of African literature as an autonomous corpus of literary knowledge.
- 1.7.4 Generation and stimulation of further debate on and research in African literature.

1.8 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Robust debates have been going on among African literary critics, scholars, and writers such as Ngugi, Ngara, lo Li-yong about evolving literature which would be peculiarly African and which would advocate African renaissance in it. Though these African cultural activists recognise that this literature might be a bud from various literary traditions from different countries, they maintain that it should encapsulate uniquely African elements in it. This is because of the fact that these literary critics, scholars, and writers have always believed that African literature will give Africans a sense of continental identity and belonging in that it will help them re-discover and proclaim "loyalty to indigenous values" and "on the one hand, be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated; while on the other be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots" (Ngugi, 1986:95). These African literary critics and writers acknowledge that African literature forms a central part of the struggle towards cultural, socio-economic, and political emancipation of

the continent since cultural subjugation has, for a long time, been stifling Africa's economic development and human resource growth. This unwarranted domination by external political forces has led to the erosion of African identity. Ngugi (1993:42) notes:

the subjugation of the entire labour power of other countries by the concentrated capital, or money power, or another country came to realize that the economic exploitation and the political domination of a people could never be complete without cultural and hence mental and spiritual subjugation. The economic and the political conquest of Africa were accompanied by cultural subjugation and the imposition of an imperialist cultural tradition whose dire effects are still being felt today.

The effects of cultural subjugation which Ngugi talks about are experienced more in the area of identity. It is identity which defines a people as their cultural, political and economic power depends on the way in which they see themselves as on organic unit which has defined roots. For Africans, these roots were, regrettably, not allowed to grow and develop due to colonialism, something which led to their experiencing a severe identity crisis.

This quest for a peculiarly African identity, however, is not satisfactorily reflected in the African political sphere. For instance, many African states enjoy political freedom, meaning that political leadership is now in the hands of Africans, although a great number of the inhabitants are, ironically, still languishing under harsh economic conditions. This paradoxical situation emanates from, *inter alia*, the ineptitude and avarice for power revealed by most African leaders at the helm of governments, hence the need for African renaissance, and from the former colonisers' refusal to let

go of their former colonies. Kariuki (2003:19) aptly indicates that Africa's would-be democracy has been blighted and tarnished by the civilian and military dictatorships which are characterised by human rights violations in the form of torture and genocide. Former colonisers still rule their former colonies indirectly through economic strangleholds, which in turn affect these former colonies' cultural and social integrity. This study, therefore, endeavours to explore Africa's search for her authentic identity through examining the works of Mphahlele, which means her quest to not only define her roots, but also to develop and promote the totality of her socio-cultural existence.

Europeans colonised Africa and in the process destroyed her cultural identity. They used civilisation as a guise but their primary aim was to expand their empire and to plunder her resources through a systematic historical and cultural distortion programme. Ngugi (1993:130-131) exposes that one of the weapons they used to disfigure the African image was literature:

The literature that carried the images of Africa and the African ranged from that, depicting the self-effacing African as the real human being, or the fun-loving, always smiling type as the more sympathetic being, to that which showed the African resistance fighter as the very reincarnation of cruelty, cowardice, ignorance, stupidity, envy, and even cannibalism. The collaborationist African was glorified. The one who opposed colonialism was vilified. Of course it was not always so directly stated. It was simply the way the author guided the emotions of the readers to make them identify with the African who saw no contradictions between himself and colonialism and to distance themselves from the African who argued back, the one who demanded his rightful dues, or the one who, in the banana plantations, plotted against the master.

The European invasion of Africa had the following negative influences on African identity:

At first, Africans were condescendingly considered as noble savages - a concept which implied that Africans, by virtue of their alleged savage nature, were lazy, primitive, licentious, had no history, culture and language (they only spoke gibberish), were unreliable and therefore, had no identity. Africa was then labelled as the Dark Continent infested with disease and ignorance. The Europeans patronisingly proclaimed that Africans were noble because they were hospitable, humble, and generous, but most regrettably, docile in that they unsuspectingly allowed them to usurp their land.

As time went on, Africans rebelled against European domination and tried to restore their identity, history, and culture by protesting against this infamous system. As a result, the colonial powers started regarding Africans as cannibalistic brutal savages who deserved to be relegated to the bottom rung in the society. Carrol (1990:4) contends:

The long debate over the human status of Africans provides an epitome of these contradictions. Although a papal bull stated officially in 1537 that non-Europeans (in this case South American Indians) were human beings with full spiritual rights, the Protestant countries of Europe were to prevaricate for several hundred years over the status of the African. At the two extremes of the whole spectrum of views were the noble savage and the depraved cannibal. The African noble savage was, for the eighteenth century, man in a 'state of nature', in perfect harmony with his environment. This essentially literary view, the product of the primitivistic myths of the time, was opposed by the doctrines of perfectibility and progress which, like that of the Great Chain of Being, placed the Negro lower down the human ladder than the white races.

This relegation of the African found support both from the Linnaean classification of humanity into white, yellow, red and black races in the eighteenth century, and from Darwin in the nineteenth. If the fittest survived and developed, it was argued, then the Africans were backward because they were inferior.

The French and the British governments followed two diverse colonial policies in Africa. The French government used the policy of assimilation with which they would take brilliant young African students to France for education in the hope that once these young Africans got educated, they would forget about their people, their culture and identity, and be absorbed into the French culture, but that was not to be. Moore-Gilbert, Stanton and Marley (1997:7) remark:

In the African context the word used to describe French colonial policy is 'assimilation'. The mission of French colonialism was to 'civilise' the Africans which in this case meant to acculturate and to 'Frenchify', to make them into Frenchmen by means of education. In order to become French, however, the African self had to be abandoned. To this end and under the sponsorship of the French authorities 'a large number of African students were sent to France in order to accelerate their adjustment to the norms and values of modern society'.

Conversely, the British government pursued the policy of "indirect rule" in Africa through which they would appoint an African to rule on their behalf and, thereby continue to perpetuate their rule (Moore-Gilbert *et al.* 1997:11). In Nigeria, for example, the British government mainly used native chiefs to continue their rule while in Kenya, the British settlers owned the vast expanse of land from which they administered the natives. A few co-operative Africans were allocated pieces of fertile land which they in turn rented out to their fellow Africans, thereby rendering many Africans

tenants in the land of their birth. Mutiso (1974:17) compares the extent to which the French and the British governments went in eroding African culture when he reveals the identity-search-reactions from the African intellectuals who had received their education from France and Britain:

But this is only part of the story. From another point of view the phenomenon may not be as ironical as it seems. Perhaps because of the French policy of assimilation, the literati of that country's former holdings in Africa have been able to evolve a clear identity in their dissent from these alien and omnipresent philosophical and socio-political systems. The literati in the former English colonies, on the other hand - precisely because of the indirect and incomplete nature of the acculturation process they were subjected to - have suffered a continual crisis in their quest for identity both during and after the colonial period.

In their struggle to deconstruct these European preconceptions and rebuild Africa, Mphahlele and other prominent African writers realised the need to evolve literature which would epitomise Africa. They were spurred on by the belief that they could invent African literature free from European influence because Africa, like her literature, has her own traditions, models, and norms which distinguish her from literature from other countries. Thus, African literature can be a sovereign field of study with an identity of its own. Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980:4) note:

But African literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the Europeans or other literatures. And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constrains quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European. These facts hold true even for those portions of African

literature which continue to be written in European languages.

This problematic situation gives rise to the following research questions:

- What is Mphahlele's contribution towards creating an African literary identity?
- How does Mphahlele handle identity in his literary works?
- What role does language play towards forging African literary identity?

1.9 RESEARCH APPROACHES AND METHODOLOGY

Literary theorists who enter the arena under these colours point out that the initial act of reading (apart from, and supposedly prior to, acts of interpretation and evaluation), like all observation, is theory-dependent. The study of literature requires much more than a commonsensical and self-evident toolkit with which to approach texts. Literary study, like any other fields of enquiry, needs a theoretical foundation, that is, an articulation of its basic paradigms, methods, assumptions, and the like (Ryan & van Zyl, 1982:12).

Literary theory is and has over the years been the lifeblood of literary appreciation and analysis. It has given and continues to give literary criticism logic and reason for existence by questioning what the nature of literature is and how it can be efficaciously evaluated. It examines the essence of literature, that is, its literariness and its social significance. Literary theory clarifies the relationship between the text and reality. It assists readers in the discernment of textual meaning, which means that every field of study is "theory-dependent". When Ryan and van Zyl state that "liter-

ary study, like any other field of enquiry, needs a theoretical foundation", they mean that for any literary practice and evaluation to be deemed sound, it should be based on a particular theory (ies) and method(s).

This study is, therefore, based on three literary approaches: Afrocentricity, Post-colonialism and the Historical-biographical. The researcher hopes that these theoretical underpinnings will give this study academic authority and credence. He has adopted this "mélange [combination] of various approaches" (Serudu, 1993:13) in order to have a holistic investigation into the study. This eclectic, multi-dimensional approach is relevant to this study because the three approaches complement one another well in the researcher's attempt to answer the research questions.

1.9.1 Afrocentricity

Centricity is a word which is derived from centre which originates from the Latin word *centrum*, which means the mid-point of anything, an axis. It is a point around which things move. Asante (1999:1-2,4) defines Afrocentricity "as a critical corrective to a displaced agency among Africans" by "re-centering African minds". In other words, Afrocentricity is aimed at correcting the damage the Europeans inflicted against the Africans through Afrocentric means. Karenga (1988:404) defines Afrocentricity as "essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of the African people". This means that it is a state of being centred on Africa, which is to say that in Afrocentricity, everything revolves around the African continent, her people, their customs, knowledge (including scien-

tific and technological), art forms, morals, habits, ideologies and politics, cultures, and traditions (Asante, 1999:4). Africa is used as a centre of discourse, a context for whatever content there is to pronounce on. In this way, Africa becomes a subject of analysis, a point of focus and concentration, the axis. Asante (1980,1987,1988 and 1990) and Diop (1974) have formulated these terms: Afrocentricism, Afrocolony, and Afrocentricity in order to put Africa at the centre as far as her existence is concerned. Afrocentricity also serves as an affirmation that Africans are capable of doing any other exploit that any person can do (Appiah,1992). One of the salient tenets of Afrocentricity is *ubuntu*, "which is the collective solidarity of the poor on survival issues" (Mbigi & Maree, 2005:vii). The overriding phrase embraced in *ubuntu* is sacrifice for the benefit of others. In other words, one should overstretch oneself in an attempt to help others.

1.9.2 Postcolonial theory

Post-colonialism as a theory covers "all cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day" (Aschcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989:2). These cultures were denigrated and eroded during the imperial era to date. It deals with the previously oppressed people's quest for identity on the basis of history, language, race, and culture.

Postcolonialism is a tool, a method used by post-colonial theorists to falsify and debunk the myths and stereotypes the centre (Europe) has about the Other continents (Africa in this case). It is a discourse through which the colonised resist colonial domination. The colonised assert their sense of

cultural difference and particularity from their imperial masters hence "the Empire writes back to the centre" (Rushdie in Aschroft et al., 1989:ix). Thus, this discourse is a corpus of literature of protest against imperialism. Themes of colonisation, neo-colonisation, decolonisation, and transformation are salient in this literature. It unmask the evils and the injustices of colonialism by exposing it as a corruptive phenomenon.

As a term, postcolonialism comes from the Latin words *post*, which means after, and *colonia*, which means to settle. In other words, postcolonialism concentrates on Africa after the end of the reign of the colonial settlers.

1.9.3 The Historical-Biographical approach

The Historical-Biographical approach argues that factors outside the text have a direct influence on it. In other words, writers mirror their lives and times in the context of their texts. This fact finds expression in their character portrayal. Creswell (in De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delpont, 2002:272-273) uses the term biography in an inclusive manner as the following extract indicates:

Creswell (1998) uses the term *biography* to indicate the broad genre of biographical writings. This strategy is used to report on and document an individual's life and his experiences as told to the researcher or found in documents and archival material. The biographical forms of research vary, as in portraits, memoirs, life histories, case studies and autobiographies, but all forms represent an attempt to construct the history of a life. As a result, the researcher may decide not to begin the study with a theoretical perspective (*hypothesis*) [my italics] that guides the study

Creswell implies that when using biography as a research method, the researcher has to collect extensive information and data about the biographical subject, and has to have an explicit understanding of the historical and contextual information which has influenced the biographical subject. In order for the research to yield the desired results, the researcher should enter into the "life world" or "life setting" of the subject. In this thesis, the present researcher has used the following three elements which serve as the key tenets in any literary activity which lean on the Historical-Biographical approach: the author, the text and the reader (Ngara, 1982:11). In order to do justice to the first element which is the **author**, the present researcher has studied Mphahlele's biographical and historical background which entails the socio-economic and political circumstances which have influenced and continue to influence his writing. For example, he/she has shown that the manner in which Mphahlele grew up has a bearing on his perspective and outlook on life and literary works. All these aspects provide a wealth of information to the reader (researcher) about the author and further help him/her gain a deeper understanding of the author's novels. The **texts** are the novels themselves because it is in the texts that the author strives to make the reader gain an insightful understanding of the content. Through the texts, the author makes a contribution to the literary tradition of the time. Texts consolidate the author's life experiences in print. Mphahlele's novels do the same. The last element is the **reader** who, in this case is the researcher who has examined Mphahlele's autobiographical and fictional novels (*Down Second Avenue*, *Afrika My Music*, *The Wanderers*, and *Chirundu*) as well as critical works on them which have made an indelible impact on his psyche, feelings, and life hence the writing of this thesis. Furthermore, the researcher has

perused them because of the important role the theme of identity plays in them. Thus, this study serves as a culmination of the effect Mphahlele's novels had on the researcher, guided, of course, by topical literary practices, norms, and values. He has interpreted them in order to unlock and suggest opportunities for further research in African literature as a field of inquiry.

1.10 MOTIVATION

A large corpus of literary, critical and scholarly work about Mphahlele, which serves as a manifestation of his iconic stature as a writer of note, has been written but this work does not deal exclusively with the theme of identity in the four works under discussion. The writer who, perhaps, came closest to doing justice to the theme, albeit indirectly, is Manganyi in his well-known biography of Mphahlele entitled *Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele* (1983). However, the fairly superficial manner in which Manganyi deals with the theme of identity has necessitated this study which focuses solely on identity. Thuynsma has edited *Footprints Along the Way* (1989) which is a book that consists of papers written by a number of distinguished scholars such as Mzamane. Many of these papers pay tribute to Mphahlele's "intellectual resistance to apartheid" (1989:5). They trace Mphahlele's writing history, starting from South Africa to his sojourn in the other African states such as Nigeria and Kenya up to the time when he went to Denver in the United States of America. Furthermore, Mzamane contributed an appraisal of the short stories which Mphahlele wrote when he was in his self-imposed exile in Nigeria in *Footprints Along the Way*. In addition to this, Chapman edited a short story anthology *The "Drum" Decade: Stories from the 1950s* (1989),

in which Mphahlele's ground-breaking South African short stories are well examined. Mphahlele's other works, namely, his autobiographies (*Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music: An autobiography 1957-1983*), and his fiction (*The Wanderers*, *Chirundu*, and *Father Come Home*) as well as his critical work (*The African Image and Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays*), have also been analysed and quoted in numerous works, such as Obee's *Es'kia: Themes of Alienation and African Humanism* (1999), with particular attention paid to other literary aspects such as the plot structure, setting, characterisation, and theme but with little or no attention dedicated to the concept of identity as an area of research. This untapped thematic treasure serves as the basis of this research.

1.11 THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This thesis is restricted to an investigation of identity in African literature with particular reference to Mphahlele's autobiographical and fictional works. As indicated in this chapter (Chapter 1), it also examines other critical literary texts in order to conscientise Africans about their identity. It looks into African literature from the Afrocentric perspective, which means that the evaluation will be from the African point of view. Thus, Africa is used as a starting point, a point of departure. She is used as a context which houses Mphahlele's texts, thereby rendering the approach of this study as the text written in an African context. Afrocentricity, in this study, serves as an antithesis of Eurocentricity in that it attempts to solve Africa's social ills in order to effect a synthesis through moral regeneration. Thus, Afrocentricity plays a dual role: first, as an antithesis to Eurocentricity and second, as, hopefully, a panacea to the challenges and the constrictions posed by Eurocentricity

and multiculturalism to the continent. Chapter Two examines the theoretical grounding of identity in African literature by interrogating views by different literary writers and critics on identity in African literature. The third Chapter analyses the following autobiographical novels by Mphahlele: *Down Second Avenue* and *Afrika My Music*. Chapter four analyses Mphahlele's fictional works. The last chapter offers concluding remarks on identity in African literature in general and identity in Mphahlele's autobiographical and fictional novels in particular. It also outlines, as a way-forward, some recommendations on how African identity and self-knowledge can help solve some of Africa's poignant problems.

1.12 CONCLUSION

Having outlined the background to the study in this chapter, the next chapter will look into the theoretical grounding while chapter three will explore identity in Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* and *The Wanderers*. Chapter four analyses identity in Mphahlele's *Chirundu* and *Afrika My Music*. The last chapter outlines the recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: THEORETICAL GROUNDING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to examine the ways in which African literature has attempted to define itself in an attempt to release itself from the trappings of the network of other literatures, particularly European literature, and how it has striven to reconstruct its identity. It looks into identity in African literature as understood by different African writers and critics, as shown in the Makerere conference in 1962 and other subsequent conferences, "in an attempt to validate Africa's historiography denied by colonialism" (Ogude, 1999:1). It also explores the qualities and aspects which make African literature distinct and distinguished, while discussing the literatures which have helped shape it. It acknowledges that African literature is a separate but organic part of the whole corpus of global literature. Mbiti (1969:228) concedes that African writers write their literatures "which are peculiarly African and yet set in the modern world" in an acknowledgement of the inevitable external influence on African literature. This chapter also examines a number of factors, such as history, culture, and indigenous knowledge systems, which qualify it and which are integral to it. An attempt is made at depicting African literature as a unique craft which has not emerged as an isolated entity, but as an offshoot of the global literary traditions.

2.2 IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

2.2.1 African Worldview and Philosophy

Though Africans from different African states and the diaspora have divergent perspectives on how they perceive the world around them, they generally share many beliefs in common which serve as contexts to their identity:

2.2.1.1 African identity as portrayed in African belief systems

Africans believe, through the myths, fables, folk tales, legends, riddles, proverbs, that the world and all the creatures that live in it have been created by God. Mbiti (1969:39) acknowledges this notion when he says that "over the whole of Africa creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God". The Zulu people of South Africa also strongly believe in God as the Supreme Being, the Creator who is in Heaven, hence they themselves are called Zulus. The word *zulu* can be loosely translated as heaven. Zulus or Amazulu, therefore, means people from heaven where God (*uNkulunkulu*) stays (Thorpe, 1991:35). Many Africans have a firm belief that the entire African land has been bestowed on their ancestors by God. This belief finds an elaborate expression in the Kenyan (used as a microcosm of Africa) myth of creation as depicted in the stories of Gikuyu (man) and Mumbi (woman) which gave the Gikuyus a sense of purpose and identity. *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (1996:905) defines a myth as "an ancient story that deals with gods and heroes, especially one used to explain some natural phenomena". Thus, myths in the African setting, deal with phenomena which are both natural and supernatural. Legend has it, in the story of Gikuyu and Mumbi,

that God (*Murungu*) sent them to Gikuyuland to found the Gikuyu nation, thereby bequeathing land and everything on it to them. Guma (1967:2) defines legend as a historical story which contains a historical fact "whose existence is shrouded in mystery". This story can either be mythical or semi-mythical. A legend can also be a narration of a story which has occurred a long time ago. This Gikuyu legendary story legitimises their struggle for land recovery because, to them, land serves as a source of identity, unity, and inspiration. Ngugi (TRB:1-2) argues:

It began long ago. A man rose in Makuyu. He claimed that Gikuyu and Mumbi sojourned there with Murungu on their way to Mukuruwe wa Gathanga. As a result of that stay, he said, leadership has been left to Makuyu. Not all the people believed him. For had it not always been whispered and rumoured that Gikuyu and Mumbi had stopped at Kamenno? And had not a small hill grown out of the soil on which they stood south of Kamenno? And Murungu had told them:

'This land I give to you, O man and woman. It is yours to rule and till, you and your posterity.'

The land was fertile. It was the whole of Gikuyu country from one horizon embracing the heavens to the other hidden in the clouds. So the story ran in Kamenno. Spiritual superiority and leadership have been left there.

Some Africans, mainly those still living in the rural areas, still believe in the myth of traditional medical practice and magic because magicians are treated with awe, honour, and respect, as they are able to foretell the future happenings of the tribe as it is widely believed "that they receive revelations from God" (Mbiti, 1969:68). If the future supernatural prediction of the tribe's occurrences is bleak, they are able prescribe protective medicines to curb the possible threat to the tribe. This makes Africans look up to these magicians for

inspiration and protection. Many people also aspire to be future magicians because of their (magicians') ability to control the uncontrollable. Though this practice is despised by many educated Africans today, many African governments recognise it through the establishment of the ministries of traditional affairs. The educated elite publicly condemn it but secretly revert to it during times of need. Ngugi (TRB:2) indicates:

Or there was that great witch, Kamiri, whose witchery bewildered even the white men at Muranga. His witchery and magic, before he was overcome by the white men with smiles and gifts, had won him resounding fame. He too, it was said, had been born in Kamenno. Like Mugo before him, he had disappeared from the hills to the country beyond. He could not be contained by the narrow life of the ridges. Another was Wachiori, a great warrior, who had led the whole tribe against Ukabi, Masai. As a young man he had killed a lion by himself. When he died, at the hands of a straying white man, he left a great name, the idol of many a young warrior.

Kenyatta (1979:xvii) endorses the African people's belief in the magicians and ancestral worship when he says that he has witnessed them performing the traditional rites because his grandfather was a magician and a seer. In other words, he grew up as part of this tradition.

2.2.1.2 Land ownership and economic life as part of African identity

Land is one of the most important commodities for Africans in that it defines their identity. In the past, it was shared collectively among the people who lived on it. This is the reason why when the Europeans alienated Africans from their land, it felt similar to impoverishing them spiritually and

physically, because, to them, land dispossession is equivalent to the complete erosion of their identity. This means that land is integral to their identity, African identity, hence its multi-functional nature to them. It was used for economic and material needs such as in peasant subsistence agriculture and in the rearing of livestock. It was also used to build shelter on. Biko (1978:43) testifies about the value of collective land ownership in the African communities when he says:

The land belonged to the people and was merely under the control of the local chief on behalf of the people. When cattle went to graze it was on an open veld and not on anybody's specific farm.

Farming and agriculture, though on individual family basis, had many characteristics of joint efforts. Each person could by a simple request and holding of a special ceremony, invite neighbours to come and work on his plots. This service was returned in kind and no remuneration was ever given.

Kenyatta (1979:55) observes that land is "the foundation rock on which the economy stands" when he attests to its significance in the community.

Cook and Okenimkpe (1997:52) contend that land ownership is important in Africa because it helps link the living with the dead and thereby bring cohesion and unity within the family and the tribe. Thus, it serves as the tribe's heritage:

Land has thus from time immemorial been the key factor in the unity, cohesion and strength of the family, linking the living and the dead in an unbroken chain.

In South Africa today, collective land ownership is done through land re-distribution coupled with volunteerism. It has been modified into what is called Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), spearheaded by the Department of Public Works. This programme is aimed at poverty alleviation through labour intensive job creation practices. The reason for this is that "Africans believe that all people should be enabled to live a normal life" (Thorpe, 1991:115). Thus, people use labour-absorbing techniques to work instead of modern technology, thereby getting empowerment through monetary incentives and skills development. This is another form of African socialism which the former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere called *ujamaa*. This self-help, help-one-another programme is called *ujima* or *letšema* in South Africa. Makgoba (1999:157) concedes:

The concept of *ujima*, recognizing the commonality of a people's aspirations and objectives, and the strength and quality of our national (collective) desire to rectify the wrongs of the past in the process of our development, overrides boundaries and limits of sectoral ideologies, political affiliations, creed, gender, race and ethnicity. It demands the sinking of our differences (as individuals or group) in the pursuit of collective fulfilment and realization of our human inclination, namely to work together for a common cause of which we all are its beneficiaries.

The South African former Minister of Public Works, Thoko Didiza (2008:2-3) has this to say about this notion of a community-driven labour-intensive endeavour when launching her department's magazine:

This publication highlights accounts from many of the stakeholders committed to creating employment opportunities for marginalized communities, through

the implementation of projects using labour-based methodologies and programmes, in this regard, EPWP. In this context, our progress in implementing the EPWP has us well on target to reach that one million goal, as indicated at the end of the third year of implementation (March 2007). Those figures revealed that the sectors are performing exceedingly well, with the Infrastructure Sector in the lead, having created 397 655 work opportunities (target: 370 953), the Environment Sector 255 153 (target: 98 921), the Social Sector slightly behind with 53 840 work opportunities created (target: 74 191), and the Economic Sector sitting at 9 751 (target: 5 935). Programmes such as the *Vuk'uphile (Wake up and live) Leadership Programme* have the added dimension of building emerging contractor capacity to execute the increasing amount of labour-intensive work under the EPWP, and in so doing, create sustainable contractors who can compete in the open market once they exit the programme.

There are other poverty alleviation programmes which are in line with EPWP which are facilitated by other government departments such as the Department of Health and Welfare which relieves poverty to the people by giving them old-age social grants and child-support grants. The Department of Local Government and Housing pushes back the frontiers of poverty within communities by building the Reconstruction and Development (RDP) units while the Department of Education has introduced the notion of no-fee schools for the schools which are situated in the poverty-stricken localities. Learners in the primary schools which are situated in the quintile one and two schools are fed through the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The government has also proposed that with effect from next year (2011), they are going to introduce free education for students doing first degrees at the universities within the country, as a form of reducing financial burden from the people. Communities are also encouraged to come together as a collective and form co-operatives which

are financially kick-started by the government. Some of these co-operatives establish vegetable gardens in some communities while others register companies which apply for tenders from the government. Normally, tender-committees give these co-operatives priority of selection because they come from disadvantaged background.

2.2.1.3 African identity and the system of education

Basic education within the African communities takes place informally primarily through initiation ceremonies (schools). Initiates are initiated according to their different age groups. It is at these initiation schools where good character and manners are orally transmitted to the children. Initiates (learners) are initiated amid heavy song and dance (Rabothata, 1991), which means that this traditional curriculum serves as a representation of the "grand narrative" (Van Wyk, 2002:309). For example, when Waiyaki and Muthoni go for circumcision in Ngugi's *The River Between*, this process is accompanied by an elaborate dance and song followed by the explanation of the importance of circumcision to the people. Ngugi (TRB:41) notes:

The dance was being held at an open-air place in Kamenno. Whistles, horns, broken tins, and anything else that was handy were taken and beaten to the rhythm of the song and dance. Everybody went into a frenzy of excitement. Old and young, women and children, all were there losing themselves in the magic motion of the dance. Men shrieked and shouted and jumped into the air as they went round in a circle. For them, this was the moment. This was the time. Women stripped to the waist, with their thin breasts flapping on their chests, went round and round the big fire, swinging their hips and contorting their bodies in all sorts of provocative ways, but always keeping the rhythm.

To Waiyaki and Muthoni, and the African community in general, circumcision is not only about physical mutilation but is also about a central element of belonging, of communal living, that is, identity. Furthermore, it is also about the introduction of "the candidates to adult life" (Mbiti, 1969:121), the passage of a person from childhood to adulthood, from boyhood to manhood, and from girlhood to womanhood. Muthoni tells her sister Nyambura that she wants to be circumcised because, she argues: "I-I want to be a woman. I want to be a real girl, a real woman, knowing all the ways of the hills and ridges" (TRB:26). When Muthoni talks of being "a real girl, a real woman", she refers to a girl who can be identified with a certain group. In other words, identity is still a major issue. Waiyaki's father, Chege, says that Waiyaki will be "initiated into manhood" (TRB:38), when referring to his (Waiyaki's) circumcision rite, and will, therefore, be a full component of the community. Ngugi (TRB:68) acknowledges that circumcision is an integral part of the Gikuyu, and therefore, of the African traditional culture and identity which deserves to be upheld:

But it was more than this. Circumcision was an important ritual to the tribe. It kept people together, bound the tribe. It was at the core of the social structure, and a something that gave meaning to a man's life. End the custom and the spiritual bliss of the tribe's cohesion and integration would be no more. The cry was up. Gikuyu Karinga. Keep the tribe pure. Tutukwenda Irigu. It was a soul's cry, a soul's wish.

Kenyatta (1979:138-139) outlines all the stages leading to the physical operation: He says that the first stage is the shaving of the girl's head and a massage in order to ease her tension. The second one is the performance of the ancestral

ceremony which is believed to be informing and reuniting them with their ancestors. All these things happen in the presence of the girl's relatives and friends (for communal support) who are dressed in their best attire as they regard this ceremony as a celebration. Lastly, the operation takes place in the homestead.

Circumcision is the heartbeat of the identity of many African people, hence its abolition will diminish their soul. It is small wonder that the Gikuyu people clung tenaciously to this cultural rite even at the time when the Scottish missionaries expelled female learners who had been circumcised from their schools because they considered it a "heathen" and "pagan" practice. This is despite the fact that this surgical operation had an important tribal significance in that it had educational, social, moral, and religious importance to the villagers as Kenyatta (1979:134-35) indicates:

The Gikuyu name for this custom of *rite de passage* from childhood to adulthood is *irua*, that is, circumcision, or trimming the genital organs of both sexes. The dances and songs connected with the initiation ceremony are called *mambura*, that is, rituals or divine serves. It is important to note that the moral code of the tribe is bound up with this custom and that it symbolises the unification of the whole tribal organization.

Circumcision as a means of passing on values to posterity is still promoted and practised in many African countries today albeit with some health precautions. For example, in South Africa, circumcision schools are run inter-departmentally, with the Department of Traditional affairs taking the lead, followed by the Department of Health, then Education. Thus, the circumcision schools are regulated by the government.

2.2.1.4 African identity and marriage

To many Africans, marriage is aimed at bearing children and not for sexual gratification. Marriage "becomes a duty to produce children, and sexual intercourse between a man and his wife or wives is looked upon as an act of production and not merely as a gratification of a bodily desire" (Kenyatta, 1979:163). Thus, "without procreation marriage is incomplete" (Mbiti, 1969:133) because children are a requirement for marriage. This is the reason why if a couple has been married for some time without having children, they become the outcasts of the community. In the African past and even today, as seen in Zulu and Swazi cultures, polygamy was allowed to be practised while polyandry was outlawed. Marriage between two people was the beginning of a relationship between their families. In other words, a bond between a man and a woman became a marriage between two families. In other words, their marriage "binds not the bride and the bridegroom, but also their kinsfolk" (Kenyatta, 1979:163).

2.2.1.5 Ubuntu as a concept central to African identity

African people express their identity and oneness through ubuntu which is manifested in the communal life they lead. This is because in Africa a person "becomes a person in and through the community. He or she is far more than just a lone individual, but is part of a group, a whole that is more than the mere sum of its constituent parts" (Thorpe, 1991:120). No one had complete ownership of property as property was considered to be the possession of the community. Since they collectively owned everything, property was for the group not the individual. Poverty was a word foreign to them because theirs was a life characterised by sharing, however little

one had. They were a community that exuded hospitality, humility, and warmth which bordered on the principle of *ubuntu* which is an ethical, moral and religious value which emphasises empathy, sharing and co-operation of African people. Respect for older people, other people's assets, and their customs was upheld. Every child was every parent's child, every man every child's father. This was during the halcyon days of Africa. Thus, *ubuntu* is their way of life not an academic concept. It is a key to African moral renewal and regeneration, to the sustenance of social cohesion. Though African people's exposure to the world was narrow, this did not disturb the blissful and harmonious lives they lived in their villages. These, one is tempted to say, are the salient features unique to African people, on the continent and in the diaspora. They make their hearts tick.

The foregoing discussion, therefore, indicates that African worldview and philosophy form the nub of African identity, of who Africans are. In other words, African identity is constructed around this outlook on life. It is the African experience which distinguishes Africans from other people.

2.3 AFRICAN LITERARY CRITICS ON IDENTITY IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

In 1962 I was invited to the historic meeting of African writers at Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. The list of participants contained most of the names which have now become the subject of scholarly distinction in universities all over the world. The title? '*A Conference of African writers of English Expression*'. I was then a student of English at Makerere, an overseas college of the University of London (Ngugi, 1971:5-6).

Since the true nature of African literature and its identity has tormented the minds of African literary critics for some time, the need to discuss it has increased. This need was triggered by the fact that it is autonomous and independent from other world literatures and should, therefore, be indicated as such. It is not "an appendage of English literature" (Soyinka, 1976:viii). The first conference on the subject was held at Makerere University College by African writers writing in English. In attendance were African writers of note such as Soyinka, Achebe, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Cyprian Ekwensi. The primary question on the agenda was: What is African literature? In other words, they wanted to understand what makes African literature African. Is it "literature about Africa or about the African experience? Is it literature written by Africans or a non-African who wrote about Africa?" (Ngugi, 1981:6). What if the African story is set in a foreign land? What about the language which should be used? All these issues were discussed at this conference and another one held at Fourah Bay in an attempt to formulate a serviceable definition which would encapsulate the essence of this branch of literature.

Chinua Achebe (1975:56) views African literature as follows:

What it all suggests to me is that you cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units - in fact the sum total of all national and ethnic literatures of Africa.

Achebe finds the definition of African literature too complex for the ordinary man to understand. He simplifies it as follows: when he talks of national literature, he means litera-

ture that is written in the national (official) language of a country. The idea of officialising national languages is difficult to bring to fruition because in many African states, it is still difficult to choose a national language because there exists a large number of indigenous languages to choose from as in, for example, South Africa, where eleven official languages vie for national status. Frequently, the ethnic groups to which these indigenous languages belong engage in battles and fights for their languages to be afforded the national status. By ethnic literature, Achebe refers to literature written in the indigenous African language which belongs to a particular group within a nation.

Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980:13-14) contend that the following aspects should be considered when developing a uniquely African literature:

- the primary audience for whom the work is produced;
- the cultural and the national consciousness expressed in the work, whether through the author's voice or through the characters and their consciousness, habits, comportment, and diction;
- the nationality of the writer, whether by birth or naturalization - a matter that a passport can decide; and
- the language in which the work is written.

Chinweizu *et al's* ideas about African literature are, one may argue, comprehensive because they encapsulate some of the important issues about African literature such as, the type of

audience African literature should address itself to, which other writers have not captured in their outline of African literary identity. As they see it, a writer should have a heightened cultural consciousness and awareness to be able to conscientise other people through his work. The question of nationality is crucial to African literature as well because even a person who is a naturalised African citizen, and profoundly understands the African milieu, can make a good African writer. Lastly, they talk of the language writers must use when writing. Surely, good African writers should consider the type of audience they are writing for, a fact which will determine the style and register they should use. Good African writers should make themselves explicit to their readers when they write. African literature should be understood to be two-pronged: oral and written. Orature (oral literature) implies that African literature has been in existence since time immemorial because stories have always been told and passed on to posterity since the beginning of time. Africans have been involved in song and dance since they were born. Written literature is the art that was learned from the West. Thus, African literature is not an offshoot from any literature from anywhere because it has originated on this continent as a product which got refined, modified, and complemented by some literary borrowings from other world literatures.

Ngara (1982:3) defines African literature as not only consisting of works produced by indigenous Africans, who profoundly understand the African milieu, setting, and experiences, but also includes works by white Africans who identify with Africa:

At another conference African literature was defined as creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral.

Ngara's view is relevant even today because of its reconciliatory tone. It concurs with Biko's (1987:48) sentiments that being African is not a question of pigmentation but of consciousness. This means that works written by white Africans such as J.M. Coetzee, Alan Paton, Doris Lessing, and Nadine Gordimer are encompassed because they objectively address and confront the African reality. African literature should help Africans gain knowledge of who they are, why they are in the situation in which they find themselves, where they come from as well as projecting where they are going. It should help Africans discover and rediscover Africa. Ndebele (1991:35) observes that African literature should not only expose social evils, but should also unveil where such evils come from and suggest ways in which they can be combated. In this way, consumers of African literature will grow intellectually and gain a deeper understanding of their identity. Ndebele thus contends:

Firstly, there is a danger here that critics might be accused of being unpatriotic simply because we do not agree with what they say. Secondly, does it mean that 'Black Consciousness adherents' must uncritically rave enthusiastically about anything written by blacks? Nothing could be more dangerous to the struggle than the suppression of criticism. The two attitudes above are not only anti-intellectual, they are also essentially undemocratic. If we want to struggle towards a genuinely democratic future, then we must be prepared to subject everything to rigorous intellectual scrutiny followed by open and fearless discussion. Writers and critics can make their contribution too. The demands made on us by the future leave no room in which to feel sorry for ourselves.

2.3.1 The role of the African writer

African writers today play a role that is subtle and full of nuances because they are unsure about the nature of their audience. Because of the dilemma of being unsure of who their audience are, they find it difficult to make their readers establish a sense of purpose in life in terms of who they are. Achebe (1977:43) remarks:

The final point I wish to address myself to is the crucial one of identity. Who is my community? The Mbari and the Afikpo examples I referred to were clearly appropriate to the rather small, reasonably stable and self-contained societies to which they belonged. In the very different wide open, multi-cultural and highly volatile condition known as modern Nigeria, for example, can a writer even begin to know who his community is let alone devise strategies for relating to it?

Achebe's words are a telling revelation of the identity crisis African writers find themselves faced with today. He sees Nigeria as a microcosm of Africa where African society is fragmented by modernism which is characterised by urbanisation, detribalisation, and selfishness. He laments the loss of the rural and peasant African halcyon past which is fast getting eroded by civilisation. Africa, he argues, should not completely go back to her "primitive" past because the past has its own imperfections, but should engage herself in a rigorous search for a new identity in the face of modernity which threatens her social order. Though current African communities display a glaring cultural confusion in the sense that they have one foot in the West and the other in Africa, Achebe (1977:41) contends that "we can see in the horizon the beginnings of a new relationship between artists and the community which will not flourish like the mango-trick in the

twinkling of an eye". As such, he acknowledges that Africa is a confused continent which should search earnestly for new and unique relationships in terms of culture, religion, and economy which can proudly be called African. The distinguishing function and role of the African writer is two-pronged today: he writes for personal gratification as well as for public satisfaction. In the traditional past of pure orature, the role of the poet was communal in that poets and storytellers (*griots*) recited and narrated their stories and poems for the benefit of their own communities. The duty of the poet was, therefore, to praise the heroes of the community, namely, the gods, the king, the tribe, animals, and the strongholds of the community, such as mountains and caves, as well as their traditional tools, for instance, spears and calabashes. Their poetry may thus be regarded as a reflection of African historical identity in its diversity. Coupled with praise poems were oral narratives about tribal histories, oral performances, dramas, hunting lyrics, and dance songs. These forms of oral poetry served to entertain and teach people about their identity, thereby assuming a purely social and cultural role. Today, the African writer writes for both private and public contemplation as Achebe (1988:40) asserts:

It is important to say at this point that no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience. He must remain free to disagree with his society and go into rebellion against it if need be.

Achebe's view is open in that he alludes to the African writers' responsibility to their community while he also argues that writers should write what they think is right by following the dictates of their conscience. His argument is solid because it caters for both sides, namely, the needs of the

community and the writers' freedom of speech. He further postulates that African writers should help their societies get on their feet again and attain their true identity by rediscovering their past in order to forge a true African identity: "What we need to do is to look back and try and find out where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us" Achebe, (1977:44). Achebe argues that African writers should, through re-education, assist their community to regain its identity. This is because, as Mphahlele in his *African Image* (1974:80) posits, African writers are supposed to be "a sensitive point" in their communities, meaning that they should be a national conscience. Ojaide (1992:44) adds: "The writer in modern day Africa has assumed the role of the conscience of the society, reminding readers and society of the high cultural ethos that must be upheld". Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980:252) also agree with the writer being a communal voice when they posit:

For the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assumes a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings, and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego.

These African scholars differ from Achebe on the issue of the African writers' freedom to write what they want to express and that they should not be dictated upon by the community on what to write about. They (1980:252) contend:

It won't do for him to claim that a writer has no mandate from anyone to write, therefore no one should advise him what to write about or how to write. One may ask such a writer why he bothers to make his writings public, why he uses public resources, lays claim to public attention, yet disdains all responsibility to society.

Chinweizu *et al*, (1980:253) see no use in the writers publishing their work if that work is intended for themselves and not for the public. They point out that such writers should rather keep the work to themselves as a private property. In an attempt to reconcile the above arguments, they argue that good African writers should be committed to their craft, whether for their sake or for the sake of the public. Commitment, to them, can be defined as follows:

Artistic commitment as we see it, is therefore a matter of perceiving social realities and of making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of or change in, the society's norms and values.

This means that the writer should be committed to either changing the *status quo* or preserving it. A large number of African writers support the idea of changing the *status quo*. Committed African writers can be divided into three categories:

- First, there are those writers who only chronicle social injustice from a neutral position in that they do not offer readers their personal side of the story. These writers only "depict reality as it really is" (Alvarez-Pereyre, 1984:21).
- Second, there are writers who report social evils without suggesting possible solutions to those evils.
- Third, there are writers who record social unfairness and suggest ways out of the morass. In other words, they urge their "society from what it is towards what it might be" (Cook, 1977:3).

These writers also celebrate the beauty of the African past. Ngugi and Achebe fall under this category because they attempt to conscientise their readers about their social plight as well as pointing a way to salvation. It is, however, unfortunate that in their criticism and protest against socio-political unfairness, some of these writers compromise artistic standards (Chinweizu et al., 1980: 251-253).

Ngugi, in *Writers in Politics* (1981), supports Chinweizu et al. when he proclaims that every writer is a writer in politics in the sense that to him (Ngugi), politics, society, and literature are inseparable. His view is Marxist because he agrees that he writes primarily for the masses. He writes, as Fanon (1963: 28) would argue, for "the wretched of the earth". Ngugi (1993:82) also believes that a writer should be committed to the truth:

The question is, how can he perform his role more effectively? The obvious answer, of course, is that he must always be committed to the truth - that is, be faithful to what he sees, what he hears, what he touches.

Ndebele (1991:23-24) supports committed writing by adding that African writers should display artistic expertise because the function of literature is to expose social evil in an artistic way and not only to document events. He contends:

All this is because moral ideology tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good and evil, instead of leading us towards important necessary insights into the social process leading to those finished forms. Thus, showing no more than surfaces, writ-

ings influenced by an ideology tend to inform without involving readers in a truly transforming experience.

Ndebele notes that, regrettably, many African writers are not artistic enough in their craft hence they only write to inform and when one reads something which one already knows, the result is that one only recognises it and this recognition causes one to have a *déjà vu* feeling, thereby making one lethargic about re-discovering the crux of who one is. He contends that in order for readers to attain intellectual transformation, they should be exposed to the social processes which lead to the themes of the text which they are reading. This will enable them to gain new insights into the work and, therefore, their identity. Thus, he calls for African writers to have artistic and intellectual rigour which are the hallmarks of excellent art. African writers should interrogate social evil and not merely report on it because that will be journalism masquerading as literature, and will, therefore, weaken their commitment to African identity.

2.3.2 Language as an African literary identity

The role of language in African literary works is challenging in that African writers and critics are not agreed on whether to stick to using indigenous languages or European languages. This problem is caused by the fact that, on the one hand, Europeans used their languages as a weapon in their colonising mission of Africa and in shifting her identity, while on the other hand, the majority of the people for whom African writers claim to be writing when they use indigenous languages, are illiterate. In other words, if they use European languages in their work, they will be implicitly promoting Euro-

pean culture in Africa, thereby neo-colonising their continent. Ojaide (1992:43) declares: "There is the Eurocentric temptation to see modern African literature written in these European languages (English, French and Portuguese) as an extension of European literature". And if African writers write in the indigenous languages, their readership will virtually be non-existent because of the high rate of illiteracy in Africa. Notwithstanding this, a large number of African writers are averse to writing in English because, as they correctly put it, language is a carrier of the people's hopes, aspirations, and identity in that "it provides lense(s) of [cultural] perception" (Akoto, 1992:31-32). This means that if they subscribe to writing in English, they will be perpetuating imperial culture. Mazrui and Mazrui (1998:53) agree with the statement when they say that language is "a reservoir of culture which controls human thought and behaviour".

Europeans made use of their own languages, such as French, English and Portuguese, to portray the colonised continents as dark continents inhabited by backward, uncultured, and uncivilised people while theirs was always depicted as a progressive one. Said in Moore-Gilbert (1997:23), using the Orientals as an example, indicates:

As a consequence, the East is characteristically coded negatively in Orientals discourse as - variously - voiceless, sensual, female, despotic, irrational, and backward. By contrast, the West is characteristically represented in positive terms, as masculine, democratic and progressive.

In their attempt to eradicate African culture, European writers declared their languages as media of instruction, thereby imposing their culture on the Africans through their (languages) use. The majority of African writers and critics

have, however, tried to reverse the above language imbalance in their writing. Ngugi (1992:xiv) remarked as follows when he changed from writing in English to writing in his indigenous African languages, Gikuyu and Kiswahili:

This book, *Decolonising the Mind*, is my farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings. From now on it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way. However, I hope that through the age old medium of translation I shall be able to continue dialogue with all.

Ngugi's main aim of writing his decolonising work in Kenya's indigenous languages may be ascribed to his wish to be accessible to his people. He agrees that one's cultural identity finds appropriate expression in one's language and that should he continue to write in English, he would be promoting the English culture in Africa. To him, writing in English is a perpetuation of neo-colonialism which African writers and critics are supposed to oppose. He, therefore, regards African writers who write in English as promoting the unwanted "culture of apemanship and parrotry" (Ngugi 1992:2) of the colonial powers, thereby engaging in a self-denial exercise. This view also revolutionised Kenyan and African ordinary citizen at large against neo-colonialism.

A large number of African writers such as Achebe, Okara, Soyinka feel that English should continue to be used but be adapted to suit the African context (domestication of the English language). These critics condemn the so-called standard language, which, in this case, is English, in favour of different varieties and dialects of English (world englishes) in an attempt to establish the "English" which will express their identity. They argue that there should be "non-repressive alternatives to imperialist discourse" if the pro-

cess of decolonisation is to run like a well-oiled machine (Brydon and Tiffin 1993:12). Achebe, quoted in Walder (1998:52) indicates:

The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surrounding.

2.4 AFRICAN LITERARY TRADITIONS

Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions. The former are relatively well known - at any rate the recent writings in European languages. The unwritten forms, however, are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms do not fit neatly into the familiar categories of literate cultures, they are harder to record and present, and, for a superficial observer at least, they are easier to overlook than the corresponding written material (Finnegan, 1984:1).

African literature may be sub-divided into two traditions:

- The oral tradition
- The contemporary tradition

2.4.1 The oral tradition

African literature derives its distinctive origin from storytelling and traditional oral poetry. In the African past, poems and stories were verbally transmitted and passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth through either mu-

sic, dance, myth, and dress, a point which makes it (African literature) "people-directed and mass-consumed and therefore, people-centred and mass-based" (Ramogale, 1995:8). In other words, artists derived their literary content from the people thereby making their work people-driven. Finnegan (1984:5) expands this view when she argues:

In many stories, for example, the characterization of both leading and secondary figures may appear slight; but what in literate cultures must be written, explicitly or implicitly, into the text can in orally delivered forms be conveyed by more visible means - by the speaker's gestures, expression, and mimicry. A particular atmosphere - whether of dignity for a king's official poet, light-hearted enjoyment for an evening story-teller, grief for a woman dirge singer - can be conveyed not only by a verbal evocation of mood but also by the dress, accoutrements, or observed bearing of the performer. This visual aspect is sometimes taken even further than gesture and dramatic bodily movement and is expressed in the form of dance, often joined by members of the audience (or chorus). In these cases the verbal content now represents only one element in a complete opera-like performance which combines words, music, and dance.

This oral transmission of cultural heritage to posterity attests to the indisputable truth that there is oral birth to any written work. It is mainly this "great heritage of orature", as Ngugi (1993:74) calls African oral literary tradition, which makes African literature autonomous and independent from other literatures. This does not, however, mean that it is not related to other world literatures. They are, in fact, related because they are all literatures but differ because they have different value systems enshrined in them. This, therefore, makes African literature united in diversity with global literatures.

In the African past, the oral tradition was characterised by praise poetry which was recited by the praise poets (*griots*). Their poetic interest was diverse in the sense that their objects of poetic examination varied broadly. The poet would praise heroes of the community such as the chief, and the strongholds of the community such as caves and mountains as well as traditional tools such as spears and calabashes. His poetry would also manifest the dramatic experiences of the day such as celebrating the arrival home of the initiates from the mountain school, welcoming regiments home in both victory and defeat from the war or encouraging them before they leave for the battlefield. His poetry was also didactic in that its consumers gleaned moral lessons from it. People derived pleasure and entertainment from it as well. Thus, the function of his poetry was multi-dimensional in that it gave people a sense of purpose and assurance in life. It kept diseases away, made enemies die, lulled babies to sleep, made leaders feel honoured, made ancestors feel appeased, caused sores to heal, made husbands, wives, and children happy, but most of all, it imbued the community with hope for a better future in that it articulated their aspirations. It made them face the future with audacity and courage. The audience got attracted to oral poetry because of its accessibility to them as displayed in its linguistic simplicity. The immediacy of the *griot* also made his poetry rendition carry his audience along and, therefore, render it memorable.

2.4.2. The Contemporary Tradition

The Contemporary African Literary Tradition is epitomised mainly by written symbols. Where orature is used, the performer does so "in order to praise or criticise" the authorities, as Mzwakhe Mbuli, the South African praise poet, does

(Brown, 1999:3). Thus, African writers express their commitment to African identity and culture in writing. Many of them, such as Chabal, wrote in the vernacular (Kiswahili), in order to restore their identity by debunking the myth created by the colonisers about African languages. Mkuti (1996:120) confirms: "African languages in South Africa (Africa) were encouraged by the white regime for the wrong reasons, consequently, people formed negative attitudes towards their own languages". Chabal was followed by Senghor and Césaire, among the French-speaking writers (Francophone). English-speaking writers (Anglophone) started coming into the picture in the late fifties with the Nigerian writers such as Achebe and Soyinka featuring prominently (Cloete, 1996:27-29). East African English literature followed later on with, for example, Ngugi and Taban lo Liyong. Portuguese-speaking English writers (Lusophone), such as Chabal (different from Chabal mentioned earlier on in the paragraph), also appeared on the scene with their works. Black South African writing was an offshoot from missionary literature and influence, with Sol Plaatjie's *Mhudi* (1930), which is regarded as the first novel written by a South African to be published in English, Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931), and Herbert Dlomo's play, *The Girl Who Killed To Save* (1935) as cases in point.

2.5 PHASES OF WRITTEN AFRICAN LITERATURE

African literature may be divided into three phases which are: Europe's Early Image of Africa, The Colonial Conquest and The Post-colonial (also called Post-apartheid in South Africa) Era.

2.5.1 Europe's Early Image of Africa

This first phase deals with literature written by the colonisers and imperial explorers about the colonised. It generally portrays Africa through the eyes of the West, that is, Africa portrayed from the view of the West. Africa was trashed, demonised, and stereotyped mainly through the use of the story of the sons of Ham from the Bible. Wauthier (1979:209) records: "As early as 1870, at the first Vatican Council, a group of missionary bishops produced a document asking the pope to release the Negro race from the curse on it which comes from Ham". In other words, they believed that "the Bible curses the sons of Ham" (Wauthier, 1979:209) which is a misrepresentation of the divine truth for personal gain. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise when, even today, some Europeans still liken Africans to backwardness. It is this stereotype which makes the Europeans regard Africans as savages and barbarians who are doomed to failure and death. This sentiment is echoed by one of Europe's celebrated missionaries in Africa, Dr Schweitzer, when he patronisingly says about an African "I am your brother, it is true, but your older brother" (Wauthier, 1979:218). This is one of the reasons why Mphahlele (1974:209) says "To us the church has become a symbol of the dishonesty of the West". Schweitzer's view is stereotypical because it is based on Europe's own unbalanced interpretation which is not supported by any scriptural text, instead, the Bible preaches love, expiation, confession, and forgiveness of sins which go with eternal life. People, therefore, have equal opportunity to be redeemed. To the Europeans, the sons of Ham have been condemned and damned beyond salvation. Thus, Europeans claim monopoly of Christian knowledge, wisdom, and civilisation. As a result of this stereotype, Africans were condescendingly regarded as noble sav-

ages, people who lived harmoniously with the wilderness, on the periphery, people who were uncivilised and primitive, who were without history, language, and culture. As most Europeans saw it, the Africans' nobility ensued from the fact that they were primitive people who were morally superior because they were in close touch with nature. They were unsuspecting, generous, unreservedly hospitable, and therefore, naïve and exploitable.

The idea of African savagery was popularised by the European explorers, such as Vasco da Gama and Bartholomew Diaz, in their voyages of discovery. They perpetuated, in their travelogues, the false notion that Africa did not have the Grace of God and was, therefore, a doomed continent infested with disease. They resultantly started with their colonisation mission under the guise of civilising Africans who were regarded as the barbarians. Thus, this phase also examines literature written by the colonisers and imperial explorers about the colonised as, for instance, expressed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1987). Joseph Conrad was a Belgian Pole who exposes Europe's stereotypical understanding of Africa in his novel, *Heart of Darkness* (1987). He metaphorically portrays Africa as a heart of darkness, which is one of the myths which the Europeans had about Africa, and which Conrad attempts to debunk. He depicts how the Belgian colonisers, led by the character Kurtz, invade the Congo and plunder her natural and human resources and thereby undermining their identity in the process.

Marlow, who undertakes a journey from Belgium to the Congo to go and see the "savages" and the "pagans" of the Dark Continent for himself, narrates the novel. When he penetrates the interior in his voyage of discovery, he meets famished and

harmless "natives" who wearily look at him with a mixture of fear, hope, and appeal. As soon as he finds the Belgian settlers, represented by Kurtz, dehumanising the "natives", he starts realising that what he has heard about Africa is a myth because he experiences that Africa is not an evil and Dark Continent as he is made to believe it is, but that Europe, exemplified by Kurtz, is. Marlow's expectations of Africa get shockingly reversed in that he goes to Africa expecting to find darkness only to be surprised by Kurtz who proves to be an embodiment of human evil. Thus, his journey into the African interior becomes an educational tour, a journey of self-discovery as he keeps on discovering Europe's unfounded assumptions about African identity. He goes to Africa being a racist and comes back a transformed person with a deep insight into human nature, which implies that, given a chance, he could help Africa reconstruct her demeaned identity.

Marlow goes to Africa and comes back with valuable knowledge that the evil that exists on earth does not belong to a particular race, but to humanity at large. He acknowledges the fact that human nature, irrespective of race, colour or creed, is evil, and thereby confirming the wrong views Europeans of the time had about Africa and her identity as Carrol (1980:3) observes:

This, then, is Africa, the dark continent of European imagination. It is an extreme stereotype, but one which clearly answers to a certain need in both writers and readers. We all require a symbol, myth and stereotype to order experience, and it is reassuring in this context to remember that the African devils are white. Recalcitrant facts are invariably subdued: however elaborate the social institutions the explorers uncover, Africans remain children of Nature. Africa is described as a tactless wilder-

ness. The genius of a Conrad or a Mary Kingsley could transcend the restriction and security of the stereotype, but most writers found in Africa what they had been conditioned to find.

2.5.2 The Colonial Conquest

The following sub-phases comprise this phase:

- The first sub-phase deals with literature which was published "under imperial licence" by the indigenous people (Ashcroft, 1989:5). This kind of literature does not show any signs of protest and resistance against imperial cultural domination and identity erosion, hence its conformity to the status quo. It was a literature written by Africans who were outcasts in their communities and sought solace in the church thereby rendering Christianity "particularly beneficial to *them* as the weakest members of the community" (Omotoso, 1996:4). In other words, they were early converts to Christianity as a "modern" and "redeeming" religion as Mutiso (1974:102) posits:

Beyond decrying the colonial experience, African writers attempt to discuss how the society reacted to colonialism. It is brought out in the literature that those groups which were traditionally outcasts in African societies were the very ones to identify themselves with the missionaries at the beginning. To the extent that they were ultimately accepted into the colonial establishment as cooks, labourers, clerks, catechists, etc., these African converts acquired money and their status rose. Thus they sort of developed a middle class mentality.

- The second sub-phase, which forms the basis of this study, deals with literature of resistance and protest, hence its proclamation of independence and restoration of identity from the imperial powers. African writers write back to the distortions of the empire, which include, *inter alia*, the assumption that Europe's colonising mission of Africa was a redeeming venture hence the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). They debunk the myth of Western civilisation with the aim of reconstructing their eroded identity. In other words, they expose that colonialism was not as benign as they were made to believe it was because it was, in actual fact, destructive and exploitative. It dislocated and displaced Africans from their communities, as in, for example, Africans who live in the diaspora. It filled members of the African community with feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. People started to have doubts about their cultural beliefs which in turn eroded their self-esteem. Colonialism was "a threat to their emergent sense of self and a violation of the integrity of their social body" (Gikandi, 2000:19). This is because in the pre-colonial era, there were certainties in terms of the people's cultural and religious beliefs which gave them a sense of purpose in life. These African beliefs afforded their subscribers hope about the future but colonialism cut this serenity short, leaving them in a state of trauma, suffering, and pain; a state of *anomie*, in the words of Soyinka (1976). Today African writers want to reclaim their self-worth, which means that they want to be part of the mainstream and not of the other anymore through the reconstruction of their dented image. Emancipation in terms of history, language, and identity (cultural identity) serves as the *Leitmotif* (recurring

theme) in this literature. Africans celebrate stories about themselves in the face of European conquest by asserting their sense of Africanness as depicted in, for instance, Okonkwo's character in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Waiyaki's in Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965). Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967) and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* (1960). Ngugi (1993:61) observes:

The writing itself, during *this period* [my italics], whether in poetry, drama or fiction, even where it was explanatory in intention, was assertive in tone. It was Africa explaining itself, speaking for itself and interpreting its past. It was an Africa rejecting the images of its past as drawn by the artists of imperialism.

This second sub-phase also deals with individual identity versus group identity in the face of social and political change, and exposes the ways in which Africans grapple with these contradictions (Mutiso, 1974:xi). Ngugi portrays these kinds of identity in *A Grain of Wheat*, where characters are faced with the task of constructing new identities in the face of (identity) crises brought about by change.

In *Things Fall Apart*, for example, Achebe affirms that there is a difference in storytelling between an African and an European in that Africans tell their stories from an African perspective while Europeans narrate theirs from their own perspective. In addition, the novel is a celebration of writing in English by an African because, despite its shortcomings, it clearly shows that Africans can write compelling stories in English as well.

An African character by the name of Okonkwo fights colonial and imperial invasion in *Things Fall Apart*. This shows that an African is no longer a silent "savage" who docilely accepts brutality meted out against him by the imperial powers. Okonkwo, the protagonist, becomes a symbol of resistance and an exponent of African identity in that he fiercely opposes foreign culture. In a bid to protect his African identity, Okonkwo kills a white messenger of court with a sword and thereafter sacrifices his life by committing suicide because he wants to break away from colonial dependency. Thus, he is portrayed as an exponent of African identity, a man steeped in "his personal refusal of a new order" (Irele, 1979:181) which was forced upon him.

Things Fall Apart, in turn, portrays a clash of European and African cultures with the Africans rejecting foreign culture while the Europeans persist to impose it, as Carrol (1980:38) notes:

More ominously, the author has introduced the aliens, white with no toes, who will before the end of the novel exploit this openness by introducing changes which the tribal structure will not be able to withstand. But for the moment the society is secure, stabilized by the questioning, modification, and adaptation which are part of the Igbo way of life.

2.5.3 The Postcolonial Era

This third phase in African literature deals with Africans who try to re-order and re-organize their lives and their identity after years of colonialism. It portrays corruption, multi-culturalism, reconciliation, decolonisation, and freedom as delineated in Ngugi's *Matigari* (1987) and Achebe's *A*

Man of the People (1966). In *A Man of the People*, for example, Achebe tries to show that though Africans have attained political independence, they are culturally still enslaved by the colonial powers, which means that they are still experiencing an identity crisis. Moreover, Africans face problems such as poverty, corruption, and ignorance in the post-colonial era as well. Odili is an enlightened young teacher who holds a university degree while Chief Nanga is a Member of Parliament and his former teacher, who believes in traditional African values. Nanga identifies with the poor by buying cheap popularity from them. Thus, Nanga serves as an example of a corrupt and incompetent politician whose constituency is blind to this weakness of his because, like him, they have lost their sense of African identity and morality. Odili, on the other hand, is aware of his African identity and attaches value to this awareness but is alienated and isolated from his people by Western education. Mutiso (1974:26-27) aptly postulates:

Note that the values of the literati are always defeated in the literary works by traditional values. Many of the literati, in an attempt to compensate for feelings of defeat, loneliness and uncertainty, become involved in work for the national government as a means of creating for themselves a collective self-identity. Yet even in joining the government, when they have the interests of the country at heart, they are dominated by the politicians in what they do. They become victims of the structure of their society, which places more value on politicians and politics than on the literati and intellectual leadership.

2.5.3.1 African identity and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

The post-colonial period is a period of re-building and re-constructing the African continent after years of subjugation. It is, in essence, the African renaissance period, the African century. It is in this re-ordering that Africans must wake up to the need to dovetail indigenous knowledge systems (Africanness) in all their affairs. These include, among other things, a paradigm shift from Eurocentricity to Afrocentricity. Africans must desist from seeing themselves through European eyes but rather, look into themselves through the African mirror. This shift of emphasis contends that IKSs are essential towards the total definition of African identity in that they embody African culture in its totality. They strive for the primacy of African culture in every sphere of African life. It is, therefore, incumbent upon African scholars, writers, and researchers to capture this point in their writing. They must develop ways in which indigenous culture can be efficaciously used for the advancement of the continent as IKSs encompasses using one's own culture and knowledge to aggrandise oneself. These indigenous African cultural aspects (IKS) can be fused into our education system, politics, administration, commerce, agriculture, and judiciary. Ntuli (2002:60) argues:

The African Renaissance project seeks to create an ethos that will help reshape our educational models. It aims to re-focus our intellectual and emotional energies towards a more holistic vision of society, to bring about new methods of socialization - methods that will help break the stranglehold of Eurocentricism and usher in an African-centred one - mindful that the way we think and act is a result of our socialization. It is a result of

our upbringing and behavioural patterns inculcated in us. All our actions are an expression of our way of life. In other words, we shape and are shaped by the way we were brought up.

Africans realised that in order for the continent to be totally liberated from imperialism and be re-born, there should be an intensive review of the current Eurocentric curriculum programmes in favour of Afrocentric ones. In other words, they must adapt these curriculum programmes to the needs of their societies by incorporating indigenous traditions into their education (Makgoba, 1998:42). It must be predominantly African "in content" (Nyerere, 1965:112). Restructuring in this case does not, however, mean doing away completely with anything and everything un-African. Instead, it implies starting from the known to the unknown. This means that in their revamping venture, curriculum designers must prioritise African educational values over European ones. Owuor Anyumba, Taban Lo Liyong, and Ngugi in Ngugi's well-known critical work, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986:94):

We reject the primacy of English literature and cultures. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and the rest of Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contribution towards understanding ourselves. In suggesting this we are not rejecting other streams, especially the Western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture in an African university

Here, Anyumba *et al.* refer to education restructuring in, firstly Kenya, East Africa, and Africa. In South Africa, South Africans should put South African culture in the centre, followed by Southern African culture and lastly, the en-

tire African culture when they develop a curriculum with African relevance. From Africa, South Africans should move to the African diaspora and then to the countries which share their history with the continent, a history of being former European colonies. They should also study cultures of the indigenous people of the world, such as the cultures of the Red Indians, the Maoris, and the Australian Aborigines. After having acquired this knowledge, they can move to European and Western cultures. It is in this way that Africans can authentically reclaim their identity and uniqueness which will further enable them to effectively and confidently contribute to global issues. The products of this envisaged kind of education system will be proudly African because they will be able to define who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. They will be anchored on a sound cultural knowledge as they will be conscious of their identity.

In order to restructure Africa's education system in schools and universities, these institutions should mainstream African indigenous knowledge systems in their curricula. And, in order to understand African indigenous knowledge systems, academic institutions should familiarise themselves with the ingredients of being an indigenous African in a country as opposed to being the other African. Being indigenous in a country means that one belongs to that country in a natural way. He/She is a native of that country, which means that he/she is an original inhabitant of that place. Other Africans are Africans who hail from other countries or continents to come and settle, and consequently acquire citizenship in Africa. In other words, they become naturalised citizens of Africa. Though they are still Africans, such Africans have a culture which is different from the indigenous one. Thus,

when Africans restructure their education system, priority should be given to indigenous culture.

It is worth noting that when re-ordering their education system, African curriculum developers will be engaged in the process of self-definition. They will be defining who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. It is on the basis of this that their identity will be succinctly explained. As a result, curriculum designers must do the following:

- In English Studies, South African, Southern African, and African students must be exposed to literature which enshrines African experiences in its content. It must be literature which epitomises Africa, her traditions, cultures, and values, though structurally, it will draw from the Western literary tradition. However, this should not take its African uniqueness and sovereignty away from it. African students must know, for example, that their literature derives its origin and existence from story-telling and traditional oral poetry. Their awareness should be raised to the fact that in the halcyon days of the African past, poems and stories were verbally transmitted and passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth. It is this orature which makes African literature autonomous and independent.

These students must further be conscientised, through the curriculum, to the fact that their literature is a literature which falls within the precincts of all literatures written in English by people who live in countries formerly colonised by countries such as Britain, Spain, and Portugal. This literature stretches from the

colonial era to the post-colonial era. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989:1) observe that African literature forms part of:

Writing by those peoples formerly colonized by Britain, though much of what it deals with is of interest and relevance to countries colonized by other European powers, such as France, Portugal, and Spain.

African literature deals with a quest for identity on the basis of history, language, race, and culture. It tackles issues of resistance by the colonised against colonial domination. Africans voice their sense of cultural difference and particularity from their imperial masters. As such, literature of the formerly colonised constitutes a literature of protest against imperialism. Themes dealing with colonisation, decolonisation, transformation, and change are salient in this literary genre. It strives to falsify and debunk the myths and stereotypes the centre (Europe) had about Africa. It also unpacks the stark reality that most of these countries are still under the grip of cultural and economic influence from their former colonial masters, though in a different guise. This new threat comes from what African intellectuals, such as Ngugi, call neo-colonialism. It is in this literature that the natives cry out for their self-worth, self-respect, and humanity. In *Devil on the Cross* (1987:15), for example, Ngugi lashes out at neo-colonialism when the young man who prevents the female protagonist from committing suicide reflects:

You are right to be weary. Nairobi is large, soulless, and corrupt. But it is not Nairobi alone that is afflicted in this way. The same

is true of all the cities in every country that has recently slipped the noose of colonialism.

This young man ascribes the economic difficulties experienced in these African countries to their parroting of and not customizing the American system of self-interestedness and individualism rather than abiding by the selfless traditional principles. He contends that these African states "have been taught new songs, new hymns that celebrate the acquisition of money". The young man who reverts to citing some of the new songs and incantations which reveal the paradoxical nature of the moral decay in Kenya continues:

Crooked to the upright
Meanness to the kind
Hatred to the loving
Evil to the good

African literature also sets out to unmask the evils and the injustices of colonialism. Colonialism is exposed as so corruptive a phenomenon that it even plays havoc with the colonisers themselves. Aimé Césaire (in Moore-Gilbert 1997:80) remarks:

They prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man, that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it, that the colonizer who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. It

is this result, this boomerang effect of colonisation, that I wanted to point out.

An apt example of what Cesaire talks about is the character of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1987). Kurtz, who epitomises the colonizing power, colonizes Africa, which is metaphorically referred to as the heart of darkness. He plunders her resources and eventually gets consumed by his corrupt behaviour thereby becoming the heart of darkness himself. Thus, Cesaire attempts to show that any civilisation, however developed and admirable it can be, is sick if it is based on colonisation. African students should, therefore, acquaint themselves with the oral tradition, the colonial, the post-colonial and the neo-colonial eras.

- History books have to be re-written in favour of the good things which African heroes and heroines have achieved in their respective exploits. Instead of centralising and extolling European conquerors and explorers, it must emphasise African heroes such as Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Senghor, and Mandela. This is important because it will help African students with the knowledge of where they come from as well as providing them with role models and people to look up to for inspiration.
- African songs and dance should be introduced in the institutions' departments of music. African musical instruments such as horn, marimba, and the thumb piano have to be used in the composition and production of music. African students should be taught the virtue and the value of African music, which are, among other

things, its therapeutic nature to the soul. It also serves as a source of entertainment to the people.

- The law departments should introduce the African way of hearing cases and settling disputes. For example, if a couple has matrimonial differences, the matter should first be discussed between the two families and if no solution is reached, it has to be taken to the local chief for judgement.
- The medical department must welcome, in its curriculum, information on African medicines and herbs, which have proven to be potent and effective in healing diseases. Thus, intensive and extensive feasibility study and re-search has to be conducted into such medicines.
- African agricultural patterns and systems have to be incorporated into the department of agriculture. Stock farming, animal husbandry, and grain farming have to be explored from the African perspective. African students have to understand the agricultural dynamics of communal land and property ownership.
- The idea of how Africans understand and interpret the earth, the moon, the stars, and the sun and their dynamics has to be studied in Geography.
- African science should be positively introduced to African students. It does not have to come to them as witchcraft or black magic, but it has to be explained to them how this science can benefit man in his quest for development. The fact that, archeologically, Egyptian hiero-

glyphics represent the first written symbols on earth and that the Egyptian pyramids are the first wonderful pieces of construction on earth should also be revealed to them. These indicate that civilisation has long been existing in Africa. Theology department should encapsulate African religious beliefs while Philosophy should include African ethics such as *ubuntu* and communalism. Economics should entail, what Lo Liyong (1998:6) calls "black market economics and borrowing"

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the opinions, views, analyses and perspectives of African literary critics and scholars on what they think African literary identity should encapsulate. These critics try to map out the decolonising direction which this literature should follow by searching "for a discourse of social renewal and ideological reorganisation" (Taoua, 2001:196). This is, however, not a smooth route to traverse and they are fully aware of that. In order for African literary critics to constructively understand themselves in terms of who they are today and where they are going, they should do introspection and soul-searching. They should be prepared to stave off many odds in their attempt to reconstruct their lives, which are among others, the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism. They also have a glaring threat in urbanisation and globalisation with their concomitant detribalisation and individualisation. Africans should help one another rehabilitate themselves by rekindling the positive aspects of their African cultural past, such as *ubuntu* (humanism), and fuse them with positive European cultural aspects, such as, advanced technological knowledge, in an endeavour to develop a new, well-enlightened, modern Africa.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN IDENTITY IN MPHAHLELE'S *DOWN SECOND AVENUE* AND *THE WANDERERS*

3.1 *DOWN SECOND AVENUE*

3.1.1 Background

Down Second Avenue is Mphahlele's first and key autobiographical novel which was published in his formative years as an author. That he was still trying to cut his teeth as a writer when he wrote the novel is apparent in its (novel's) narrative and structural simplicity. Notwithstanding this limitation, *Down Second Avenue* emerged as one of the most outstanding, widely read, and trend-setting works in the literary genre of self-definition in South Africa and Africa at large, after the publication of Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom* (1974). Hot on their heels followed Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me On History* (1990) which also explores an author on a journey to self-identification. *Down Second Avenue* covers a period between 1924 and 1959, which makes it a time-span of thirty-three (33) years. Obee (1999:78-79) writes:

Mphahlele once wrote that autobiography in South Africa has emerged naturally from South African conditions, and in fact, we are seeing it emerge all over Africa as a literature of self-definition. It has become a peculiar genre in Africa, a genre that depicts the very social conditions that have given rise to it.

Down Second Avenue is, therefore, a product of "South African conditions" in the 1950s. It records the plight of South Africans under apartheid rule and their desire to extricate themselves from "the situation which uprooted the African from his cultural milieu" (Nweke, 1992:231) and carve a niche for themselves as people who can freely practice and promote their own culture. These harsh conditions under which black South Africans lived included, *inter alia*, lack of privacy, deprivation of economic safety and security, poor education, and precarious health services. In other words, South Africans were living in difficult socio-cultural and political conditions. Though they were materially poor, they were spiritually rich in the sense that their spirit, as embodied in Mphahlele, was formidable. The African spirit was always crying out for recognition. Although dented, it was never crushed. The *self* (the I) in *Down Second Avenue* is akin to the communal *we* in Africa as it is deeply grafted in the community which, in more ways than one, implies that the black South African community serves as a cultural protagonist. The book is essentially about the people and the community whose human and humanistic spirit triumphs in the darkness of adversity. Mphahlele's attempt at self-definition and self-creation is a testimony of Africa's endeavour to carve her identity in the face of dislocation and cultural denigration.

In *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele probes indigenous cultural aspects such as *ubuntu* (African humanism), myths, proverbs, and tales, which give South African people, who symbolise African people, a strong sense of identity. He is concerned with "identity politics" (Chapman, 2003:5). He also portrays resistance and protest which South African people unleash against their oppressors, thereby forcing them to battle against "the politics of occupation" (Mazrui & Mphande, 1995:

167). This novel investigates, through the use of South Africa as a microcosm of Africa, socio-economic, political, and cultural conflicts between the Europeans and South Africans, with Europeans battling to impose their culture on South Africans on the one hand, and South Africans fighting fiercely, and sometimes rebelliously, to maintain their cultural rites, rituals, and customs on the other. This is because these cultural elements are important in the definition of their identity. The novel also chronicles Mphahlele's harrowing real life experiences of the imperial destruction of his people's cultural treasures entrenched in the form of customs and traditions. It bears a testimony to his life, and as a result, falls within the bounds of testimonial literature.

Mphahlele extensively explores African literary identity in *Down Second Avenue* by portraying how (South) African people, passionately struggle to protect their cultural values. He is committed to this cause of striving to preserve and promote African cultural values which Africans hold dear to their hearts, as well as correcting the distortions the Europeans had about Africa. He does this by reconstructing the past with the view of redefining himself as an African. In other words, his identity as an African. He attempts to assist his society find itself after years of subjugation by reclaiming, among other things, their African oral heritage as opposed to the Western code of writing. Mazrui and Mphande (1993:39-40) note:

This juxtaposition of the Western-African divide on a dichotomous view of the orality-literacy continuum expectedly led to the emergence of a neonationalist school which sought to 'reclaim' orality as one of the many glories of the indigenous heritage of Africa. Oral literature came to be regarded as a hallmark, *sui generis*, of the African creative mind

which needed to be 'conserved' and protected against the imperialist onslaught of the written word.

Since African tradition is oral, orality becomes the central factor in the transmission of African cultural identity to posterity. Mphahlele encourages Africans to return to their roots of how to learn their ways as this will protect them "against the imperialist onslaught of the written word". He, therefore, seeks to reconstruct the past by deconstructing and reshaping the present. In *Down Second Avenue*, he endeavours to make Africans "have a dignified sense of African culture" through the use of the oral tradition (Gikandi, 2001:6).

Apart from providing the people with "entertainment", orality provides the community with stories full of moral values. Such stories are usually educative because they teach the people how to be in the right standing with the values enshrined in the community. They impart social mores in the people thereby bringing unity of purpose among them which helps transform them into focused people. In the African past, orality used to provide them with a sense of solidarity and empathy with one another. It connected them to their surrounding, making them feel at one and at peace with the environment around them. In times of tribulations, people resorted to music and dance for therapy, healing, and perhaps, even for the outlet of harmful emotions. This means that "there must be a certain appeal not only in what the performer is saying but also in the way it is said" (Okpewho, 1992:42) in order for the performance to produce the desired effect from the audience. It is this oral treasure which must be bequeathed to posterity for the attainment of a sustainable African cultural renaissance.

In *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele asserts African identity through the use of the philosophy of African humanism (*ubuntu*) imparted by means of folklore, myths, songs, dance, to reclaim the indigenous African heritage as a means of authenticating African literature and identity. His idea of African humanism encapsulates, *inter alia*, the notion of having warm feelings and being accommodative to one another as Africans. These humanistic cultural aspects (folklore, myths, songs, dance, respect) are verbally handed down from generation to generation. Pityana (1999:144) calls this treasured African value "human solidarity" which means that "one achieves true humanity through other people". Mphahlele also portrays his main characters as proponents of African cultural beliefs in the novel. This view is essentialist in that it assumes that the foregoing cultural aspects are indigenous to Africa, and therefore, unique to the continent. It posits that Africans are the chief custodians of this oral tradition. Kenyatta (1979:xiii) suggests:

The cultural and historical traditions of the Gikuyu (*African*) [my italics] people have been verbally handed down from generation to generation. As a Gikuyu myself, I have carried them in my head for many years, since people who have no written records to rely on learn to make a retentive memory do the work of libraries.

Kenyatta purports that orature was taught by impressing enduring cultural values on the mind of the listeners which they, through days of practice, could recall and recite when need arose. Orature compelled the audience to "rely on their own eyes, ears, and memory" (Nketia, 1973:88). In other words, children had a wealth of cultural treasure to memorise hence Kenyatta himself "carried them in my (*his*) head". This mental exercise was easy, one guesses, because as stories

were narrated, they were also concretised by being acted out, thereby making a lasting mental impression on the participants. This mental training practice of orature usually culminated in poetry, story-telling, song and dance contests being organised and adjudicated over by elders of the community. Prizes, though small, were given to best performers as tokens of encouragement. It was in this manner that Africans managed to preserve their rich oral tradition. There were no books to diarise the activities in as their brainpower served the purpose.

3.1.2 Exploitation as an undermining factor to identity

Exploitation has a direct negative bearing on identity erosion in that it creates poor self-image in the affected people. If people do not have enough to eat, they lose interest in everything around them and focus only on their stomachs. Their only concern will be on how to secure their next plate of food. They will dress shabbily, not bath well. This crushing exploitation will certainly make them feel inadequate and dehumanised. In *Down Second Avenue*, people, mainly women who are epitomised by Mphahlele's aunt Dora, struggled to earn a living from selling home-made beer, which the authorities regarded as illicit. This implies that there is a need for "economic empowerment" of women in order to carve a strong African identity (Guéye, 1999:252). This "illegal" activity often led to their beating and brutalisation or even arrests by the police. White policemen would hurl insults at them, calling them names such as "stinking Kaffir", "uss", "jou donder" (DSA:42) to further humiliate them, which means to take their humanity away from them. This harassment and abuse did not drift them apart, instead it cemented their unity and also helped in constructing their identity. These women sol-

diered on and remained courageous as they continued to send their "children to school with money from beer selling" (DSA: 41). Mphahlele depicts these women as stoical and as the backbones of their families. Robertson (1995:45) attests to this reality when she says that "women provide at least 70 per cent of subsistence needs by growing or gathering food, and in cities this function often continues as women are responsible for feeding their families".

In *Down Second Avenue*, exploitation is made clear through Mphahlele's encounter with white people. This happened after he passed his Junior Certificate with First Class. He did not have money to go on and do matric at Fort Hare University College and as a result, he had to look for work. He landed it as a messenger in a white lawyer's office. He fearfully describes his white boss as "a tall forbidding colossus" (DSA:137), which gives one a sense that the boss was fear-instilling and therefore, not easy and warm to relate with. When Mphahlele greeted him every morning when he arrived at work, he never replied. This made Mphahlele tremble every time he cleaned his ink pots. He appeared fearsome to him and Mphahlele hated this emotional torture meted out against him. Mphahlele writes:

I had my share of trouble with whites and their superior airs. It was, 'yes, John,' here; 'yes, Jim,' there; 'what do you want, boy?' here. I answered rudely where I could have myself heard distinctly. A few times I had white lads chasing me in order to beat me up for 'rudeness' and to 'put the Kaffir in his place' (DSA: 137).

Mphahlele was always irked by the whiteman's "superior airs", which implies the wrong perception white people had that they had faculties superior to him as a "Kaffir". The excerpt

above indicates that they knew what his real name was but they called him by different names such as "John, Jim, boy" just to demean him. In other words, the whiteman wanted to "inculcate attitudes of inferiority and dependence" in Mphahlele (Mzamane, 1991:179). Mphahlele resented this attitude and sometimes responded with "rudeness" as a form of retaliation. In other words, he was trying to reassert himself as both an African and as a person. This often earned him the wrath of many a racist person from the white community. This is because peoples' names indicate their identity, defining who they are. By calling him by a string of names, Mphahlele was being stripped of his identity. He was being given a new identity, which to him was valueless and inconsequential. His colleagues did not behave collegially towards him as they did not care who he was. He was only seen as an object to be sent around, an intruder in their territory. He "made tea and ran errands for the white girls" because to them he was merely a tea-boy, an insignificant other.

3.1.3 Identity through humanism (*ubuntu*)

In *Down Second Avenue*, Mphahlele articulates African identity through the use of African humanism (*ubuntu*) which advocates for African cultural renewal and regeneration. This is because, as Lo liyong(1991) puts it *Culture is Rutan*, which means that culture is the essence and centre of a people's life, of being. Ramose (2002:324) uses the words ethics, morality, and humanism interchangeably in his article. He defines ethics as "a science of morality, that is, the study of the meaning of good and evil with reference to human behaviour". In other words, *ubuntu* is an ethical, moral, and religious value based on the principles of empathy, sharing, and co-operation among the people. African humanism, therefore,

advocates for African moral rebirth and preservation. Mphahlele contends that in order for South Africa and Africa to recapture her battered identity, she should strive to revive her fragmented moral values. All the cultural technologies and behavioural perceptions (Asante & Asante, 1989:123), which tied Africa together and made her proud of who she was and where she was going during her halcyon days, need to be revisited and if need be, be customised to suit the current trends of time. Such cultural practices which qualify to be promoted include, *inter alia*, her indigenous languages, music, games, dress codes, myths.

Mphahlele argues that, if the aforementioned values are restored to Africa, humanness (*botho*), which is the spiritual ideal that asserts the selfless, basic respect for human nature in its entirety, will be realised. Resultantly, Africans will have a sense of purpose in their lives. Teffo (1999:153-154) asserts:

Moral decay, mainly attributed to the West, is a source of concern. The cycle of violence and criminality which has plagued South Africa during the past few years could be drastically reduced if we were to restore our moral fibre. To this end, the philosophy of *ubuntu/ botho* could assist us. As a cohesive moral value that is inherent in all mankind, once revitalised in our hearts and minds it would go a long way towards alleviating moral decay.

Teffo clearly agrees with Mphahlele that the only remaining hope for Africa to positively reconstruct herself is to resuscitate her principle of humanism. This humanism virtue is "inherent in all mankind", which means that we are born with it. It is infused in our system and therefore, lies very deep

in us. Unfortunately, it is a dormant phenomenon which is suppressed by all the things our senses feel. It, therefore, means that in order for one to activate this virtue, one has to dig deep, sacrifice a few carnal luxuries and focus solely on it. It is in this way that *ubuntu* can be "revitalised in our hearts and minds" and once rekindled, "it will go a long way towards alleviating moral decay". This means that once this virtue has dropped into the heart, it becomes spiritual and therefore, permanently placed for easy tapping during times of need. This is exactly what Mphahlele has done through his book *Down Second Avenue*, to see that the people's damaged moral fibre is restored and reconstructed in a way that it keeps the society connected to its roots, and not severed.

Mphahlele depicts the strongly held communal values through the preservation of rituals and customs such as weddings and funerals, the offering of assistance to neighbours, and showing respect for elders by Ma-Lebona. She seeks to rebuild "the value system of the nation" (Tucker in Landsberg and Hlophe, 1999:4). One fully understands her character because of what she says to other characters as well as what those characters say about her. What Mphahlele articulates in the book about her also helps one grasp who she really is in relation to African identity. She is portrayed as an assertive person who is good at story-telling, who humbly advises her people on how to conduct themselves around other people. In other words, she mentors people on how to behave and carry themselves in the company of their fellow South Africans. She confirms her story-telling prowess (her orality) when she says to her daughter Nkati about her would-be son-in-law:

'Your young man is too quiet for my liking. Such men can't be trusted. He will sit there as quiet as a mountain and say very little.' To him (son-in-law) [my addition] she said: 'I could never sit quiet like you, you know. When I was your age, I used to keep people listening attentively for hours' (DSA:63).

This narrative prowess may sometimes be misconstrued by, mainly Europeans, for empty gossip and idle-talking because Ma-Lebona could talk "for hours" on end. Every time she was on the floor, she would "keep people listening attentively". This means that she could keep the people under her storytelling spell and therefore, make them feel comforted about their dejection through those riveting narratives. The fact that she "could never sit quiet", which means that she could never sit without talking, serves as a recipe for the much-needed catharsis and entertainment among her people. South Africans were oppressed and depressed to the point where a mesmerising stress-reliever like Ma-Lebona was warmly welcomed.

Ma-Lebona argues in the book that any self-respecting African wife should be submissive, supportive, helpful, and respecting to her husband. All these points should culminate in "cooking for the husband" (Potash, 1995:76). This is a value which was treasured during the African past and Ma-Lebona seeks to resuscitate it by speaking nostalgically about the African wife who was a real wife and not a knife to her husband, as it appears to be the case today. A good African wife resiliently brings her household together by ensuring that peace prevails in the family. She serves as the fulcrum of the family in that unity revolves around her. Ma-Lebona, a rounded and believable champion of African belief system, al-

so argues for the veneration of the elders, who, in this instance are the in-laws, as African culture would have:

A good wife must be obedient to her mother-in-law, she must be able to wash, clean, cook, clean the house and look after her children well,' she always said. 'But the young girls we have today for daughters-in-law, Phoh! They are thick-headed and stubborn'

'Ever seen a modern girl able to cook?' grandmother said, spitting with gusto because this was her subject. 'We were taught to cook by the Boers - and Boers could cook, I don't know if they still can (DSA:59-60).

Ma-Lebona expresses disappointment at today's daughters-in-law because, she contends, they are "thick-headed and stubborn", which implies that the African personality in them is contaminated by outside influence, hence their disrespect for their in-laws which is unheard of in the African culture. Foreign influence has blighted their morals. Ma-Lebona also fulfils the African communal adage which asserts that every woman is every child's mother and every man every child's father by allowing Mphahlele and his siblings to sleep in her house when their parents had gone visiting. This selfless feeling of compassion and warmth, which is one of the hallmarks of *ubuntu*, indicates her strong desire for the renewal and preservation of African cultural values. She shares with the needy because she knows that "sharing is the most important value of the *ubuntu* philosophy" (Mabelebele, 2008:18). It also indicates that she considers other people to be more important than her. This is a virtue which will make Africa and the world a better place to live in. It also shows how inter-dependant Africans are on one another, which is also a fulfilment of the African proverbial expression which says: "*Motho ke motho ka batho*". This saying translates

as follows: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969:108-109), which means that a person's identity is shaped by people around him/her. In other words, if one prospers or fails, his or her failure or success becomes a group prosperity or a collective failure as he/she is a product of the community within which he/she finds himself/herself. Mphahlele declares:

We often went to sleep at Ma-Lebona's, opposite ourhouse, when grandmother and the other adult members of the family were going to be away for a few days (DSA:64).

Ma-Lebona's sharing of her valuable property with the Mphahlele children shows the amount of communal support which existed in Second Avenue. It also indicates a profound humanistic value and empathy for one another in the presence of the incisive oppression under which they lived. There was a deep-seated care and love among them. The fact that her house was "opposite our (Mphahlele's) house" shows that she was a genuine neighbour. This is also divine in that she loved her neighbours as she loved herself. Mphahlele attests to this *ubuntuism* concept which he subscribes to in his conversation with Manganyi (1981:9):

MANGANYI: One sometimes develops the impression that the kind of vitality that you've been talking about, that is the basis of your nostalgia, may have something to do with what I would describe as your compassion, your interest in ordinary folk, particularly in your short stories. I think this is quite clear. Your interest in what you see as a humanistic approach to existence.

MPHAHLELE: Yes, this is really it. I am very much attracted to humanistic existence, where people treat each other as human beings and not simply as instruments or tools; where people be-

come committed to one another as human beings without necessarily declaring the commitment; if one of their kind is in difficulties the others immediately rise to the occasion and do something about it.

This attraction to "humanistic existence" finds expression in the character of Ma-Lebona when she complains about her daughter Nkati and her son-in-law's disrespect for her as an elderly person. It, therefore, again means that these children despise African cultural beliefs which, to Ma-Lebona, will have dire consequences. She quips:

She kept reminding Nkati, whenever they met, that her man had no respect for old age and had talked to her as no young man, or even old woman, had ever done. 'Just like her father, this girl Nkati,' Ma-Lebona said. 'But as sure as the sun's riding high the wrath of the ancestors will break upon her one day' (DSA:65).

Elderly people are the custodians of the community's identity which is encapsulated in its norms and values. Young people tap their heritage and wisdom from them. It is, therefore, untoward for any young person to have "no respect for old age". Ma-Lebona swears that misfortune will befall Nkati and that "the wrath of the ancestors will break upon her one day" because of her waywardness. Coming from a disgruntled parent, this kind of statement, one may argue, carries a curse which may move from generation to generation. Apart from this, elderly people in the community deserve better treatment because they are weak and vulnerable by virtue of their fragility. The agile are, therefore, duty-bound to provide shelter and better life for the aged. Ma-lebona serves as a true champion of "African renaissance as a pre-requisite for rebuilding national and cultural value system" (Landsberg & Hlophe, 1999:4).

3.1.4 Identity through religious belief

I don't know if ever it did. What I do know is that about eight out of every ten educated Africans, most of whom are also professed Christians, still believe firmly in the spirits of their ancestors. We don't speak to one another about it among the educated. But when we seek moral guidance and inspiration and hope, somewhere in the recesses of our being, we grope around for some link with those spirits (DSA:64).

Many Africans resort to their ancestors who are "the living dead" (Mbiti, 1975:72), when they are beset by trouble because it is these spirits which give them their spiritual identity and self-respect. The spirits of their ancestors, they believe, give them a sense of survival, purpose, and meaning in life hence the traditional African religion is considered to be "vital, basic, mysterious and magical, and at the same time it knows how to survive in the midst of adversity. It is all-pervasive and has a distinct character" (Teffo, 1999:157). The low self-esteem which has been instilled into Africans by colonial education which regarded many African norms and values as backward, makes them feel ashamed of their roots to the point where they "don't speak to one another about it among the educated". They are no longer proud of their Africanity as they are gripped by self-denial. The moral degeneration and decay, which is prevalent in contemporary Africa today, stems from the lack of "moral guidance" which used to be provided by the centrality of African culture in the days gone by. Africa, particularly educated Africa, is today teetering on the precipice of identity crisis because they want to serve two worlds, an exercise which makes them "grope around for some link" with the past. Africans must truly go back to their roots, to the basics,

and stop being charlatans who straddle cultural lanes. They must convince themselves about the efficacy of the past in today's world. The idea that most educated Africans who "are also professed Christians, still believe firmly in the spirits of their ancestors" indicates a fierce cultural conflict among African communities, the primary cause of this being identity. Thus, though they seem to be experiencing identity dilemma, Africans are still grounded in their traditional beliefs. The word "firmly" suggests rooted, meaning that Africans want to remain the way they are, established in their own customs and traditions and practise them the way they used to do without any external interference. It may again, paradoxically imply a strong opposition to the white man's culture in favour of the conservation of Africa's cultural heritage on the one hand, while on the other, it may mean a docile acceptance of Western culture as they are self-confessed Christians. All these essentially show the extent to which European culture has plunged the African into a state of identity confusion by making him stand astride two cultures instead of creating an environment conducive to amalgamating the two cultures for the purposes of actualising what is good from both sides. Lo Liyong (1991:120) notes:

As far as we are concerned, everybody has his shrine guardian, every family has a shrine every clan or tribe has its major shrine and array of gods and goddesses. It is inconceivable to imagine a person or group without religion. The religion of your clan belongs to you. You never go from clan to clan selling, hawking your god, young, old or mythical. When guests come, European or Arab, you welcome them in your name, the names of your dead ancestors, on behalf of their ancestors.

3.1.5 Communal living

In the African past, Africans expressed their identity and oneness through the communal life which they led. Communalism is "a feeling of togetherness" towards one another (Biko, 1987:43). Though their exposure to the world was limited, this did not disturb the collective, blissful and harmonious lives they lived in their villages. In fact, wide exposure to the world has led to social ills such as greed and graft, which Africa is currently suffering from. It has removed a number of Africans from their true nature and plunged them into a state of a people without conscience, insensitive people who are numb to compassion. These values, one is tempted to say, are some of the hallmarks of African identity. It is, therefore, relevant when Mphahlele writes about the "communal fire-place" in Second Avenue (DSA:15) which served, not only as a source of warmth against cold weathers, but also as a symbol of emotional warmth for the oppressed Africans staying in the slums. Stories were orally told by older people such as Riba and Segone to the younger ones and these narratives provided consolation and solace to the audience. It made their hearts tick. Riba and Segone also narrated educational and morally edifying fables to the children, though some of them were factually painful, such as that one of the marriage break-up between Thema's parents which was caused by urbanisation. Ojaide (1992:44) confirms: "Traditionally, African literature is an informal evening fire-side school in which elders and parents teach the young ones ethics, morality, and the culture of the community. Thus African literature is traditionally didactic". Mphahlele (DSA:15-16) adds:

The communal fire-place. Men and boys of the village met here to talk important things and trifles, away

from women and girls. The only time women and girls were allowed to come near was when they brought supper in calabashes. Even then they were the younger set. The man whose wife was ill and maybe had no daughter to cook for him had his food with the others at the fire-place. Other women cooked for his sick wife.

We, the boys, had to bring wood with us from the veld when we came back with our goats, cattle or donkeys. While evening milking went on somebody made a fire for the night. We took turns to make the fire early in the morning and in the evenings. The fellow who was too lazy to carry wood just was not allowed to sit with us. He didn't want to be told to stay away either, and one felt disgraced by having to stay at home with the women and girls.

The communal fire-place served as an important place where older men of the community transferred their cultural heritage to the boys. The history, customs, and traditions were orally handed down to the boys. They were taught life skills such as cattle-milking and fire-making. These boys exchanged roles when carrying out these responsibilities which made everyone of them an active participant. They were exposed to men's roles in the community as opposed to women's. Laziness was totally discouraged as it was regarded as an unmanly phenomenon. These people acted out humanism as the readers experience it in its concrete form. Obee (1999:91) agrees with Mphahlele when she says:

At the African fireside, as Mphahlele describes it, the reader can also observe the African humanist philosophy as it is lived. There is a historic sense of ancestors as a source of strength and moral guidance. While listening to the African sage one imbibes his collective wisdom through proverbs, tales, and the recounting of tribal history and myths. Gossip is exchanged and manners and morals are imparted.

Humanism is also concretised when people interact with one another at the "communal water tap" (DSA:29). It is here where Mphahlele shows that he does not romanticise African humanism because one sees the community as a round entity. This roundness of Marabastad community finds meaning when Mphahlele argues that "sometimes the people quarrelled, then they laughed, then they eavesdropped and they gossiped" which indicates that they were characters with true human personalities not caricatures with cosmetic and unconvincing traits. They engage in jokes and fights, which is normal for people to do. It is a convincing portrayal of life in its fullness.

3.1.6 Identity of place

When Marabastad was razed, Mphahlele says that he felt stripped off his identity. This was because he identified with the place and felt at one with it hence the shell-like hollowness he felt on the inside of him. He was overwhelmed by the feeling of melancholic alienation which made him feel rootless. His displacement and dislocation made him feel soulless because it is this place (land) which makes him tick. He protests against forced removal because he feels it fragments and undermines his way of living. In other words, his identity was eroded. Obee (1999:88) describes the destruction of Marabastad as a "symbol for the author's and the community's spiritual death", which means that it is the heart and soul of the people.

Marabastad is gone but there will always be Marabastads that will be going until the screw of the vice breaks. Too late maybe, but never too soon. And the black man keeps moving on, as he has always done the last three centuries, moving with baggage (DSA:157).

Mphahlele confirms that though Marabastad "is gone there will always be Marabastads" which implies that he will never forget the place because he is who he is because of it. It defines him, his identity. The spirit of the place will continue to live in the people who used to stay in the place and this spirit will be passed on to posterity, verbally or in writing, thereby continuing the existence of Marabastad forever. Marabastad will, therefore, continue to influence and shape the identity and destiny of Africans for years to come. Mphahlele subtly shows that detribalisation and urbanisation, which result from land dispossession, also had an effect in the obliteration of African identity and humanism because they destabilised the African family unit, that is, its strength and cohesion. For instance, a man would leave his wife and children to go and work in a far-flung urban area thereby leaving his family to fend for themselves. When he arrives in the city he establishes a new city family with compromised African values. Mphahlele feels that this unfairly robs off the African's heritage. Obee (1999:95) acknowledges that the essence of African values in the cities is adulterated, hence the prevalence of moral degradation there:

Mphahlele continues to draw comparisons between his present life in the urban slum of Marabastad and his early years in rural Maupaneng, offering a commentary on the ways in which urbanisation has altered the lifestyle and fundamental humanism of city dwellers. In urban Marabastad people relieve themselves in buckets, rather than in nearby fields. Houses are lined up in a straight row rather than in a circle. People no longer visit back and forth nor do they sit around the "communal fire" and tell stories.

Mphahlele expresses unhappiness at urbanisation characterised by Marabastad in its comparison with the rural Maupaneng. He lashes out at urbanisation by contending that it has "altered the lifestyle" of the people, which implies that it has uprooted their "fundamental humanism". The infrastructural set-up is linear in Marabastad and not circular, a phenomenon which is foreign to Africa. People no longer visit one another's houses which means that they are no longer one another's keepers. Thus, urbanisation has successfully detribalised them.

3.1.7 Marriage

Mphahlele got married to his wife Rebecca, first, in a customary setting, and second, in a Christian milieu. This phenomenon gives one an impression of a creation of a sub-culture of Euro-African cultural co-existence in *Down Second Avenue*. This sub-culture is a construction of a new identity which seeks to dovetail the two cultures together hence Mphahlele's comment that it is "customary among both urban and rural Africans today to marry by civil rites and then have their union solemnized in church" (DSA:160).

3.1.7.1 Customary Procedure

In Mphahlele's South Africa, if a boy fell in love with a girl, he would make advances to that girl and propose love to her, unless the relationship was an arranged one. If she agreed to the proposal, the two would be in love without any physical contact involved until they are, after following several steps towards marriage, officially married to each other. Mphahlele went through the above-mentioned procedure in its entirety. He first saw Rebecca, "a young woman"

(DSA:154) of his age reciting a portion of literary text from Wordsworth and was attracted to her. He soon made arrangements to pay her a visit at her home in Sophiatown. No sooner did they meet than "a pact was made" (DSA: 154) between the two of them. They entered into a courtship for some time, which afforded them enough time to get to know each other better. The two lovebirds then decided on a date of marriage after which each one of them would then tell his/her parents about their decision. Mphahlele concedes:

Rebecca and I arranged to be married on 29th August 1945, which would be just after I should have started at the school. My mother was very pleased and looked the happier woman alive (DSA:156).

Parents of the two lovers do not get involved until their children disclose their love affair to them. These children are the captains of their romantic ship, as Mphahlele and Rebecca were. The next step would be for the parents of the two lovers to invite the family uncles and aunts to the home of the two lovers respectively. They would then inform the uncles about the intentions of the two lovers to marry each other and even set a date on which the groom's uncles would go to the bride's home to start the negotiations. These negotiations normally commence sometime before the actual wedding day. Mphahlele's *lobola* (bridesprice) negotiations were not an exception as they started "towards the end of 1944" which gave them a manoeuvring time of roughly eight months before the official wedding day.

3.1.7.2 *Lobola* Negotiations

Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1996:174) defines *lobola* as "a price paid, usually in kind, to a bride's family by the

bridegroom". This practice, which starts with intensive negotiations, occurs especially in tribal societies. In African communities, lobola payment is a vital part of the marriage custom. It is a communal and collective effort in that the kinsfolk of the two families are involved. Mphahlele started with "the African fashion", "the orthodox route" (DSA:156;160) by sending emissaries to Rebecca's house to ask for her hand in marriage and to open lobola negotiations. Lobola is usually paid in the form of cows, goats, or sheep and in monetary form but Mphahlele chose the monetary route and paid £60 towards the transaction. He gave his in-laws money and not cows because Marabastad and Sophiatown were peri-urban areas where livestock-rearing was illegal which, again indicates the toll urbanisation has on African identity. It is normal for tempers to flare up during the talks particularly if the groom's emissaries are inexperienced in the art of negotiating for a bride. Conversely, it may also mean that they differ in order to ultimately produce a good contract, a contract desirable and agreeable to all. Mphahlele confirms that both parties "lost their tempers" (DSA:160) because Rebecca's uncles "stood firmly on the bride-price of £60" which Mphahlele's uncles considered unreasonable. It was after lengthy negotiations that they finally agreed on the £60 and the *lobola* deal was, therefore, cut. It was only after the finalisation of the negotiations that, as custom would have it, "Rebecca and her mother came out to serve the guests" (DSA:160) as they were not allowed into the negotiation room during the process of the talks. Neither was Mphahlele allowed to be there as he says that he "had to wait elsewhere until the talks were completely over".

3.1.7.3 Marriage solemnisation and celebration

It is at the end of *lobola* negotiations that marriage is solemnised in the African culture but Mphahlele straddled over to the Western culture by having their "union solemnised in church" by The Native Commissioner (DSA:160). This clearly indicates the identity crossroads engendered by Western culture. It was on the 29th August 1945 that the wedding celebration took place. As custom dictates, multitudes of people from far and near were invited to come and witness the celebration with the two families. Two oxen were slaughtered to feed the "big crowds of people" (DSA: 161) invited there. The marriage service was held in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and not in the families' kraal as it was in the African past. People were dancing, singing, and ululating as shown in the "lu-lu-lu-lu-li-li-li" (DSA:161). The bride and the groom graced the occasion by participating in the "folk-dance" (DSA:161) with the bridesmaids and the groomsmen. A reception was held in the Community Centre in the evening where the newly-married couple would be welcomed to motherland and fatherland respectively. This is un-African but it was convenient for this sub-culture.

3.1.7.4 Home

After the wedding celebration, Mphahlele lived with his wife in the school house and later on bought a house of their own. He did not take Rebecca to Marabastad where she would live with her in-laws as per African culture. Though this step seems undermining to African identity, it is beneficial to Mphahlele in that it gave him a sense of focus as he managed to obtain a "B.A. degree as an external student of the University of South Africa" soon afterwards with Rebecca being

"a divine source of inspiration during these years of hard study" (DSA:166). She was a pillar of strength and a shoulder to lean on for her husband during these difficult times of study. Thus, she epitomises a true African woman in this regard.

3.1.8. A clash of cultures

Mphahlele also portrays a fierce clash of cultures in *Down Second Avenue*, and the primary cause, again, is identity. Africans want to remain the way they are, to practise their customs and traditions the way they used to do without any interference while the Europeans have contrary plans. They treat Africans coldly as is shown by Mr. Goldstein who, although he works with aunt Dora's husband at the museum, does not bother to think of carrying the laundry there for easy picking up by aunt Dora. He believes that he has a loyal servant in Mphahlele to perform that duty. As an African who is used to being treated humanely, Mphahlele feels mistreated by Mr. Goldstein when he does not meet him halfway with the laundry. Conversely, Mr. Goldstein does not see anything wrong with how he handles Mphahlele because in his culture, Mphahlele must earn his salary. This is a typical example of a clash of cultures, individualism versus humanism. Mrs. Singer is branded as a virago for shouting at her "girl" (female domestic worker) for beating her dog. This is because whites "regard their dogs much more highly than they would their servants" (Maibi, 2000:21). This is un-African and therefore, insensitive because in Africa people are more important than animals (things) hence this Sepedi proverbial expression: *Feta kgomo o sware motho*, meaning in times of trials, rescue preference must be given to a man (*motho*) not to a cow (animal) (*kgomo*). This cultural clash is a literary

theme which is not unique to Mphahlele. Some of his contemporaries such as Ngugi, in *The River Between*, also explore it when Waiyaki's father, Chege, tells him that he (Waiyaki) is the last in the line of seers, with Mugo wa Kiribo being the first, and that he is the one to lead his people to freedom. This is because Mugo wa Kiribo had prophesied a long time before that Waiyaki would be "a black messiah" (TRB: 38). The word "messiah" has a strong Christian connotation which implies a cultural fight between Africans on the one hand and Europeans on the other.

Though Mphahlele, like Ngugi and many other renowned African writers, lived in a rural village, he did not lose the essence of his African identity enshrined in *ubuntu* upon his arrival in Pretoria's Second Avenue, which is a metropolitan environment. He was not swayed by the multicultural milieu which would normally jolt many people into moral decay which culminates into one's loss of his/her identity. He did not experience any identity crisis even at the time when he was criss-crossing the continents. His sense of humaneness remained intact amid all the forces of de-Africanisation directed against him. The only salient challenge which perturbed him, particularly when he was in exile in European and Western countries, was an excruciating sense of alienation. He felt nostalgic towards his mother country, South Africa. He longed for her mountains, rivers, lakes, his mother country in her totality. Western individualism made him yearn more for African communalism and togetherness, the brotherhood and sisterhood of African people. He has this to say in his conversation with Manganyi (1981:28-29):

MPHAHLELE: When we went to France we felt so far away psychologically that it started to needle us. It was Rebecca who bore the brunt of alienation.

MANGANYI: Yes.

MPHAHLELE: France needled us, I think, because the European milieu, is pretty unfriendly. We felt alone, for the two years we were there. It was accentuated when we went to Kenya. This was another dimension of it.

MANGANYI: Yes.

The fact that Mphahlele's mother sent him to Christian schools (St. Peter's and Adam's College) in order for him to "come back and be able to look after yourself and the two (younger siblings) you're leaving behind" (DSA: 123), indicates the belief that Africa's socio-economic problems would only be solved by Western education. This notion is paradoxical in the sense that on the one hand, it opposes the white man's culture in favour of the conservation of Africa's cultural heritage, while on the other, it embraces the white man's education for survival and prosperity. This further indicates the extent to which European culture has plunged the African into the state of identity crisis by making him stand astride two cultures. Mphahlele goes to European schools, Christian missionary schools, to acquire the white man's education and comes back to deliver his people from the oppressive forces through the knowledge that he has amassed. He uses the barrel of a pen to do so. He also explains that people in the neighbourhood of the schools used to attend church in the schools' compound, which indicates how torn between the two cultures Africans were. Omotoso (1996:1) calls this "Living on the Seam of Two Worlds". Conversely, Ogude (1999:89) does not regard this as an identity crisis but as an attempt, by Mphahlele, to create "cultural synthesis" which is indispensable to Africa today.

3.2 *THE WANDERERS*

In *The Wanderers* published in 1971, Mphahlele takes literary account of his exile. Not only does he re-live his experiences, but he frames them in fiction narrative. Fiction promised a certain control over his life, and these novels offered a chance to adapt the vitality of his experiences in exile

(Thuynsma, 1989:92-94)

The Wanderers (1971) is Mphahlele's second novel to be published. Though it is not as popular as *Down Second Avenue* within the literary circles, it is also intriguing and riveting. In it, Mphahlele (Timi) continues as a vagrant "who drifts from Nigeria, France, Kenya, Zambia, and the United States of America" (Mashau, 2005:20) in a quest for who he really is in the midst of all the different winds which were sweeping the continent. Roscoe (1976:225) adds that Mphahlele, epitomised by Timi, moved "like a medieval scholar to campuses scattered through Africa and North America". *The Wanderers* is also a novel of self-affirmation and self-discovery. *The Wanderers* was written between the years 1957 and 1969, which covers a period of twelve years. Mphahlele writes: "The action in this novel spans a period of twelve years - 1957-69" (TW:5). He fictionalises personal and real life experiences, meaning that "he uses a variety of narrative devices to transform personal experience into fiction", in order to make his characters assume a true African identity by using autobiographical leanings to witness his appalling circumstances. This also enables his readers (mainly African) to identify with the experiences depicted in this novel because they are true to their situations. The novel is a "literary account of his exile" as it documents his exile experiences.

3.2.1 Book One

Mphahlele has started the novel *in medias res*, thereby making its plot intricate. He narrates the story through the use of flashback and flashforward techniques. The phrase *in-medias-res* is a Latin expression which means "in the middle of things" (Shaw, 1972:142). It is a literary term used where the events in the story do not follow their chronological order. The novelist may start the events in the middle of the book or at the end, thereby deviating from the normal sequential arrangement of those events. This technique is employed in order for the writer to attract the interest of the readers. Mphahlele opens the novel with the events which actually took place at the end in order to excite and prompt the reading appetite of his readers to desire for more reading. The book starts with Felang, Timi's son, killed in the line of duty while he was engaged in freedom fighting. Timi is still reeling from the shock of the news of the untimely death of his son at the hands of government troops when his former colleague and friend at Bongo magazine, Steve, comes in to confirm this sad tidings. This grand opening of the book will entice the reader to want to know more about the events which have led to the death of Felang.

The Wanderers is divided into four books, with the first book outlining Mphahlele's torrid life in Tirong where he wandered from one job to the next. This frustrating job-hopping enterprise stemmed from the fact that he was dismissed from his first job that he loved most, which is teaching, due to his participation in the political struggle for emancipation of his own people. He, therefore, becomes a wanderer in the country of his birth. People in South Africa were classified according to their race and class. There was an area for Af-

ricans, whites, coloureds, and Indians as per the Group Areas Act. Many people, mainly Africans, rented rooms because they could not afford to buy houses of their own. Even those who could afford to buy houses were not allowed to do so in the city of Tirong. This political and economic strangulation made them identify with one another. It brought them closer together. Poverty was abject and excruciating. Timi puts his belief in humanism into practice when he helps the family who lived next to him in the rented rooms. The man of that family had died of pneumonia and his wife could not bury him because of shortage of money. Timi took it upon himself and buried him (the man). He offered his services which included, *inter alia*, his money, time, and energy to arrange the funeral of his neighbour. Thus, he was in charge of the entire bereavement procedure. He confesses:

I hired a horse-drawn trolley. What little post office savings they ever had had run out months before anyhow. There was no burial insurance, so I had a coffin made by the carpenter down the street (TW:45).

This is a classical example of African humanism where people help one another in times of need. They selflessly share their resources in solidarity with their fellow fallen brother. Timi fully understands the dignity inherent in a human being, whether dead or alive, hence his positive contribution. Like a true African, he reveres the dead. In other words, he has a conviction that if the dead are given a proper send-off, they will rest in peace. This is what Mphahlele, through Timi's character, seeks to rekindle in Africans. His kindness springs from his upbringing. He grew up very close to nature, "in the country" where he looked "after cattle and goats" and climbed mountains and slept "under rocks" (TW:

66). Nature symbolises peace, calmness, and serenity which are sublime elements. A natural person, therefore, is the one who is at peace with himself, others, and God.

Timi further extends his helping hand to his not-so-privileged fellow Africans when he goes with Naledi to the potato farms at Goshem, a farm area on the outskirts of Tirong, to look for her long-lost husband. Such men were prisoners traded to white farmers in order for them to go and toil on the farms. Though they found that Rampa, Naledi's husband, had died, the warm, human, and helping effort by Timi was worth taking. When the two arrived at Ha-Kau, a village from which Timi's investigation about Rampa took place, they were hospitably welcomed by Shuping, the local teacher to whom Timi was referred by his friend, Michael. Shuping did not personally know Timi, let alone Naledi, but he embraced them as his fellow human beings, notwithstanding. This indicates that hospitality is one of the essential hallmarks of Africanity. Timi and Naledi wanted to pay for the accommodation Shuping was going to provide for them but he refused their offer by retorting: "Oh, you city folk! You always think you have to buy everything. I feel insulted" (TW:70). Shuping feels insulted because it is un-African for a brother to help out a desperate brother for a fee. He calls Timi "my brother" (TW:70), which shows not only the racial connection, but also the spiritual and soul connection, the African brotherhood. He offers them a "maheu" (drinkable African soft porridge) (TW:70) to drink in order for them to alleviate their hunger. It is customary, in the African culture, to offer visitors food when they come to visit, the belief being that they might be hungry after the long trip. Shuping still continues in the same vein. He has made his house to look African. Timi attests to Shuping's homely house:

The warm smells of cow dung, the cow dung that had been smeared on the floor, and the smell of earth, were just as we had found them in the afternoon, just as they had been part of my life in my boyhood, and were never really recognized as *smells*. They were simply part of the smell of life (TW:77-78).

Shuping's house was a traditional African mud house smeared with cow dung. To Africans, this type of house is homely. The smell of the cow dung was appealing and welcoming because it was "part of the smell of life". This suggests that though it was repugnant, it was also life-giving. It ran in their system and therefore, formed part of who they were. Conversely, it may be indicating the crushing poverty under which Africans lived. They acquiesced to the harsh conditions under which they lived and unwillingly loved them because there was nothing they could do about it. They got used to suffering and hardship, if it is possible to embrace such discomfort. The only thing that brought them together was their unity of heart and oneness of spirit, their empathy with one another. Shuping confesses to Tumi:

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.

It is this spirit of camaraderie which kept Africans alive under these hopeless circumstances. It afforded them the strength and courage to face the next day with gusto. Poverty never prevented them from reaching out for their goals in life. The fetid smells of the slums served as a tonic for them to reach greater heights. Those who were weak were taken by the hand by those who were stronger, as Timi did to Naledi and *papa* Joas who died next door of pneumonia. This gesture, which was reciprocated by every one of them, solidified the

"people's will to live, to survive, to stay on top of the rubble and not allow it to bury them underneath" (TW:122). People put one another's interests first and theirs last. It was in this way that their spirits were enlivened, quickened and emboldened to move on.

3.2.2 Book Two

Timi realised that he was no longer adding value to the society as he should hence he took a reluctant decision to leave the country of his birth and go into a self-imposed exile. He did not even treat his colleagues at Bongo magazine to an official farewell hence Steve's, his white friend, correctly surmises after not seeing him for some time:

It became obvious that he had skipped the country, or was on his way to the border between South Africa and Botswana in the west. The rascal: he might have waited for me to come back from Dinokana. First class job he did of that Naledi story. Surprised himself, too. Never really liked to be a journalist (TW: 138).

Steve reminisces lovingly about Timi's intellectual and writing prowess. He acknowledges that though he was a good journalist as shown in the "first class job he did of Naledi story", he "never really liked to be a journalist". He loved teaching passionately. Timi's upright character made Steve introspect very intensely about the oppression the Europeans meted out to Africans and came to the conclusion that it was not only unfair but also inhuman to do that to other fellow human beings. Steve consents that people are all human beings irrespective of their colour or creed. He contends that "cutting across all these (man-made) disparities are one's dreams" (TW:136), meaning that notwithstanding these privi-

leges that he was enjoying as a white person, the bottom line is that he was a human being. It is this revelation which made Steve undergo a fundamental change of heart, a spiritual heart surgery towards Africans. He wanted to make a contribution towards changing the socio-political conditions of Africans for the better. He argues:

I admire people like Ruth, Hilda, Helen, Rusty, Albie, Jan, Breyten, who have been tortured under detention and in solitary confinement to force them to inform on African and White politicians. And the thousands more from the African, Indian, and Coloured side who are on Merino Island, who are in jail on the mainland, whose dependants live in constant grief, in constant deprivation (TW:136).

Steve looks at the political activists with admiration because they were making a tangible contribution towards the emancipation of the masses of the people, African blacks in the main. Some of them were "tortured in detention" for this worthy cause. Steve's sudden realisation adds a new dimension to the self - worth of the people in that it creates a new form of identity, a multiracial identity which argues for better life for all the people. That people, irrespective of their background, religion, colour, or creed belong together, to God, and to the world they live in. Steve's change of heart was genuine in that he ultimately saw a potential wife in Naledi and not a black, backward kitchen "girl". He eventually got married to her in a multiracial marriage ceremony which symbolises non-racialism which forms a new form of identity in the novel.

3.2.3 Book Three

Timi, like the ANC freedom fighters who, during the liberation struggle, went into exile in the neighbouring states and other states, skipped the country via Francis Town (in Botswana) through Zambia and into Iboyoru in search of identity. Exile separated him from his family because he crossed the border(s) alone, leaving them behind. He took up a teaching post in Iboyoru's city of Sogali and for the first six months, he was tormented by internal conflict. He was torn between divergent streams of mentality, shredded apart by his longing for his family and a sense of communal alienation which was commonplace in Jericho. He even went to the extent of doubting "the wisdom of the move" (TW:192) from South Africa to Iboyoru. This internal strife made him do "some intense thinking and soul-searching" (TW: 192) because he could no longer understand himself well as he seemed confused. His sense of identity was getting blurred, it was in crisis. It was with time that Timi got healed from the dilemma of the identity of place, which confirms the healing power of time. Mphahlele argues:

Timi came to identify Sogali's characteristic smells. It was always like that with him: he wanted to identify with a locale, assimilate it through his physical senses. During the day, there was the strong smell of boiling red pepper (TW:193).

Timi ultimately felt at ease and at one with his new environment. He got used to the "smells" of the place, which means that he got attached to the place and, therefore, gave himself entirely to it; his energy, his emotions, his feelings, his time and his intellect. This is because, unlike in South Africa where towns and cities were the "white man's exclu-

sive" (TW:195) enclaves, Iboyoru "was African" and, therefore, compatible with his general outlook on life. Though he identified with the place, the experience was nightmarish in that it did not change the fact that he was an outsider, a foreigner on his continent. This created, oxymoronically, a comfortable discomfort in him as the place became tyrannical to him. It caused in Timi what Mphahlele calls "the tyranny of place", a kind of alienation from one's home that only the affected person would understand:

Six months of knocking about; of getting to know himself, to know alienation, aloneness, nostalgia, the longing to be back in the fire, just so long as he would be suffering along with others of his kind. He longed for his next-of-kin, for his friends. He thought much about the jazz club he had made it a weekly ritual to attend. The letter from Kush had aroused in him a painful desire to be back among those struggling to survive. He thought now how much it was all patchwork, this effort to find outlets for one's interests in the vast condition of insecurity (TW:197).

Timi felt alone in the company of his friends in Iboyoru. He physically ran away from South Africa and its segregationist policies but on his inside, he wished he were back there "among those struggling to survive". He considers his leaving South Africa "patchwork" because he thought that it would afford him spiritual and physical therapy and fulfilment only to realise that it provided him with superficial satisfaction. One senses a feeling of guilt in Timi in his "longing to be back in the fire, just so long as he would be suffering along with others of his kind". He thinks he is a coward for having abandoned his people instead of fighting the injustices alongside them to the bitter end. His conscience gnaws him as he visualises the jazz meetings which they ritualistically attended on a weekly basis, musical jazz meetings which

helped carve their identity. He had "a painful desire" to be with the suffering people of South Africa. This nostalgic hurt makes him regret his departure from South Africa. He is always in deep thoughts about his immediate family members, particularly his brother, with whom he lost contact as they "grew apart" (TW:198) from each other, blame it on Western education. It has caused a rift among siblings, parents and their children, and relatives. This coldness ensues from the class structure which education fuels. Educated people will normally associate with people of their educational class as they will discuss things they commonly share and vice versa. This means that their uneducated relatives have little or nothing to dialogue with them about and will, therefore, feel excluded. This immensely worried Timi. Mphahlele asserts:

Timi was to continue puzzling over the effects of higher education on relationships between people, over the cruel rift that came between mother and son, father and son, brother and sister who were not of the same degree of education or literacy. It pained him (TW:198).

African identity is further demonstrated in the conversation between Timi and his friend Doris about the type of content which must be taught to children in schools. Doris argues:

that we ought to teach our children what we think will be of use to our country - an African country - not what will please British examiners. Tell me the name of anybody else who's trying to do the same in this second half of the twentieth century - oh-, besides Taiwo Shola (TW:203).

The debate advanced by Doris that African curriculum must be revised to suit the African setting holds water because a person better understands things closer to him/her than things foreign to him/her. This is also logically correct be-

cause if an African teacher teaches from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex, then what he/she teaches "will be of use to our country - an African country", and not what comes from afar. After all, charity begins at home. This should not be misconstrued to mean that Africa wishes to do away with everything European. She only wants her traditions and customs to filter down and be known by her children before they move on to study other people's cultures. It, therefore, does not come as a surprise when Doris speaks commendably about a man like Taiwo Shola who champions Afrocentric education in the mist "of the twentieth century" identity crisis. Africa is also not completely immune to the creation of identity crisis Europe has started. This fact is prevalent in the post - independence Africa in which African leaders, display a debilitating sense of avarice for power which is normally characterised by oppressive tendencies from the state President and his ruling party. Instead of reconstructing their continent, they destroy it through their corrupt practices. Iboyoru is not an exception as her president, president Batsia (nicknamed Peacemaker), as satirised by Mphahlele, forgot about the people who voted him into power after he assumed the presidency and "became obsessed with the external trappings of power" (TW:206). In other words, he focused on trivial things, such as erecting his statue, instead of channelling the state funds towards addressing the fundamental challenges of life, such as building houses, hospitals, schools, clinics, his people were facing. Mphahlele confirms:

He became obsessed with the external trappings of power: a statue of himself, an international hotel, a large auditorium, had the old castle renovated and furnished expensively, borrowed money from

overseas to finance the construction of a harbour and Faraji Dam.

(TW:206)

It must, however, be acknowledged that it was not wrong for president Batsia to infrastructurally develop Iboyoru but it was grossly wrong of him to start with inappropriate projects. This means that he could not prioritise his country's challenges well. His people lived in abject poverty and as such needed poverty relief programmes as urgently as possible. They wanted houses because they lived in sordid and squalid conditions, clean water, good educational institutions, effective health facilities. Instead, he married and re-married and had children by different women as indicated in the conversation of the people in the Bar Lounge:

Then he married the daughter of an Arab oil potentate in the Middle East. People in the bars, on the beach, at the market, in night clubs voiced their amazement in different ways at the Peacemaker's marriage

"And he has a child with a Tanka daughter - did you know that?"

"What kind of children will they have?"

"What do Arabs care about Africans anyway? They despise us" (TW:206).

President Batsia did not take kindly to constructive criticism, particularly if such came from "the literate class of people" (TW:205). He felt shaky in his position if enlightened people made contributions towards the redevelopment of Iboyoru hence his harsh response to that by incarcerating such critical intellectuals. He would summarily retort by saying: "Put him away" (TW:209). Thus, he suppressed opposition politics because of the unfounded fear of being usurped from power. He thought that by virtue of being the first

elected African president of Iboyoru, he qualified to be on the throne for life. He convinced himself that "the gods have anointed him" (TW:207) for that position hence his self-seeking and self-serving attitude towards his people. The people were, therefore, not given "the freedom to criticise him and his government". The peacemaker started to show his true colours as he suddenly transformed into a monstrous troublemaker. Iboyoru "teemed with government informers". Freedom became a nightmare for them as "the air was thick with suspicion and whispered stories". The supposed unifier of the nation became its divider because he sowed some seeds of mistrust among the citizens. It was only a matter of time when the military toppled him in a bloodless *coup d'état*. People were happy but their happiness did not last long because *coup d'états* became the hallmark of independent Africa. A new form of identity, characterised by greed for power, was forged as one president after the other was toppled. Corruption and self-interested politics became the order of the day, a norm, because one oppressive leader was replaced by another bad leader, justifying Armah's writing of the novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). This leadership crisis became a vicious circle of mediocrity because "corruption is (was) merely being replaced by corruption" (TW:212). Aliyi confirms this in his conversation with Awoonor:

"Don't depend on it," Aliyi remarked. "Africa has always died to the rhythm of its own dance and laughter" (TW:209).

Aliyi means that Africa has created a self-destructive political system which is busy sinking her into the doldrums of a chaotic mess. The song is still there but it is a malicious one, laughter is still prevalent but it is a mischievous one.

Greed for power and wealth-amassing which masquerades as service delivery for the poor is the order of the day. This is clearly seen when Batsia marries "the daughter of an Arab oil potentate in the Middle East" because he wanted to create oil wealth path for himself and not for Iboyoru. Another thorny problem which plagues Iboyoru's and Africa's political stability is tribal and ethnic clashes which lead to ethnic wars, all because of hunger for power and not for genuine service to the people. This challenge also befell president Batsia because several of his advisors and ministers whom he eventually looked askance at "had emerged from an ethnic group in the north" (TW:205) of the country. When they voiced their opinions, because in a democracy freedom of speech is granted, Batsia disciplined them or perhaps even cleansed or purged them. Timi aptly observes this inhuman phenomenon when he says that human beings are, by nature evil and mean which may further suggests that this problem may not necessarily be unique to Africa but it might be a universal, timeless problem. He argues that human beings always "try to climb out on each other's backs" and in the process "create a little comfort for our (*their*) single selves and single families" (TW: 213). Graft is rife in Iboyoru. When Timi wanted a driver's licence, the traffic officer wanted to sell it to him. The officer asked him whether he wanted the driver's "licence through the front door" (TW:232) or whether he would come to his home to talk about it. He immediately gives Timi his business card for further communication. This is the crux of what Mphahlele seeks to drive home to in this section of the novel; the fact that Africa is trapped in a self-consuming web of destruction in her endeavour to save herself from Western colonization. It is a new sub-culture which is plaguing contemporary Africa during the post-independence period.

Timi realised that the only way to solve this rot is through education. He believed so fervently that African humanism, taught through African literature was the only way to salvage Africa out of her morass. He strove for the introduction of African literature in every university he taught, though in certain instances he met with fierce opposition. This means that he understood that through proper teaching of African literature, Africa's mess will be turned into a good message to the world. He preached *ubuntu* through "lecturing on radio, at writers' workshops" as well as through the publication of "a literary journal to stimulate Iboyoru writing" (TW:240).

Timi did not lose his true African identity amid all the political upheavals in Iboyoru. This is seen when he accepts Steve's request for his wife Naledi to sleep at over his house in Sogali from the burial of her mother in South Africa. Not only does Timi welcome Naledi in his house because she was their family friend, but he did so also because he understood what had delayed her at home after the funeral of her mother. She stayed behind in order to ensure that the African custom of "the after-burial ritual had been completed" (TW:240). Timi embraces the fact that Africans perform ritual cleansing after the passing on and burial of close relatives. He moves from Sogali, which is a metropolitan city in Iboyoru, to Takora, which is a town on the outskirts of Iboyoru, where people were still culturally inclined. They were still true to their African roots. Mphahlele contends:

In Takora, the drums come to Timi a persistence he had never known in Sogali. The ancestral springs? But his ancestors had thrived in other climes, they had stamped their feet, clapped their hands to other rhythms. They had populated the maize and sorghum fields, they had followed their cattle and goats in search for grazing; they had drunk beer

from corn and wild fruits and not palwine; they had fought other wars with other weapons (TW:248).

Timi felt more at home in Takora than in Sogali because African identity and reality was still celebrated in there. Sogali was veering towards westernization, to Timi's disappointment. The dancing to the drums, the stamping of feet, and the rhythmic clapping of hands gave Timi a new leaf on life, it injected freshness into his system. He felt more at home, at peace with himself and his environment. People in Takora exuded warmth and hospitality as they helped one another in "the maize and sorghum fields". In other words, they "populated" the fields, which means that they tilled the land in large groups which allowed them space to share responsibilities and the rigours of the work. The word "populated" suggests group (team)-working which is normally labour-intensive based on the selfless assistance of one another. This is at the heart of African identity. Timi, the wanderer, leaves Iboyoru for Kambani in Lao-Kiku, East Africa, at the end of Book Three, still searching for a true African identity.

3.2.4 Book Four

Timi took up a teaching post as a lecturer in Kambani College where he introduced "African literature into the Honours syllabuses" (TW:303) in an attempt to rekindle African identity. His idea was well received by his seniors in the Department of English, to Timi's joy. He strove to deconstruct the myth the British had about Africa and their policy of indirect rule of having "turned this part of Africa into a piece of England" (TW:314). He pushed for African literature to be analysed using Afrocentric and not Eurocentric literary standards. He debates the "question of standards" (TW:325) with

his British friend John, who contends that Africa must follow the literary standards "of the United Kingdom" which, to him (John), "are also universal" (TW:325). Timi begs to differ with John by dismissing his (John's) contention when he says that John was "born in a wrong country". This indicates that Timi regards John's input on literary standards to be lacking in depth and substance.

Timi accepts European influence but only if it is followed on Afrocentric standards. The same can be said of multiculturalism. His son Felang was changed into a rebel by multiculturalism with its concomitant vagueness because Felang pursued it in a wrong way. The boy despised the policies of Africanism and became totally assimilated into the European culture. He preferred white friends to black friends and when his white friends visited his house, he would derive pleasure as he, together with them, "bully the servant and even drive terror into him" (TW: 331). His father confronted him about this problem by reminding him that he was black and that "the sooner you (he) wake(s) up to that fact the better". Felang eventually embraced Africanism and got deeply involved in the liberation politics. He joined the African Nationalist guerrilla forces which were fighting for the total liberation of the African continent from the colonial powers. Felang became unfortunate because he was killed in the line of duty. Timi's contract was also not renewed at Kambani College because the appointment committee did not understand "Africanization, as they call(ed) it. They want(ed) to employ a fellow finishing his Master's at Leeds" (TW:338). Timi was, therefore, sacrificed because of his belief in African identity. His son was also compromised because of his fight to repossess what was rightfully his, African identity. Notwithstanding this seem-

ing setback, the struggle for the total liberation of Africa continued.

3.2.5 Symbolism in the novel

The novel operates on a symbolic level with characters used to symbolise ideas or objects Mphahlele wishes to project. Shaw (1972:142) describes a symbol as "something used for, or regarded as representing something else". It is, therefore, a word, phrase, or any other expression which has a myriad of associated meanings. The phrases "used for" and "representing a thing" are relevant in this instance in the sense that Timi represents or stands for Mphahlele. These represented things can either be animate or inanimate. Baldick (1990:30) confirms Shaw's definition of a symbol by saying that a symbol is "anything that stands for or represents something else beyond it - usually an idea conventionally associated with it". By "something beyond it" Baldick suggests that a symbol is loaded with meaning and therefore, allows for a multiplicity of views from the reader. Morner and Rausch's (1997:40) definition of a symbol is more apt for this study because it relates directly to literature:

In literature, a symbol is usually something concrete - an object, a place, a character, an action - that stands for or suggests something abstract.

Morner and Rausch imply that the use of symbolism is always intertwined with characterisation because characters are used as symbols in as much as symbols are used as characters. Writers often use the main characters as symbols of ideas or things they intend to depict. These main characters are usually complex, which means that they are shielded from the

scrutiny of the reader. They do not have "label names" which are names which define who they are. Names such as Happiness, Comfort, Doctor, fall within the precincts of these wishful names. These characters start and end with the book and are therefore, fully rounded and credible. They are not plainly painted because they are not caricatures. Mphahlele is no exception when it comes to the use of symbols as characters in *The Wanderers*. Timi symbolises Mphahlele himself, Tirong City stands for Pretoria City, Karabo symbolises Rebecca who was Mphahlele's wife, Bongo magazine represents Drum magazine while Felang stands for Mphahlele's first born son. Thus, Mphahlele has used symbolism to fictionalise his work and therefore, save himself from the possible arrest by the authorities of the time who would have taken offense at the manner in which he has satirised them had he written the novel factually. Conversely, he has used symbolism in order to semi-autobiographise his book because all the events in *The Wanderers* are a representation of his real life experiences.

3.2.6 The autobiographical text

In *The Wanderers*, Mphahlele continues with his *leit motif* of the search for his African identity through the character, Timi. In it, Timi, who epitomises Mphahlele's real life experiences, like Kurtz in *Heart Of Darkness*, undertakes a twelve year long soul-searching journey into the African interior in a quest to discover who he really is. In other words, Timi's journey into the interior, just like Mphahlele's, is a journey into the self. He searches for "it" in Okara's (1970:13) words. It is a journey of self-discovery, a trip into the nature of humanity in that it helps him understand other people better. Mphahlele left South Africa hoping that he will find peace in the other African states only to have his expecta-

tions bitterly reversed as he encounters the fundamental truth about human nature. Exile becomes a nightmare to him. He becomes a vagrant who moves from one country to the next in search of asylum. He is not warmly welcomed everywhere he goes, which means that his identity is in crisis:

Timi's long journey into the interior of Africa is also a journey into himself, in relation to his family and the continent. It is the story of exile, the often soul-mutilating process it can be. The road into exile is strewn with several casualties. There are no heroes, outside the possibility of return and the war to reclaim your country. But that can often be but a romantic vision. Which is why I intentionally left the ending of this novel open: no resolution; only suspended disbelief; hard questions; disruption of family life; rejection and acceptance of black aliens in African countries; the continued attachment of these to their former colonial masters; and so on (TW:6).

This novel also veers in the direction of autobiography (testimonial literature) in that it reveals striking similarities with Mphahlele's real life experiences. This notion of testimonial (semi-autobiographical) literature also obtains in other distinguished African literary writers works such as Ngugi wa Thion'go.

Mphahlele, therefore, explores African identity in *The Wanderers* by portraying how African people, through Timi, passionately struggle to search and preserve their identity. This struggle spills over into his other novels. He is committed to this cause of striving to safeguard cultural values which Africans hold dear, as well as correcting the distortions the Europeans had about Africa. He does this by reconstructing the past with a view to re-establishing himself as an African, in other words, his identity as an African.

3.2.7 The nightmarish journey

Timi left his motherland in search of a home away from home in the neighbouring African states only to be met with almost the same animosity that he thought he had run away from. He becomes a homeless vagrant on his own continent, who moves from one academic institution to the next in search of stability and serenity. Exile is not as rosy as he thought it would be as his own African brothers treated him like an interloper:

And so the odyssey of Timi Tabane and his family begins: a harrowing trek along the ravaged west coast of Africa in search of refuge; teaching in high schools and universities; then on to black yet still colonial East Africa. Tabane has joined 'The Wanderers', outcasts on their own continent, a group of intellectuals and political activists - both black and white - stripped of home, country and hope, drifting from one turbulent country to another, victims - and perpetrators - of the violence that has engulfed them (TW: Back Cover Jacket).

3.2.8 Juxtaposition

Timi's struggle for socio-cultural freedom bears a strong resemblance to Njoroge in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* and, thereby making it the African challenge. Njoroge, like Waiyaki, pins his hope for Gikuyuland's future in the Western education, in a way breaking apart his identity. He passes from a community-run primary school and progresses to a missionary high school, Siriana, to get further education with the hope of coming back and sensitise his people about their appalling socio-economic and political conditions. He sees, like Timi does, the breaking apart of his identity as a catalyst for

the preservation and promotion of his people's cultural beliefs, norms and values. To him, education is liberating rather than limiting. This is a continuation of the prophesy of the coming of the black messiah sounded by Chege in Ngugi's *The River Between*. Unfortunately, Njoroge's aspirations are shattered by the killing of Jakobo, his family's landlord, which leads to his withdrawal from school by the police because they accuse him of being an accomplice in the murder. Ngotho, like Ngugi's father, does not have a land of his own hence his living as a peasant-tenant, an *ahoi*, on Jakobo's land. Jakobo and other Africans of his kind have been chosen by the British imperial government in their policy of indirect rule, to control the people on their behalf in the land of their birth. The people, epitomised by Ngotho's family, feel cheated of their land, which is regarded as one of their most important cultural assets. They accuse Jakobo of acting in cahoots with the enemy, hence his murder. Gikandi (2000:81) remarks:

We might begin by recalling that the central aspects of Ngugi's biography revolve around the love and devotion of the mother, the tenuous authority of the father, the hopes and expectations represented by the colonial school, and the concurrent terror and romance of "Mau Mau". As we saw in the introduction, Ngugi's parents were *ahoi*, landless tenants at will; and in a patriarchal culture in which authority was vested in male heads of households and notions of wealth and virtue were derived from the ownership of land, the state of radical displacement engendered by being a tenant was particularly hard on the father. Without the authority represented by ownership of land - which Kenyatta had already defined as the key to understanding the most important elements of Gikuyu identity, including notions of space, time, and self - heads of such households were condemned to states of doubts, recrimination, and guilt.

3.3 CONCLUSION

The above discussion shows the ways in which Mphahlele, supported by other distinguished African writers such as Ngugi, attempts to raise his people's awareness about their identity, that is, who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. He emphasises humanism as the main cultural aspect peculiar to African identity and to show his belief in this positive aspect of the African tradition. Thus, in Mphahlele's novels, African humanism has "been removed from anthropology and revalued as living, literary inheritance" (Chapman, 2003:2). He portrays the African's struggle to preserve their cultural inheritance such as weddings and funerals, offering assistance to neighbours, and respect for elders. These are some of the cultural beliefs central to South African identity and, therefore, African identity. However, Mphahlele, like Ngugi, acknowledges, as outlined in his earlier works, that Africans should embrace Western education without losing the essence of their identity. Thus, Western education is welcome if it is for the benefit of Africa and Africans.

CHAPTER FOUR

IDENTITY IN MPHAHLELE'S *CHIRUNDU* AND *AFRIKA MY MUSIC*

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chirundu (1980) is Mphahlele's creative self-writing work which was written when he was still in pursuit of an African national identity through the use of African humanism as a unifying force behind the political struggle for emancipation from colonial forces. In it, Mphahlele asserts that Africans should form a united front and fiercely fight for their liberation through the revitalisation of *ubuntu* as a moral value. This is part of the quest for African identity, collective identity. African humanism gave him hope to struggle for the future in which African identity would be preserved and respected. Sustenance of African unity and identity will further be maintained through communal living among Africans. This novel also portrays the innocuous onset of moral decay and the disintegration of the traditional social and cultural fabric during Africa's (Zambia) nascent stage of independence. In short, the novel shows the struggle for political and social identity while at the same time portraying the dawn of a new identity.

Afrika My Music (1984) on the other hand, continues in the vein of a quest for national identity which is recognisable when Mphahlele uses orality in the form of song and music, as well as other customary practices such as African magic, language, dress code, as the main facets of African identity. Obee (1999:156) observes:

With the publication of his memoir *Afrika My Music* and of *Chirundu*, Mphahlele provided the answer to Berth Lindfors' question, raised nearly two decades after Mphahlele's own return: "When black South African writers currently living in exile begin to return home in the next few years, what kind of literature are they likely to produce?" (1993,70). Once again, Mphahlele served as a trailblazer. His answer to Lindfors's question, before Lindfors thought to ask it, was to write one of the first South African memoirs of a returning political exile - an exploration of themes of loss, bitterness, and reconciliation. In doing so, Mphahlele turns to forms and conventions rooted both in African and Western traditions. *Afrika My Music* is African insofar as it examines self-in-community and draws on oral forms such as the *isibongo* or praise poems of naming as well as on the eastern and southern Bantu (African) traditional hero tales - epic narratives, interspersed with songs, in which the hero returns home at the end of an epic journey to far-off places. In such epics the hero's trials are sometimes precipitated by a king or father's rejection of son (father and son conflicts are recurring, painful theme in nearly all of Mphahlele's works and are brought to a resolution in *Father Come Home*). The hero then having triumphed over forces of nature and magic returns to his rightful home and to his people.

It must, however, be added that, just like in *Down Second Avenue* and *The Wanderers*, Mphahlele wrote these novels (*Chirundu* and *Afrika My Music*) in line with African communal humanism which has its roots anchored in the discovery of oneself through others, the examination of the "self-in-community", which is part of finding one's identity. Mazrui and Mphande (1995:177) support this assertion by using Ngugi as an exponent of African oral tradition:

Ngugi's use of the griot (oral) [researcher's italic] tradition is present in his early writings, too. In *The River Between*, for example, Ngugi describes Chege as knowing "more than any other per-

son, the ways of the land and the hidden things of the tribe. He knew the meaning of every ritual and every sign. So, he was all the head of every important ceremony" (1965:7). In adopting the oral style of a griot, Ngugi, like Chege, wants to "guard this knowledge and divulge it to none but the right one(s)." Yet Ngugi's "right ones" become the children, students, farmers, and workers that he eventually discovers in his later works. As a 'master of eloquence' in his early novels, Ngugi chronicles Gikuyu genealogy and Kenyan history as portrayed by the deeds of the Mau Mau movement. This use of orality serves the purpose primarily of a master of the spoken word that also has the power to charm, to heal, to divide. Narrating the troubled history of his people, Ngugi offers a healing remedy for those wounded and betrayed by the Mau Mau.

African identity is encapsulated in the continent's cultural norms and values which are passed on from generation to generation through orality which takes the form of storytelling, myths, songs, legends, and dance.

4.2 CHIRUNDU

Chirundu, like all the other works by Mphahlele, forms part of his commitment towards recording Africa's history of the struggle for the total emancipation from the European invasion through, mainly, Afrocentric means. He seems to be prompted by the "Negritude concern that [Africans] have been uprooted from their African cultural origin" (Rafapa, 2006:16). In its three-part narrative, Mphahlele fictionally expresses his desire for political and cultural freedom which forms part of the identity of African people as a nation. Even though the novel records the challenges Africans face in the post-colonial era, Mphahlele urges them to shrug off the demon of neo-colonialism which seems to be rearing its ugly head in the post-independence Africa. Though Mphahlele

acknowledges the primacy of the African approach in solving Africa's problems, he, however, agrees to adopt forms and conventions rooted both in African and Western traditions. In other words, he wants to explore Africa "in relation to the European encounter with her (Africa)" (Okita, 1992:180). He, therefore, implies that pure African identity no longer exists and that a middle ground has to be found. Soyinka (1979:xii) supports this view in the preface of his essays:

Nothing in these essays suggests a detailed uniqueness of the African world. Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history and mores; in such a total context, the African world, like any other 'world' is unique. It possesses, however, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity. To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, an attempt to perpetuate the external subjugation of the black continent.

Mphahlele uses the European legal court and nomenclature, such as bigamy, to settle Tirenge and Chirundu's marital problems in this novel, probably, as an acknowledgement of the unavoidable presence of modernity in Africa, though this modernity has to be available on African conditions. Obee (1999:179) contends:

Similarly Chirundu, just as he has discovered what James Olney refers to as "pleasurable polygamy", finds Western law, government, and modern politicians looking askance at a cabinet minister who openly insists on keeping a town wife and a country wife.

Mphahlele writes about the themes of corruption, incompetence, debasement of standards, social injustice, brutality, and poverty which work against Africa's new form of identity,

which is a hybrid reconstructive identity. Though Mphahlele depicts a gloomy picture of post-independent Africa, he does not dwell on it. It is in the midst of this disillusionment that he offers the flipside of the coin in the resilient character of Tirenje. The novel, *Chirundu*, reflects on the daring legal exploits of this heroic character, Tirenje, who presses charges of bigamy against her all-powerful, depraved husband, Chirundu. Chirundu is portrayed as a corrupt Minister of Public Works in the fictional African state of Zambia. In this unprecedented battle for women's rights against her husband's abuse of power, Tirenje draws courage, confidence, and sustenance from traditional African values as opposed to Monde, Chirundu's city mistress, who is an urbanised African woman. Thus, Tirenje adopts a Western legal system in her endeavour to solve her conjugal problems in her quest for marital identity. This shows "how cumulative and dynamic culture is" (Okita, 1992:178). Mphahlele continues, in his search for identity, to use the recurrent theme of tradition versus modernity through Tirenje's fight for women's rights by depicting her as a faithful African wife who honestly prefers monogamy without showing any acrimony and bitterness against her rivals. As such, she becomes a beacon of Africa's identity, the promoter of both the traditional ways and modern values in that she "adapts to modern ways while not losing her fundamental values and dignity" (Obee, 1999:174). In other words, she is an embodiment of a new form of African identity:

I used to give Tirenje the task of cleaning my two-roomed 'house'. She liked to do it. A little shy, but not timid. A girl of country breeding with an earthly voice. Although her face was youthful her eyes seemed to hold unutterable wisdom. No, she was not timid, like a deer that will bolt as soon as you touch it (Chirundu:14).

Tirenje is portrayed as a humble woman whose humility epitomises a true African woman. She is full of brave meekness and kindness as compared to the uncultured Monde. Her wise confidence and her self-assured demeanour made her stand out from other women in her fight for women's rights. She courageously puts up a fight against her husband's unfairness without showing any signs of disrespect. She fights her battle emotionlessly, with sympathy, loyalty and love which are factors which are the tenets of African identity. She portrays an identity of a liberated African woman, a "neo-African culture" (Okita, 1992:180).

Mphahlele exposes the façade of neo-colonialism by ensuring that Tirenje, Chirundu's traditional wife, wins against him (Chirundu) and his mistress. She is a custodian of African identity which has its roots in the African traditional past as opposed to the cosmetic and pretentious Monde who represents modernity. Tirenje lives in modern Africa but she, with courage, character and integrity, adapts to modern life without losing the essence of her African identity: Obee (1999:180) purports:

Like Moyo, Tirenje symbolizes the coming together of two streams of consciousness - African and Western. She is a working prototype of a new African aesthetic, of what the new woman can become. The clash of wills between Tirenje and Chirundu on such issues as the sanctity of marriage as it reflects on tribal versus modern customs and law raises highly relevant questions revolving around women's liberation and equality. Yet, Tirenje, at her most eloquent, comments on one of the gravest risks posed to indigenous culture by Western industrialized society, saying: "Something strange has touched us in the white man's school and church, in the white man's town and we make loneliness in ourselves as the factory makes clothes" (Mphahlele 1973, 89). Thus, she gives voice to the self-

alienating sense of loneliness Africans feel when caught between old communal ways and new ways in an industrialized urban setting.

Chimba Chirundu, who is a protagonist in the novel, serves as a symbol of both the present and the past, that is, modernity and tradition which are at war. This cultural clash is manifested when Chirundu tries to adopt both Western culture and African culture, but to no avail as he becomes the victim of circumstances.

4.2.1 Chimba Chirundu as an epitome of African cultural identity

I now oblige because I want to get over with and I don't want to feel as if I'm on trial. Miss Tirenje Mirimba is the woman I'm in love with. She is going to have my baby. Understand? My child. Whether or not I'm going to marry her is no one's business outside our families (Chirundu:18).

In the book, Chirundu is depicted as a man anchored in the African cultural beliefs. He has a deep knowledge of African values and norms because he grew up practising them to the point where they have become his second nature. He displays his firm belief in African culture when he angrily talks to his missionary school Superintendent, Mr Hackett, on his African view of marriage. He remonstrates that it "is no one's business outside our [their] families", which means that in the African tradition, marital issues are negotiated and settled between two families. These negotiations are aimed at seeking to establish "the consent of parents and other kin" of both parties (Potash, 1995:82). No outsider is permitted to participate in the discussions until the two families have reached an agreement. When Hackett accuses Chirundu of "sin,

abject sin, damnation" (Chirundu:18) after he has impregnated Tirenje, his learner, outside lawful wedlock, the latter responds by saying that in African culture, it is not wrong for a man to have children before he marries a woman because children belong to the community and not to individual people. Thus, every parent is a parent to every child in that village in every respect. Chirundu's father-in-law, Mirimba, like his son-in-law, also comes to the defence of African tradition when he confronts the Baptist preacher about Chirundu's alleged un-Christian behaviour towards women when he tells the preacher that only God knows when children are born, which means that no mortal being can pontificate on issues of life except the Creator Himself. Nobody has power over it, not even the church laws and procedures because they are man-made. Though Chirundu attempts to cling to his cultural roots, he contradicts himself by going to the European school to acquire his education, albeit his expulsion because of his protest against what appears to be Western imposition of their values on Africans. It must, however, be noted that the Europeans have not compelled him to go and attend their school which is established on European standards. He went there on his own volition because he wanted to get a better life through the white man's education. This is an unwitting acknowledgement of "the interplay of the external and the internal" ((Okita, 1992:181), which is the African and the European cultures. It also creates cultural identity crisis in him. He becomes a man at a cultural crossroads, standing astride two cultures with one leg in the West and another leg in Africa. On the one hand, the West entices him with education which will catapult him into a better person while on the other are his African cultural roots which beckon him. He is a man torn between two streams of mentality. Fear of being assimilated into Western culture at the expense of his own

mother culture makes him resist total Western influence on him. Chirundu's identity crisis can be likened to Lakunle in Soyinka's *The Lion And The Jewel* (1963) in that he (Lakunle) goes to the city and comes back having assimilated Western culture to the extent that he refuses to pay *lobola* (bride price) for his girlfriend Sidi. The results of this move become disastrous for him because he loses Sidi to the village chief, Baroka, whom he all along, regarded as an uneducated, backward man. Baroka's successful marriage to Sidi results from the fact that he, as a custodian of African cultural tradition, became exemplary by following all traditional marriage requirements and procedures in the process leading to his marriage. Lakunle becomes very distraught because he not only lost his girlfriend, but lost her to the man whom he despises. This is the extent to which Western cultural influence, if allowed too much penetration, can turn a person into a mockery in the eyes of his/her own people.

Despite all his protests, Chirundu ultimately acquires a teachers' qualification, which means that he has assimilated Western culture through education. Teaching becomes a nightmare to him because the content of what he has to offer is antithetical to his cultural belief system. He forces himself to teach African children what they do not identify with, what is foreign to their culture as it does not flow from the known environment. He makes this confessional statement to Tirenje when he says that he only teaches them the curriculum for survival purposes:

The syllabus says we must, Amen. You must pass your examination, and I am going to help you all the way. Survive. Here we are learning about the American Revolution and our children do not know where

our people came from, how great they were once. I will help you survive (Chirundu:15).

Here, we further see how Chirundu is a man confused between his two selves, "the indigenous self, and the one that is superimposed by the new culture" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986:24). Mphahlele puts emphasis on Chirundu's resistant character against Western influence on African identity when he wittingly commits bigamy, which is an offense punishable by law in the Western order. He knows that his deliberate double marriage is an affront to the European legal system, but he commits it notwithstanding.

The British system of indirect rule is put under close scrutiny when Chirundu complains about it in conversation with his lawyer, Mr. Clare: "Look, Mr Clare, your people colonised this country and imposed their own laws on us. Now the Ordinance supplants native customary law. And yet the British kept the tribal system alive so as to be able to govern through chiefs and kings" (Chirundu:9), remonstrates Chirundu with his attorney, Clare. This, according to Chirundu, is a contradiction by the British which always results in severe identity crisis to the people they have colonized. Chirundu is a fervent exponent of polygamy and, therefore, customary law, which, he believes, is under attack from the Europeans. He symbolises "the standpoint of Africans as key players rather than victims" (Asante, 1991:172). He shouts at Mr Hackett:

Your people - your people, Mr Hackett - in Europe - they sleep with women they'll never marry and marry women they may never sleep with except when they want to make a child. We had polygamy on this continent and then you come and tell us it's anti-Christian. Your people can splice any woman as of-

ten as they like and keep mistresses and we're told it's a sin to have a concubine. I have finished (Chirundu:20)

In Africa, it is normal for a man to have more than one wife as long as that man has the physical and the economic muscle with which to take care of them. In the African past, a man's economic strength was measured in terms of land and livestock, and therefore, his wives. The vaster the land and livestock the more wives he will have. It was believed that if a man had many wives, he will have his clan name enlarged, which will bestow immortalisation and immense fulfilment on him and his kinsmen. A man would, for the same reasons, further marry wives on behalf of his brothers if those brothers have died before they could marry. Such wives will be his brothers' by traditional law but his in terms of child-bearing and material support. The belief was that as he bears children with them, he will be immortalising his brothers. Mbiti (1975:106) remarks:

Because of these views of meaning and purpose of marriage, additional customs are found in African societies such as marrying several wives, inheriting the wife of a deceased brother (or husband of a deceased sister), arranging for a dead son to be married in absence, arranging for the wives of impotent or long-absent husbands to have children by close relatives or friends, and so on. Where these customs are followed, they are respected and accepted without any feeling of wrongness about them. They are meant to ensure that nobody is left out of marriage, and that children are produced for each family concerned.

Chirundu sees this as a merit of polygamy in that it frees African men from concupiscent practices. Thus, to Africans, symbolised by Chirundu, polygamy is a cultural practice which

has to be upheld. When discussing the subject of a second wife with Tirenje, Chirundu says: "Suppose I earn enough to keep more than one" (Chirundu:45). This was an implied warning to Tirenje about the impending possibility of marrying a second wife as well as the qualification required for that purpose which is earning enough money. He talks about money, not land and livestock, because in the world today, Africa inclusive, wealth is measured in terms of money.

Western culture has eroded the African way of conducting marriage rites as it regards it as paganistic. This trend has made Africans marry in accordance with European marriage convention, with Chirundu being no exception. He marries Tirenje, his traditional village wife, who has a Western education, under the British Ordinance. This British law does not allow a man to marry two or more wives. As time progresses in his marriage, the African man in him tells him to marry a second wife, Monde, his city wife, against the British Ordinance's stipulations with which he is familiar. He also disregards the African procedure which goes with marrying a second wife because he keeps Tirenje, his first wife, in the dark about this subject of taking a second wife. In the African culture, when a man intends to marry a second wife, he first discusses it with his first wife, and the elders of the clan. In certain African communities, the activity is actually carried out by the first wife, that is, as a senior wife she looks for a suitable junior wife to come and further expand the clan. The senior wife does it because it is within her right to do so. In other words, a man cannot marry a second wife without the blessing of the first wife. This polygamous arrangement was embraced by African communities because it served as a panacea for sexually transmitted diseases emanating from adulterous relationships. This is the reason why

Africa does not know "women of the under world and slaves of the abyss. Every woman is above ground protected and sheltered under polygamous marriage system" (Blyden, 1969:24). Adultery was a taboo. If a man falls in love with a woman, he must marry her.

Tirenje, who is Chirundu's respectful African traditional wife, feels undermined by her husband's unilateral decision TO marry Monde. She decides to fight him in a court of law where he was charged with bigamy, a marital criminal offense which is foreign and non-existent in Africa. Chirundu's attempt at harmonising the two diametrically opposed cultures by standing astride them lands him into trouble. Mbiti (1975:180) indicates that "when people break moral laws, they suffer shame in society. They are kept out of the circles of their friends and relatives". Chirundu's African kinsmen ostracise him as a result of this morally and culturally wrong action. They now regard him as a pariah, a cultural rebel who has turned his back against his African ways because of adopting Western life, symbolised here by Monde and her city airs. Chirundu's incident is similar to Ocol's in p'Bitek's *Song of Ocol* (1967:150-151) in that Ocol is trapped between cultures:

We will build
A new City on the hill
Overlooking the lake,
Concrete, steel, stone:
Broad avenues, spacious
gardens
Parks, swimming pools
We will erect monuments
To the founders
Of modern Africa:
Leopold II of Belgium,
Bismarck

Streets will be named
After the great discoverers,
David Livingstone,
Henry Stanley, Speke

You young soldier
Guarding the border post,
Do you know
When that sacred boundary
Was drawn?
Which of your ancestors
Established the area
Of your beloved
Country
No street
Will be named
After Mansa Sulayman
Of ancient Mali,

As for Shaka
The Zulu General,
How can we praise him
When he was utterly defeated
And killed by his own brothers

Like p'Bitek's Ocol, Chirundu is a metaphor of "the cultural dilemma of the educated African" who is somehow a misfit in his "indigenous African culture into which he was born" (Yesufu, 1988:111). He faces cultural confusion and identity crisis because of the two worlds in which he is forced to live. He initially marries his first wife, Tirenje, under customary Bemba law of his people. This marriage is later on annulled and registered under the British Ordinance. He now stands accused of breaking the British law, thereby making himself a reject within the British establishment. His own people also find it difficult to accept him back after bringing their culture into disrepute, shame, and disgrace by degrading his wife, their bride, Tirenje, and marry Monde. In fact, Chirundu and Tirenje's case is a case of a cultural marital procedure gone wrong, with Chirundu as a culprit. Pitso quips to his friend Chieza:

That's part of the reason for my contempt, see. Why would the blinking idiot go and legalize a city piece when he would have access to it without all that paper and dotted line and ring stuff? The people who'll be looking on must think him an ass because they have extramural interests all over the place while they play the dutiful husband and father. Why would the daffer do this kind of thing, why?

'The way I read you the line between contempt and sympathy is very, very thin', says Chieza (Chirundu:4)

Pitso's angry remarks imply that Chirundu does not deserve any commiseration from his people because he is the architect of his own misfortune. Chieza summarises it by saying that the "line between contempt and sympathy is very, very thin". He must lie on the bed because he has made it. He has himself to blame as he is the one who has alienated himself from his own people. Chirundu ends up being a stranger to Tirenje, his own wife and his father, which indicates identity crisis at the family level. His father confirms that he does not know him anymore because he has changed drastically. This indicates a loss of family identity. He asserts: "But I realise my God is not yours. I do not know you anymore, Chimba, God forgive me!" (Chirundu: 54). This is a rejection, which in the African community carries a curse, particularly if it comes from one's biological father. Chirundu's father denies knowing him, his wife follows suit. The African community and its Western counterpart take a cue from these close family members and throw him out with the bathwater. Chirundu is so absorbed with the Western culture that when he comes back home to his village, he refuses to eat the food given to him by his cousin Mupwa who does not take kindly to this negative gesture. He complains: "I forget that you high people eat better food and you sit at table" (Chirundu: 88). He is a

stranger to his own people, a foreigner to the village of his birth. Chirundu's identity dilemma and his subsequent failure are, therefore, the hallmarks of Africa's cultural downfall of which he is an epitome. He is an embodiment of African weakness, "a product of history, a symbol of the people" (Mphahlele and Haarhoff, 1986:33). This identity crisis, therefore, makes him a victim of cultural circumstances which have ripped African social fabric apart. It further suggests that history shapes one's identity. In other words, history cannot be ignored as it determines the course of events in a person's life.

Chirundu's incarceration matures him into realising his grievous mistake of abandoning his people and culture. He decides to go back to his African roots when he gets released from prison, a move which signifies Africa's determination to restore her identity, her essential pride. It is this commitment to African culture which gives one hope that Africa has a role to play in this multi-cultural dispensation. Though Chirundu tries in vain to serve two masters, this effort does not impede the possibility of the two opposing cultures to co-exist without any condescension from either side. This view is endorsed by the village chief, who is the custodian of African culture, when he says: "we must have new ways of doing things - and yet do we also want to lose the wisdom of our ancestors? Should our youth no longer respect old age?" (Chirundu:112). Having said this, one cannot but acknowledge the fact that Chirundu is a symbol of African post-colonial dilemma which is the aftermath of the colonial influence on African culture, characterised by the African educated elite. Through him, Mphahlele shows that the struggle for identity in Africa is a serious one which does not have a readily available solution. This is because of the "pluralism and di-

iversity" embedded in culture (Okita, 1992:182). Mphahlele shows that African identity restoration is a process and that this process is sometimes painful because certain old ways have to be discarded, some by external forces, others by generational conflicts.

4.2.2 Tirenje and Monde: Women at cultural crossroads

Tirenje and Monde are Chirundu's wives whose cultural dilemma does not differ from their husband's. Tirenje is an educated traditional woman who wishes to move with her culture into the future. Chirundu regards her as such, as a woman who belongs to his past when he was still carving his niche as a teacher and a politician. Monde, on the other hand, is delineated as a modern city woman who belongs to the present and a suitable wife for the famous politician Chirundu has become. Through Tirenje, Mphahlele seeks to indicate that Africans should preserve their identity going forward. They should not embrace the future at the expense of their identity, as Monde does. Tirenje is portrayed as a round character in that she starts and ends with the book and all the major events in the book revolve around her. She is, therefore, a fully rounded character, recognisable, and level-headed which constitutes what Gill (1995:130) calls "portraiture". The depth of maturity with which she is described is different from her female counterpart, Monde, who is painted as a flat character. Her character flatness is made clear when readers meet her in the middle of the book when Chirundu is already an accomplished politician. She does not even know, let alone care, about the woman who was behind Chirundu during his formative years as a politician.

Tirenje is depicted as a woman who was brought up in a traditional rural milieu. This makes her anchored in the cultural values of her village though she does not agree with all of them. One of those cultural aspects which disturbs her is getting herself involved in a polygamous relationship. She outlines this aspect to Chirundu in their conversation before their marriage: "How can I share my man with another woman!" and "Am I not enough to care for, feed, clothe, and love and give you children" (Chirundu: 45). Tirenje wants her husband all to herself. She does not want to share him with any other woman, a trait which contradicts Africa's enduring selfless value of sharing. She has adopted the Western value of selfish individualism which encourages the philosophy of one man one wife and one wife one man. She wants individual ownership of her husband and not a collective one. She says: "I don't hold with polygamy" (Chirundu:10) to strongly emphasise her position on polygamy. She goes on to say:

Because I am literate. I selected you among many men. I have pegged my piece of land. No woman but me is going to graze in that land. When you know more - when you are literate, I think - I think - how can I say? - I think you become aware that there are certain things that should belong to you alone - a man, for instance

The "piece of land" that she has "pegged" implies Chirundu, her husband, by whose side she has stood during trying times, way before he could even be thought of as a high ranking politician. This stoical rejection of a polygamous marriage is oppositional to the African belief that the first wife is the one who opens and sustains second marriage negotiations for her husband. Tirenje is, therefore, a symbol of an African traditional woman trapped in a Western education which influences her to deny her customs and therefore, her identity.

She is at a cultural crossroads because she is an African woman who "knows more", who is "literate". She loves her culture but at the same time she goes against it by abandoning some of its central features. This makes her a symbol of a "modern woman" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986:29), who embraces what is good in the Western culture, such as education and monogamy, without getting rid of her deep-seated love and respect for her husband. As a believer in African culture, Tirenje should have known better that her refusal to get into a polygamous marriage was not going to yield any fruit because her husband is an African man who is part of his culture, let alone the fact that he has already expressed interest in marrying another wife. As a modern woman, she is assertive about her rights. She resents the thought that Chirundu might have married her, not out genuine love, but in order for him to only satisfy his "country pleasure" (Chirundu:63). Tirenje displays her insightful knowledge of African culture when she opts to resolve her marital distress with her husband, Chirundu, in the African way after finding out that he was cheating on her. Cheating on her, because the adverse effects of Western influence on her makes her regard her husband's polygamous relationship with Monde as infidelity. She fights her battle emotionlessly, with integrity, factors which are the hallmarks of a true African woman. Unlike Monde who characterises modern women, Tirenje fights only to have her husband back home to her and not to share his property should it happen that she wins the case. Thus, she harbours no vengeance against Chirundu and Monde which indicates that she is a true African woman of character who is deeply spiritualistic and not materialistic. She follows the traditional route of involving the relatives from both sides in an attempt to resolve the extramarital conflict. This illustrates that she is a woman who respects her culture because

in the African tradition if there is a conflict between or among people, relatives, particularly elderly ones, of the warring groups are usually called together to come and discuss ways and means of resolving the misunderstanding. This stems from the fact that Africans grow up with the knowledge that "you can't solve problems all by yourself" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986: 25), because in Africa, people are united in their individuality. In other words, people are not islands but a community. Their challenges are, therefore, not theirs but the community's. Like a loyal, well-taught African woman, Tirenje waits for her husband to come back home to her with the hope that the elders will amicably bring an end to the conflict. After realising that the traditional route of resolving the conflict has failed, she does not give in and give up. She resorts to the modern approach, which is the legal one, of trying to win her husband back. She has a strong will, an enduring spirit which symbolises the "endurance of Africa herself" (Johnson, 1984:111). Conversely, her recourse to the European court indicates the crisis of wishing to get the best out of both systems which educated Africa faces, often with dire consequences because all indications show that she(Africa) has become a victim of "Western aspirations" (Thuynsma, 1989:xiv). Trying to please two worlds has never been a good thing because it is always difficult to equally satisfy both of them. This identity conflict goes on even during the proceedings of her (Tirenje's) own court trial with her husband when she, irrespective of the ongoing Western court trial, goes back to the traditional approach by requesting Mupwa, Chirundu's cousin, to still go and talk to Chirundu on her behalf, the aim being to, again, resolve the conflict. She further takes her case back to the African court for hearing which manifests her profound regard for African culture and identity. The African traditional court she

took her case to was presided over by the elders of the community. They discuss the case but the Western court could not reverse its judgement. This is an attempt, by Tirenje, at benefiting from both cultures, that is to say identity is negotiated. This, in the beginning, confuses Tirenje in terms of which court should preponderate over the other, which value system must come before the other. She ultimately opts for both of them which shows the inevitability of the co-existence of the two cultures. It is a cultural mixture of traditional court of "the ancestors of Chirundu and Mirimba" and European courts comprising of "judges" and "prosecutors". Mphahlele indicates:

"Will the accused please rise"

Twelve months in prison, the judge pronounced. No option of a fine. Suddenly a shriek seemed to hit the roof, then the walls. Before I could know where it came from *mai wamung'ono* Tirenje had reached the Prosecutor's seat banging hard on his desk and beating on her chest. On top of this she was wailing, 'My man, bring back my man! I want my man! What do you want to know about us? If you had let me speak yesterday. I would have told the whole story how far we had come together. The ancestors of Chirundu and Mirimba know but I did not bring up this case to give you a football to play with. I wanted him to learn that I am the right woman for him (Chirundu:107).

Tirenje's hopes of getting her husband back are dashed when Chirundu is sentenced to "twelve months in prison". This is the broken hope of bringing African identity back. Mphahlele demonstrates that the external influence on African culture and ways of life is present in all aspects of Africa's day to day life. The prison sentence does not help Chirundu correct his bad ways but instead, it hardens him to become more determined to divorce Tirenje. This also suggests that Western courts, through their trial systems, are punitive and harden-

ing and not corrective and rehabilitative, as African conflict resolution system of negotiation is. Tirenje suffers from a bitter reversal of expectations because she thought, in her simple and naïve mind, that the court will help bring them back together as husband and wife and not further drive them apart. Her wailing after the sentence attests to this: "My man, bring back my man!" This indicates her shallow understanding of European culture. Chirundu's imprisonment does not dampen Tirenje's spirit of fighting for him. She declares that the battle has not yet ended, it is only beginning: "Me, I am going to begin again, I will build another house. I am not afraid anymore" (Chirundu:155). She is a courageous woman, a woman who is a "symbol of Africa's strength" (Thuynsma, 1989:xvi). Her undying spirit is an African spirit, Africa who is prepared to fight for her cultural reclamation to the last man. Thus, her desperate fight to restore her marriage and the imminent loss thereof, shows a high possibility of African cultural assimilation by the European forces.

It is because of Western influence that Tirenje's fight for her man is based on selfish intentions. It is not selfless because she wants him back on her own terms, which is un-African. In the African past, a man would wrong his wife (ves) countless times but she/they would embrace him as hers/theirs as long as he is still there for them. Lawino, in p' Bitek's *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (1972), is such an African woman who is prepared to accept her husband Ocol back on his own terms. Lawino has not been to school and as custom would have it, happily agrees to be a senior wife to her polygamous husband Ocol who, like Chirundu, is also a politician. Lawino gladly accepts Clementine who is Ocol's second wife from the city. Unlike Lawino, Tirenje finds polygamy unacceptable because of her literacy which is a Western prod-

uct. This also shows the extent to which Western culture has eroded, not only the African family unit, but her cultural beliefs as well. Chirundu's unscrupulous behaviour upon ascending to power also indicates the corruptive nature of elective power not *de facto* power.

Monde, unlike Tirenje, is portrayed as a woman without culture, a city woman who does not have any African roots to tap sustenance from. Johnson (1984:111) observes: "Throughout the novel she is associated with city life and with Western/European values". Nothing is mentioned about her people, that is, where she comes from, her parents, grandparents, relatives, brothers and sisters. She just drops onto the scene out of nowhere. It is little wonder because her name, Monde, which is a label name, has a direct bearing on her character, a point which Gill (1995:143) confirms: "there are novels in which the names suggest the nature of the characters". Monde is a French word for "world" which implies that she is a wanderer, a person without a place of abode, without a belonging. It also indicates the influence of the world on African culture. Monde is an African but knows little or nothing about Africa, let alone her culture. She obtained her secretarial qualification from Britain where she also adopted Western culture. Her assimilation into the British culture has alienated her from the African culture, thereby making her a foreigner in her own country. She abandoned her cultural ways while she was in Britain which 'reveals her shallowness of African cultural knowledge' (Ndou, 2000:25-26). Monde, therefore, symbolises Africa being transported to another world, with little means of getting back to her complete self. She marries Chirundu in a Western way. There are no lobola negotiations which have been entered into between the two families, let alone payment of a bride price itself.

Theirs is a marriage of convenience in that Chirundu marries Monde to satisfy his own carnal pleasure whereas Monde marries Chirundu for the purpose of boasting her social ego and status. Their marriage does not, therefore, have a solid foundation and basis. Chirundu finds it difficult to accept her as a real, original African woman, hence his remark that she "had become a habit *he* could not shake off; a convenient habit" (Chirundu:64). He observes a missing African link in her, an inadequacy in her demeanour. He acknowledges this lack of completeness in her: "Yet I felt something missing in Monde. Something unnameable. Maybe something that keeps a woman's feet on the ground, as Tirenje's were" (Chirundu: 47). "Something" which is missing in Monde is her African heritage which is the essence of her identity. Monde goes on to show complete ignorance of African hospitality gesture when she coldly welcomes Chirundu's visitors into her house and does not even bother to offer them any food to eat. Chirundu and their visitor, Moyo, take it upon themselves and quickly prepare sandwiches to save Chirundu from embarrassment. Monde unashamedly says that "they do not cook lunch on Saturdays because the cook is off" (Chirundu:135), to her husband's disgrace. African women must cook, literally and figuratively, for their husbands. A woman who is not able to cook for her husband cannot be a fulfilment for him and his household. Thus, an African woman, must, however busy she may be, never rely on a domestic worker for the welfare of her household as this might have far-reaching consequences for her family. Monde is blind to this common African knowledge because of her European airs. She is only good at appearing in public places with Chirundu, that is, giving him a good public image because she "knows how to smile for people in high places, knows how to walk like white people, takes out a handkerchief for everything that comes out of her face,

tears, mucous, saliva so as not to remove the paint" (Chirundu:63-64).

Unlike Tirenje, Monde's literacy does not preclude her from accepting Chirundu's offer for marriage though she knows that he is a married man. This suggests that an African woman will always be one irrespective of the borrowed robes she tries to wear. The cosmetic life which Monde tries to lead will melt with time. This means that in order to get out of this cultural crisis, Monde must just go back to her original self, her real African self without a make-up. Monde's lack of backbone is shown in her running away when the country is plunged into flaming labour riots. She flees without even thinking of the support she has to give to her jailed husband, Chirundu. She does not even bother to defend the burning household, which is her marriage, either. Her rival in marriage, Tirenje, has instigated and joined the riots in an attempt to still fight for what is rightfully hers, which is Chirundu. Monde's flight from the riotous mob is actually a flight from Tirenje. She cannot stand up to her (Tirenje) and fight for her marriage as well. This indicates a lack of commitment to her marital relationship. In other words, their marriage is not a treasure to her, something worth fighting for. All these weaknesses and dearth of depth in character are attributed to the British influence she has internalised at the expense of her African identity. Though despicable in character, Monde is an object of commiseration because she is a product of a system of acculturation by foreign forces. She is, nevertheless, still a beautiful daughter of Africa and hopefully, must have learnt a lesson and will, therefore, mend her ways. It is not late.

4.2.3 Hope for Africa

In the novel, hope for Africa's cultural renewal is put squarely on the shoulders of characters such as Moyo, Chirundu's nephew. He is delineated as an embodiment of African identity and heritage. He is a round character who displays depth of understanding on issues of culture. Moyo exudes easiness and confidence when he is in the company of the village elders because he connects well with them. Thuynsma (1989:234) reminds us that Moyo's "confidence stems directly from his faith in his ancestors", meaning that his faith is in the cultural identity of his people. He reveres and upholds the spirit of his ancestors because he believes that they give him a sense of perspective in life during his moment of despair. He is a product of parents from two different warring ethnic groups. His father comes from the Tumbuka tribe while his mother, Chirundu's aunt, comes from the Bemba tribe. The Bemba people had strong political and economic power over the Tumbuka and as a result of this advantage, they treated them with condescension. This patronisation is a stereotype which needs to be debunked because we are all human beings who are equally created in the image of God. No one, no matter how he/she is blessed, is, therefore, more important than the other as we are the same before the eyes of God. Here again, we see the forces of identity, even in Africa's natural setting being clouded by the dynamism of tribal intermingling. Moyo carries the blood of both tribes in his veins. He becomes a symbol of unity as he is a reconciliatory figure between the two tribes. This tribal synthesis activity is bound to succeed because he draws his strength and courage from the treasury of cultural knowledge he has about his people. It may, conversely, also imply unity between the European and African cultures as Obee (1999:179) contends:

Moyo, on the other hand, rather than exploiting, combines the better of two worlds. A political activist who gets involved in trade unions, Moyo is African enough not to want to criticize his uncle and modern enough to see the need to do so. Realistic and modern, he is engaged in building a new order. He also adheres to the best African humanistic values without experiencing conflict. He reveres his grandfather and his wise counsel, respects his aunt, and shows compassion for his peers.

In his attempt to build "a new order", Moyo amasses a wealth of knowledge from listening to stories, folklore, myths, songs, and dance narrated to him by the elders of the two tribes, foregrounded by his grandfather Ambuye whom "he reveres". This is so because elders, like village chiefs, are the custodians of cultural identity. Since African tradition is oral, orality becomes the central factor in the transmission of African identity to posterity. Moyo is not like Waiyaki in Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965) who tries without success to unite two factional ridges, Makuyu and Kamenno. He fails in his attempt to bring them together because of the betrayal of his own ridge's oath, which is regarded as one of its key traditional customs. This mistake makes him fall out of favour with them to the extent that he loses his life. Moyo, unlike Waiyaki, wins because he holds his culture in high esteem.

Moyo's deep respect for the elderly continues when he takes his grandfather Ambuye to the city after the death of his parents. This symbolises taking the older generation to new ways, to experience new identity. It also signifies bringing the old into the new so that there is a balance. This is an act of balancing identity in the modern world. In other words, he works "towards multiculturalism in which all cultural perspectives are respected and celebrated" (Ramogale,

2006:24). Moyo's goodwill gesture is in line with the African customary belief that the old and the aged have to be properly taken care of because they serve as worldly ancestors who will soon join the real ancestors yonder. This intimacy with his grandfather, therefore, makes him feel like he is "walking beside a god" (Chirundu: 53). He serves as a beacon of hope for African cultural renewal by not abandoning his people and culture. It is only after the passing on of Ambuye that Moyo gets deeply involved in community activities. He becomes actively engaged in nation building projects and trade unionism where he soon assumes an inspirational leadership role. He extends a hand of support to his imprisoned immigrant brothers, Chieza and Pitso, in a genuine spirit of humanism, which is a hallmark of African identity. Educated and enlightened as he is, he helps his educationally underprivileged people in the trade union in the interest of African advancement. He is a true man of the people and he behaves as such. As an Afro-optimist, he serves as an epitome of his people's hopes and aspirations. They look up to him for emancipation from their economic distress as well as the total liberation of the African continent from the foreign powers. Unlike Ngotho in Ngugi's *Weep Not, Child* (1964), Moyo does not disappoint his people by betraying them. He becomes their true black messiah. Thus, Moyo's struggle is the struggle of Africa, especially in the area of cultural identity.

Moyo does not stand by idly and watch his uncle's (Chirundu's) family fall apart. He, like a true son of Africa, brought up in the African ways, steps in to try and bring together the two parties caught in a love triangle. He advises Chirundu to also involve distant relatives of the family in an attempt to resolve his marital conflict as the inner cir-

cle of relatives seems to be making little progress. He does not give up on his uncle's marriage. He says to Chirundu:

It is like this: the elders teach that we must talk. We must talk among ourselves. Talk cleanses and frees the heart, it heals a lot of aches. It helps the boil to burst (Chirundu:24).

In terms of chronological age, Moyo is too young (as he is 21) to articulate such valuable words of wisdom to his uncle. This is a sign of intelligence because his mental strength and age appear to be above his chronological age. He is an asset to his family and to Africa at large because he is an agent of change, a catalyst for African development. Like the Biblical Stephen who, full of the Holy Spirit, boldly witnessed for Christ, Moyo, full of the knowledge of African culture, witnesses for Africa. He bravely juxtaposes the European and the African ways of doing things, as a reminder to Chirundu about who he really is, after realising that he (Chirundu) behaves like an European in an African body when he resorts to the European court in an endeavour to resolve his marital problems. He tells Chirundu that engaging the services of the European court is leaning on "the white man's way" while "we have our own ways" (Chirundu:24).

Moyo leads a strike action against Chirundu's government department, in spite of the financial assistance he got from him (Chirundu) during his mother's funeral. This does not go down well with Chirundu who accuses him of ingratitude. Moyo, being a child who was taught to respect elderly people, does not fight back nor does he raise his voice against his uncle. He says that he is "his (Chirundu's) nephew and I (he) cannot cross words with him" (Chirundu:85). He laments further:

I cannot understand my uncle - please help me good mothers - I do not want to go into a war of words against an older person, uncle or no uncle - that is the way my parents, my grandfather Mutiso, that is the way they taught me. Now what am I to do? I am a worker, the other workers made me a secretary (Chirundu:85).

Moyo's strike against his uncle's department does not necessarily mean that he dishonours him. Rather, it indicates that he sees a bigger picture of the love for his country and its workforce. Chirundu does not fathom this patriotic gesture displayed by his nephew because of his narrow-mindedness. Moyo loves his uncle but hates what he does in government. Thus, he does not fight a person but he battles with a corrupt, selfish system. The fact that this unfair system and its incompetent politicians have been voted into those positions by the workers makes him angry. He has learnt this political truth from the evening classes conducted by Studs Letanka, the South African refugee teacher in his (Moyo's) country. Letanka taught them African political science which included the history of trade unionism and liberation movements as some of its modules. It is against the backdrop of this political education that Moyo becomes a staunch leader of the trade union, with no intention of enriching himself or bringing glory to himself but to work "towards a better society" (Haarhoff, 1986:39). He struggles for a better Africa for all hence his refusal to heed Chirundu's advice to resign from his executive position as the secretary in the union. He feels that if he resigns from the union, he will not only be betraying the trust the workers have in him, but he will also be selling out on Africa's future as a prosperous continent. He identifies with the masses, the common people in the form of the working class in his country. He does this because he knows that the success or failure of the continent depends on

its workers as they, through their hard labour, are the generators of wealth on the continent. The workers are, therefore, engaged in carving the economic identity of Africa.

Moyo is a man post-colonial Africa needs because he abhors graft and underhanded dealings which are her hallmarks. He is even prepared to lose his life for this ideal. Even Chirundu hates to love his nephew's unflinching fight for justice. He declares:

His eyes sparkled with life and anticipation. As if he was ready to take on the world. For sheer zip and enthusiasm, a go-ahead spirit - if we had ten of him in the Cabinet instead of some of the fat-heads and fat-bellied worms we did have, this country would have little fear (Chirundu:53)

Like a true pan-African, Moyo embraces Africans who have fled from violence and injustice in their own countries. He is not xenophobic to these men: the Zimbabwean Chieza, the two South Africans, Pitso and Studs Letanka. This humane relationship with these two men enriches his political experience and reinforces his identity in that they exchange valuable ideas about the politics on the continent in general and in their own respective countries in particular. When his government arrested them because they did not meet refugee requirements, Moyo was behind them all the way. He showed his concern by paying them regular visits in jail as well as buying them a newspaper every second Sunday of the month, which is, fortnightly. This serves as a solace to them in that it keeps them hopeful and alive. Chieza praises Moyo's positive effort: "Tell Moyo we wish him well. If the new day has deceived the Chirundus, the Moyos of this land may yet move to a brighter dawn" (Chirundu:101).

Moyo's ability to bring hope to his people is also acknowledged by the village chief. When he (the chief) bids farewell to his friend Mutiso, who also happens to be one of Moyo's grandfathers, the chief positively laments:

Seriously now - the house of Mutiso has fallen yes - these are changing times - I need not tell you that - your grandson here will raise your house again - it will not matter where - you will still be in this land where your ancestors live - your grandson is not a man without a shadow - he has been to school he has hands - so your house still stands, Old Mutiso, to put it in other words' (Chirundu:112).

Though Mutiso's house has disintegrated, Moyo has the potential of building it again and therefore, continue the clan name, its identity. This means that his African identity will not be destroyed. In the same way, his country, which symbolises the continent, also looks up to him for liberation from the post-colonial ghosts such as debasement of standards, corruption, nepotism, and general incompetence. If this fact can be stated by the village chief who is the custodian of cultural beliefs, who has his people's interests at heart, then it is sound.

4.2.4 Orature as a hallmark of African identity

Mphahlele asserts African identity in *Chirundu* through the use of a poetic song as depicted in the children's play song which articulates the aspirations of the people. Thus, he uses "a chorus of commentators (the people's voices)" (Obese 1999:172), as seen in the trade union march, to show the importance of doing things collectively in Africa. This communalism, which borders on humanism, is the nub of African identity which Mphahlele tries to portray. It also connects

well with the concepts of "people's literature" which is "characterised by the documentation of the black community's hopes, fears, and frustrations, the raising of black people's social and political awareness, the inculcation of black pride, the validation of black literary standards and the advocacy of social justice" (Ramogale, 1995:2). Orality, as an important African cultural phenomenon, is further used when Mphahlele uses the myth of *nsato*, mythical python, to manifest Chirundu's avarice for power. This cultural symbolism is in harmony with African praise poems where the praise poet assumes the characteristics of animals when acting out a poem. The myth of a python runs through the novel as a *leit motif* which symbolises the power and the vitality of the past African values. A python crawls on the earth, it is very close to the soil, to home, which is its identity. Thus, Mphahlele explores the theme of a python as "a catalyst for value creation" (Ndebele, 2002:55), in order to emphasise the importance of African values as opposed to the European ones. Mphahlele recites:

Children's Playsong

(Sung while rope-skipping. A long rope is held at either end by a boy or a girl. Groups of four to five boys and girls skip as the rope beats the earth)

In Tumbuka we say *sato*,
Nsato in Chinyanja.
Mama I'm afraid of the python,
I fear *nsato*, Mama.

Stay away from the python, child,
Stay away from *nsato*, child.
I'm afraid of *nsato*, Mama.

When you find it on its ground
You'll know the size of your fear-
So long, so heavy and wild.

Mama, I fear the python.

If he comes at you, my child,
To wrap you up in its coils,
And flicks a tongue of fire
And means you ill, my child,
Go burn his house down,
Burn down his house my child,
And let wander, far and wild.

No more will I fear him, Mama,
No more, no more.

Come away, my child,
Come away.
He's the king of all (Chirundu:vii).

This poetic song indicates the intimate relationship the mother has with her children and the relationship between the python and the soil. It is also noteworthy to realise that certain chapters, such as those which deal with court proceedings and prison are theatrical in the sense that they read like dramas and plays. This attests to the African identity which Mphahlele subscribes to in that in the African past, story-telling was dramatic as narrators of stories rhythmically played community values and mores out in front of the people. The storyteller mainly used gestures to put his/her message across. This, together with his/her immediacy, closeness, and nearness to the audience, made them enjoy and appreciate the story. Legend has it that in the traditional past, hunters used to pray to their ancestors for luck before they left their villages for the forest to go and hunt for animals. When performing this ritual, they would pitch songs which would be collectively sung. Prayer can, therefore, be regarded as the first piece of literary work and if it is written down, it will be in the form of verse. The same can be said of a song which will take the form of stanzas. Thus, Africans used literature for motivation and encourage-

ment. When they come back from hunting, they would narrate stories of how they made their kill. These oral prose narratives were usually a combination of both fiction and facts, which were dramatically acted out in front of the audience. Mphahlele has used some of these spectacularly theatrical techniques in the court and prison chapters which "read like plays" (Obee, 1999:178). He indicates:

April 4, morning

Defence Counsel, Mr Clare, opens his case.

You are the accused in this case

Yes, I am.

Do you know Tirenje Chirundu, nēe Mirimba?

Yes, I do.

Was she your wife before?

Yes.

How were you married?

First by Bemba law, then under the Ordinance. The former was registered at a Boma (Chirundu:102).

4.3 AFRIKA MY MUSIC

Mphahlele's memoir, unlike some of its Western counterparts, does not declare the primacy of subjective consciousness. Mphahlele discovers who he is in part through others. Self-examination serves to reintegrate, but never becomes obsessional. It is a literature of self in which the narrator delivers the news, yet never stoops to "autobiography". *Afrika My Music* chronicles, instead, lived experience and memory, a mature life in progress - one about an exile who still has some time left in harness (Obee, 1999:159-160).

Afrika My Music (1984) is Mphahlele's second exilic memoir to be published, with the first one being *Down Second Avenue*. This autobiographical work is not as popular as *Down Second Avenue* which he wrote after his two-decade apartheid-induced

exile in Africa and America in which he was gnawed by a deep longing for his mother country, South Africa. This profound longing emanated from a sense of emptiness which goes together with exile. He was in exile and, therefore, away from his people and culture, hence his quest to restore the African identity within him. And when one is displaced from the land of one's birth, one yearns for the things which have made him/her who he/she is. While in exile, he becomes culturally nostalgic, a point which brings him closer to his roots. It rekindles deep feelings of love for his country, his identity. Thus, in *Afrika My Music*, Mphahlele shows that "African literature, in its past and present configurations, is deeply aware of the traumas of dislocation and the search for a home" (Chapman, 2003: 4). He yearned for his land, his customs, and values from which exile has estranged him. For him, *Afrika My Music*, becomes a celebration of the musical nature of Africa because music is pivotal to his identity as an African. It is a journey towards the re-discovery of his self-identity, a quest for belonging after years of exile, hence his nostalgia "for the oral tales of his childhood" (Gikandi, 2000:227). Exile afforded him ample opportunity to rethink his identity, to come to himself.

In *Afrika My Music*, as in his other novels, Mphahlele explores African orality in the form of myths, songs and dance, fabulous folklore (as in folklore full of fables) and tales as an integral part of African identity and humanism. Unlike in his previous works, this time he employs these forms of African identity with a great amount of dexterity and innovation in that he successfully marries the traditional African forms with modern European ones. He also attempts to show that African identity is encapsulated in the continent's cul-

tural norms and values which are passed on from generation to generation through the word of mouth. Obee states (1999:156):

In the course of his lifelong search for a synthesis in the dialogue of two selves, Mphahlele has dealt in richly paradoxical dichotomies, such as West versus Africa, and individual versus communal self, and the equally thorny dualities in themes of alienation counterpointed against African humanism. There has always been a spiritual struggle involved in the search - at once nuanced, complex, and contradictory - and arising out of the progressive alienation of the teacher, writer, and scholar as political exile.

While wandering through both the African and American continents, Mphahlele, like Ngugi, was tormented by sharp pangs of longing for South Africa. He wanted his political and cultural alienation to come to an end by coming back from the wilderness to the country of his birth. Mphahlele explains:

I try as best I can to explain that we can still find our way to the ancestors who are a vital part of our humanism, that this is a state of mind, which is why it can work in urban areas as well as in those rural areas where the traditional institutions no longer exist. Our behavioural patterns should also reflect this. 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. We have to expand our intellectual horizons by studies and research conducted outside the lecture room in addition to what the syllabus prescribes. *I end on the note of rediscovery - the rediscovery of self and identity* [researcher's italics] (AMM:209)

Mphahlele agrees that African cultural beliefs and traditions can be used to redefine modern African "technological, economic, and political systems". He acknowledges that though African traditional institutions have been eroded, they are not completely wiped out as African people have them engraved in their hearts and minds. These African values and norms are, by virtue of being "a state of mind", able to be carried to any area, be it urban, peri-urban or rural. They can, therefore, find expression in "our behavioural patterns", that is, in how Africans relate to one another, to their environment as well as to other people. Africans must exude the warmth, humility, and meekness symbolic of their continent. However, this meekness should not be confused for weakness, but must be accepted for its sake and for the welfare and amelioration of the entire human race. Mphahlele further cautions Africans not to be rigid in their cultural expression because culture is a dynamic phenomenon. It is not "a museum artefact", which means that it is not static. In other words, Mphahlele advises Africans to move with the trends of cultural times without losing the essence of their Africanity. This will enable them "to participate effectively in international business and politics", thereby acknowledging that though they differ with other people in terms of their belief systems, they basically belong to the human race together with them. Africans should, therefore, embrace their diversity through their unity.

Mphahlele laments the untimely death of some of South Africa's great literary artists such as Can Themba and Arthur Nortjé, courtesy of the cultural strangulation engendered by the apartheid system and their resultant exile. The lamentation is recited in the vein of orature in that it assumes the

tone reminiscent of the praise poet (*isibongo/griot*) who eulogises the deceased writers. This rekindles a sense of how Africans deal with their dead. It also shows the importance of the praise poet in providing therapy to the people during their bereavement. The praise poet helps them manage their loss:

But one felt diminished every time another exile or refugee was diminished. Oftentimes it was diminution by death.

Like Archibald Jordan, doctor of philosophy in African languages. Novelist. Cancer ran him to earth when he was a professor of African languages at the University of California, Los Angeles. He is resting in Madison, Wisconsin, where his widow lives.

Like Todd Matshikiza. His mound stands in a Lusaka graveyard. And Can Themba. He lies in Swaziland. Canadocea - what a name for an unclassical fellow like you?

Like Arthur Nortjé, now lying in Oxford, England. I never knew you, Arthur. But I know now from your *Dead Roots* how lonely you must have been. Loneliness hounded you and grounded you. You would go and do something like that - die and leave us on our own - with no more from your pen to renew us. We cannot afford to lose any more poets.

And Nathaniel Nakasa, journalist. You were just a cub when you joined us on *Drum*.

Mphahlele expresses the deep-seated love Africans felt for one another through the use of the loaded word "diminished" to suggest his genuine feeling of loss each time one of his countrymen and fellow writers passed away. It also indicates their selfless care for one another which stems from their interdependent African communal living heritage whose premise is that a person is not created to be alone but to be in the company of other people. He/She is, therefore, not supposed to live in isolation from other people because if he/she does, "loneliness" will "hound" him/her and "ground" him/her,

like it did to Arthur Nortjé. Africans are a gregarious people.

4.3.1 Spiritual Reconnection

I am sitting out on the stoep of our house in Lebowakgomo, fifty kilometres south-east of Pietersburg. I like to think of Mogodumo as the mountain of the gods. The mountain dark and its boulder-heaving rivers have since those days held some enchantment for me. I try to recapture the smells of the place. So often I am jolted out of my reverie by the birdsong of my youth. I pick up *morula* fruit and berries, and the taste travels back forty-seven years. Stories about giants and huge snakes before which man humbled himself. I can't help feeling the protective embrace of the silence.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a long way off now. It has become a sporadic memory. Psychological readjustments have simply pushed America into some corner of the mind (AMM:1-2).

Mphahlele opens *Afrika My Music* in a jovial mood after his return home from exile. He tries to readjust and reconnect his spirit to his ancestral past as he sits "out on the stoep" in his home town of Lebowakgomo. He paints a vivid picture of Lebowakgomo as a scenic, mountainous place "of the gods", an idea which gives one a feeling of his religious attachment to the place. He also betrays the spiritual emptiness he felt while he was in exile because he now feels fulfilled inside. The bushes, rivers, and the trees of Lebowakgomo make him feel "enchanted" and complete. The smell and the taste of the "morula fruit and berries" edify him. They help put things into perspective for him and, therefore, reawaken his sense of purpose in life. Lebowakgomo, as a place, also serves as a sanctuary for him, a protective stronghold against the vagaries of life in exile. He even seldom thinks

of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania because of the warmth and the sweetness of home. These American cities are "a long way off", "a sporadic memory" to him. Yes, America becomes a far-flung, distant place for Mphahlele as he re-establishes his identity with his Africa, his Lebowakgomo. It is when he is at home in Lebowakgomo that the mythical stories they were told when they were still children and how those stories have morally uplifted their lives, are revived. It was the stories about giants and snakes which added value to their lives because of their educational nature.

4.3.2 Mphahlele's quest for spiritual identity while in France

In Chapter two of the book, Mphahlele chronicles his exilic experiences in countries such as Nigeria, France, and Kenya. Though he felt like a foreigner on his continent when he was in Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, these states "gave Africa back to him" (AMM:26). In other words, they restored it back to him. He expresses joy at seeing his fellow Africans going about their chores with pride, exuding a "strong attachment to the native soil" (AMM:24). These African states always reminded him of South Africa because of the similitude of culture. They gave him the "crutch that had given *him* an identity back home" (AMM:20). Thus, they helped him rediscover who he is because of the inspiring abundance of humanity which has always elevated him. It is this humaneness which has made it easy for Mphahlele to get along with them. The one thing that disappointed him was that these African states were still following the "British style" (AMM:30), instead of restructuring it to suit their African milieu.

It was in France that Mphahlele felt spiritually lean. This emptiness ensued from the harsh reality that France made him feel un-European. The rudeness of the French people made him feel that he does not belong, he is not one of them, hence his looking "around for a spiritual anchor" (AMM:31), for a spiritual identity. Mphahlele was still keenly involved in the re-establishment and revitalisation of the African cultural reawakening when he was in France. He kept in close contact with his fellow African writers and artists in order to still keep the African in him alive. He acknowledges:

Our apartment was to become a kind of crossroads for writers and artists: Ethiopian artist Skunder Borghossian; Wole Soyinka; Gambian poet Lenrie Peters; Richard Rive; South African poet in exile Mazisi Kunene; Bob Leshoai, who was running a traveling theatre from province to province in South Africa; B.M. Khaketla, grammarian and poet from Lesotho; the late Soas Jones-Quartey, Ghanaian scholar; Kofi Awoonor, Ghanaian poet and a beloved friend; J.P. Clark; Nigerian scholar Abiola Irele; Nigerian broadcaster Emmanuel Omasola; artists like Julian Beinart, Peter Clarke, Dennis Duerden, and the South African *émigrés* Gerard Sekoto and Breyten Breytenbach, both of whose paintings hang in my house (AMM:32).

Their apartment became a kind of a crossroads, a meeting place for identity rebirth with African writers coming together to feel the warmth of Africa, to discuss the African situation and how to transform it in the midst of cultural, social and political confusion. It was a hive of cultural activity, with poets reciting and writing poetry, playwrights engaged in theatre, broadcasters doing broadcasting, painters like Gerard Sekoto and Breyten Breytenbach ever busy with their paintbrushes painting life. Mphahlele hung these painters' paintings on the wall of his room in order to remind

himself of where he comes from, his roots, his African identity. This serves as an identity of home although they were away from home. Mphahlele's love for African cultural expression and preservation is further manifested when he embraces the invitation by the Nigerian writers back in Nigeria to go and be part of the formation of the Mbari Writers and Artists Club "in Ibadan, that vibrant city of African culture" (AMM:23). The club, of which Mphahlele was elected president, was involved in the restoration, exaltation, and maintenance of African cultural heritage. All these things took place in the not-so-attractive building which housed the "art gallery, small intimate open-air enclosure for experimental theatre" (AMM: 33). The gallery had a two-pronged function; as an art and as a writing centre. The late Ghanaian sculptor Vincent Kofi's work was among the first works to be exhibited at Mbari for the communities' aesthetic pleasure. Mbari also ran a writing competition in which aspirant African writers entered for a prize which was only awarded to the winner. Alex la Guma's novella, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) and Dennis Brutus' *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963), got the privilege of being published by the Mbari. There was an upsurge of cultural writing inspired by the Mbari. Many writers' conferences were held under the auspices of this cultural club throughout the entire African continent, the first epoch-making one being at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, in 1962. These conferences were so inspirational that they saw the mushrooming of many renowned African writers such as Soyinka. Many educated and conscientised Africans joined this cultural fray as this was part of the effort to preserve, nurture and promote the African identity. In other words, the re-definition of Africanness, rooted in the past, but moving forward in dedicated African footsteps. Writers, actors, theatre producers, educationists, politicians, labourers, students. They

strengthened one another for Africa's cultural course as they were all out to redefine the African experience. They put on "native regalia", "read papers on African culture" (AMM:42-3), all in the interest of commitment to the African soil. It was also an attempt to debunk "the false self-image colonial education has cultivated in us" (AMM:45).

4.3.3 Indigenisation of higher education curricula

The campaign to promote African cultural identity culminated in the robust indigenisation debate to include African literature written in English in the university curriculum. In the forefront of this debate were Africa's prominent writers such as Mphahlele, Ngugi, Soyinka, Achebe, p'Bitek. Mphahlele indicates:

In February 1963 Francois and I, under the auspices of the Congress, organized two conferences at Dakar and Freetown (Fourah Bay College), then headed by Dr. Davidson Nicol (alias Abioseh Nicol). The aim was to throw into open debate the place of African literature in the university curriculum. We wanted to drum up support for the inclusion of African literature as a substantive area of study at university, where traditionally it was being pushed into extra-mural departments and institutes of African studies (AMM:40).

Mphahlele and his colleagues argued that for higher education system to produce an African student who is aware and conscious of his/her identity, it has to be revamped and reviewed. Restructuring in this case, they argued, does not mean doing completely away with anything and everything un-African. Instead, it implies starting from the known to the unknown. This means that curriculum designers should prioritise educational values which epitomise Africa over the Euro-

pean ones. In other words, it must not put the African children in a position "that causes them to question their own self-worth because our [their] story is seldom told" (Asante, 2006:25). This curriculum debate was rigorously embraced and entrenched by Owuor Anyumba, Taban Lo Liyong and Ngugi in Ngugi's treatise, *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Mphahlele outlines the framework:

For purposes of establishing a rough academic framework, some of us proposed that African literature should include all writing, imaginative and expository, that was created out of African experience. This would include in turn the Conrads, Joyce Careys. Students would in time sort out what, in this literature, was an act of commitment to the African soil and an expression of a cultural identity shared by the majority of our indigenous peoples; and conversely, what was an imposition of European sensibility on African materials and human landscape (AMM:41).

Mphahlele argues that any literary output by African writers must be "created out of African experience". Thus, when Africanising their education, Africans must give priority to the indigenous culture. This will be regarded, in Mphahlele's words, as "an act of showing commitment to the African soil".

4.3.4 Exilic nightmare: Denver and Philadelphia

Mphahlele left Africa for Denver University in Denver, USA, where he was awarded a PhD degree on his book, *The Wanderers*. He was later on offered a professorship position at the self-same university where he taught African literature in English. America influenced his children, Kefilwe and Motswiri, as they started to show serious signs of assimilation into the "American style" (AMM:117). Mphahlele sadly admits that

"the American teenage bug had got to them" (AMM:117). Mphahlele's disappointment ensues from the fact that they were, as Africans, not fully welcomed in the city of Denver. He writes:

In a predominantly white city like Denver, blacks generally, but especially Africans, tend to be looked at as a curiosity. And yet it is not unusual in the mid-west and the Rocky Mountain west - away from the large black ghettos - to find African Americans behaving like whites towards Africans (AMM:118).

Denver became nightmarish to Mphahlele because Africans were not regarded as normal human beings. They were "looked at as a curiosity", as aberrations and intruders into the Denverites' personal space. What baffled Mphahlele more was that even his fellow African-American brothers behaved as if they were *whites* towards them, thereby reversing his expectations about them. Their snobbish behaviour towards the Mphahleles indicates how little they knew about Africa, their mother continent. They still believed in the stereotype that the Mphahleles "come from that place where they eat giant lizards", where they live with "em honkies in Bonnie Brae" (AMM:118). There was a meeting in the dark, with Africans meeting Africans and not knowing each other. It is this mythical attitude towards the Mphahleles which makes him feel stifled by the place, "the tyranny of place" (AMM:132) which makes Mphahlele resent placelessness. He, however, seeks spiritual solace in "the living dead" (AMM: 119) who are his deceased fellow writers such as Selby Mvusi, Archibald Jordan, Can Themba. He asserts:

And Can Themba. He lies in Swaziland. Canadocea - what a name for an unclassical fellow like you. When I say this to you in that Fordsburg Shebeen, you

turn round and say, how come a barefoot boy wallowing in the dust of Marabastad with two large holes in the seat of his pants found himself saddled with a Hebrew name like Ezekiel? I say maybe my illiterate father Moses thought Hebrews were sweet. Trouble with you, Can, I say, is that you're too intelligent to have been at Fort Hare. You pulled the strands together in *Drum*, Can. And your diction was high voltage. You gave your verbs colour and power (AMM:123).

Mphahlele escapes from the torments of exile by communicating his frustrations with the dead who are now ancestors. This is a common practice in Africa where problems are reported to the dead with the hope of getting solutions. As a soul in torment, Mphahlele talks to the late Can's spirit, as if he is reporting, after which he feels better able to handle the xenophobic treatment he and his family receive at the hands of the Americans. He feels at ease reminiscing about the jocular conversations he used to have with Can Themba. In his mind, Can is not dead but alive, meaning that he might have died physically but alive spiritually. This further indicates that though many exponents of African identity have died, they have not died with it as it is still alive. In their talk, Can Themba raises a light but serious concern about the name(s) by which Mphahlele (and other Africans) is (are) called. Mphahlele agrees with Can that his parents gave him the Hebrew name Ezekiel out of lack of knowledge. Mphahlele was so much uncomfortable with it that in his quest and struggle for self-identity as an African, he modified it to Es'kia as did other African writers such as the Kenyan James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Zimbabwean Charles Marechera to become Dambuza Marechera, the Ghanaian George-Awonoor William to Kofi Awonoor, the Nigerian Albert Chinualumogu to Chinua Achebe.

4.3.5 Back to the roots

Since 1972, when we were in Denver, the desire had been taking hold, and the roots did not lack water. If it had to be Africa again, it must be South Africa. Anything else would be mere adventure, which we had no taste for any longer. We wanted community, we wanted a cultural milieu in which our work could be relevant. International living had equipped us with experience of immense value. But intellectual stimulation was not enough. American culture was too fragmented for us to be able to define the goals of our own careers in relation to it (AMM:168).

It was in 1972 that the Mphahleles opened a line of communication with the South African government through the then Chief Minister of Lebowa, Dr C.N. Phatudi, to come back home to South Africa, to their base, after wandering from one country to the next. They were inspired by an acute sense of longing for community and humanism back home, just to be around the people they knew. Mphahlele says that they "wanted community, they wanted a cultural milieu in which their work could be relevant", and this kind of cultural environment could not be found anywhere except at home. America could not give them the support base they needed to express themselves well in their different professions. At last, they came back home to a tumultuous welcome, a welcome amenable to career nourishment and "human warmth" (AMM:172). Though people were spirited, South Africa was still South Africa of old, with oppressive laws meted out against people of colour. People still lived in squalid conditions which Mphahlele describes as "the metaphor that explains black people" (AMM:175). They still stayed in small, unhygienic houses situated within small yards, with "no bathrooms, no sinks, no drainage" (AMM:

175). The environment was not conducive to human habitation. Black people still lived in fear of the white man.

Mphahlele's zest for teaching propelled him to apply for the headship of English at the University of the North (now Limpopo). It was a university whose academic staff was divided along racial lines in that black academic staff embraced Mphahlele's decision of wanting to take up the post while their white counterparts opposed it. He asserts:

I was glad to know that I would be welcome among them (*the black academic staff*). But of course I also knew that I was talking to people who were bound hand and foot by severe controls, whose movements were being watched, who had a separate academic staff association from that of the white staff, whose organization was banned from campus by the university administration while the white staff enjoyed campus facilities (AMM:181).

Though Mphahlele knew that African academic staff "were bound hand and foot by severe controls" on campus, he, nevertheless, still wanted to join them, to join in their suffering so that he could, from within, try to change things, to influence them for the better. He wanted to be, as they were, under constant surveillance, to be gagged together with them, to be denied all the campus privileges "the white staff enjoyed". His wish to join the University of the North (now Limpopo) was also fuelled by the fact that he longed to live and perhaps even die among his people as he was now nearing his retirement. He acknowledges that "retirement and old age among *one's* own people can be a gentle process" (AMM:194) because he will be in warm hands at home. The University of the North turned him down but later on the University of the Witwatersrand offered him a professorship position in the De-

partment of English where he taught a "division of African literature" (AMM:223) located within comparative literary studies. Mphahlele derived fulfilment from this relevant curriculum implementation as he was able to extend his humanistic ideas through his teaching.

4.4. CONCLUSION

The above discussion indicates the ways in which Mphahlele portrays African identity through the use of myths, songs, and dance, which were orally handed down to posterity, to authenticate African literature as a distinguished craft within world literatures. It also outlines the cultural dilemma which faces the African educated elite as they are forced to stand astride two cultures: Chirundu and Tirenje, in *Chirundu*, are cases in point. They have imbibed the white man's education with the hope of creating a better life for themselves and their communities but to no avail. Their communities are no longer prepared to welcome them back as they consider them to have tainted the purity of their culture, African culture. On the other hand, their white counterparts do not wholeheartedly embrace them into their fold because they are not pure white. This causes identity confusion in them because they no longer know who to identify with any more. They are rejected by both groups. Their identity frustration leads to their loss of focus and purpose in their lives. Chirundu leaves his village life, his structure, and goes into the life of corruption and depravity in the city, thereby rendering himself mean. Tirenje's refusal, because of her literacy, to allow her husband Chirundu to practise his tradition by marrying a second wife, throws her marriage, and therefore, her life into disarray. She even stoops so low as to participate in and derive pleasure out of burning Chirun-

du's house under the guise of trade union disgruntlement. Mphahlele seeks to show that Chirundu and Tirenje's cultural dilemma ensues from the fact that they have abandoned the culture they should have entrenched. He strives to indicate that Chirundu, Tirenje and Monde cannot be Europeans in African bodies, no matter how hard they try. In fact, the harder they try, the more confused they become. Cultural synthesis should be conditional, that is, be based on African conditions. Thus, Mphahlele uses African cultural identity as an indigenous force which has successfully managed to Africanise the novel "to the point where we can now talk of the novel that is peculiarly African in style" (Mazrui and Mphande, 1995:161). He, therefore, uses identity in the form of song and dance in his novels in order to charm, heal, educate and edify his people spiritually, in their struggle for total emancipation from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Mphahlele (AMM:135) seeks solace from Nina's song:

Ain't no use listening
Old Man Sorrow's coming to
keep me company
whispering beside me
when I say my prayers,
Old Man Sorrow mounting
All the way with me
telling me I'm old now
since I lose my man.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study on identity in African literature, like any other continental literary endeavour, testifies to the fact that Africa has a unique and autonomous identity, which can be divided into several identities, such as cultural identity, political identity, and social identity. These identities should be projected when Africa makes a contribution to the international community. Though colonialism and neo-colonialism have plunged Africa into an identity crisis, which has led to Africans sitting astride multiple cultures, they (Africans) have managed to redefine themselves culturally, politically, and socially. It should, however, be acknowledged that the damage that colonialism has inflicted on the Africans runs deep, and the wounds will take long to heal. This healing process is a challenge of immense magnitude in which everyone has to play a role. It is in this context that writers also have to play their part of recording the struggles of the people as well as their efforts to make their world a better world. A new, synthesised and integrated African identity can indeed be forged as Ntuli confirms:

The African Renaissance (*identity*) [researcher's italics] project offers us an opportunity to reflect on our condition, to re-examine our rudders and to develop new paradigms that can pull us out of this morass. It affords us a moment to pause and reflect, with the benefit of hindsight, on the benefits of Westernisation, the insights we have gained from it and the losses our culture has sustained; what to retrieve and what to jettison. Our past was not perfect. No society has ever produced a perfect culture - not even Atlantis. However, there were cultures that attained standards worthy of emulation. We propose to examine pre-colonial

Africa and its institutions, especially educational institutions, with a view to comparing it with what we have today and to ascertain if there are models we can adopt in order to move forward (Hoppers, 2002:60-61).

Ntuli points out that our past was not perfect and goes on to say that no continent has been so. The point he is trying to make is that we should not only look at what is wrong in our own culture, but we should also look at the positive aspects of it and emulate, transform, and promote them, and in time we will be fortifying ourselves, ready to move forward while our self-esteem is at its highest level. As Ntuli also notes, when we are ready in this manner, we will be ready to adopt other people's positive ways of life and be able to forge ahead.

Mphahlele agrees that Africans should embrace Western culture without losing the essence of who they are. They should not be assimilated into Western culture, rather, they should be acculturated into it to the advantage of Africa. These views are succinctly articulated in *Down Second Avenue*, especially through the character Ma-Lebona, who epitomises African identity. She stays in Marabastad, which is a peri-urban settlement heavily influenced by Europeanisation. However, she still holds dearly to African communal values. This shows a co-existence of African culture and European culture in her, which is, as it were, a symbol of Africa living in two worlds. A good story-teller in the tradition of orality, Ma-Lebona advises African women on how they should comport themselves around their husbands as well as around people in general, a value which is entrenched in many African communities. Mphahlele continues to portray identity in African literature through Timi in *The Wanderers*. Timi undertakes a

journey into the interior in search of who he really is. Thus, his going into exile is actually a journey into the self, himself, his identity.

As has been seen from the discussion, Mphahlele seeks to show the need for a new form of identity which calls for sacrifice in that Africa has to go back in time to find those aspects of her culture which were lost and which Africa was forced to deny. But Africa has to also reflect on certain ways of life and customs of the past which are detrimental to her social and economic progress. Mphahlele and Haarhoff (1986:30) remark that "there are customs which certainly will not hold today, traditional customs that cannot hold - polygamy, for one thing". This is an acceptance that there are certain cultural values which need to be discarded in favour of modern ones (hybridity). This results from the fact that this synthesised identity (hybridity) is forged from identity crisis which ensues from cultural conflict thereby justifying Ngugi's biblical borrowing that in order for a grain of wheat to germinate, it must first die (AGW:1967). In other words, in order for peace and unity to prevail, there must first be disunity and sacrifices. This cultural conflict, which is at the centre of African colonial and post-colonial writing, comes into existence when two diametrically opposed cultures come into contact. Inevitably, the coloniser's culture is forced upon the coloniser's culture. This does not usually give any room for any mutual exchange of values as one form of value system imposes itself on the other. This kind of cultural encounter is negative in that it promotes a servant-master relationship, with one culture dominating the other one. It is this kind of relationship which African writers protest against in their portrayal of the theme of cultural clash in their works. Thus, the suppressed culture finds a

voice in their works as they "write back to the centre" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1995:183-84). Some African writers opt for essentialism in their fight against imperialism while others, such as Mphahlele, are progressively liberal. Essentialists (nativists) promote a total "return to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society" while the liberal writers subscribe to cultural hybridity, which is "a creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone of colonisation" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:118). Among the African writers, there are some who are core essentialists in that they intransigently strive to maintain and preserve all the norms and values which they consider to be African (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:159) on the one hand while on the other, there are those flexible essentialists who acknowledge that indeed there are many good things which were obliterated during the colonial period but not everything from the past is relevant today. To Mphahlele, essentialism is, therefore, not the route to follow. In other words, he concedes that there is no group of people who can claim cultural purity after coming into contact with another group. He depicts Tirenje as a character who claims to be a staunch supporter of African ideals. This position ultimately entangles and frustrates her as she is trapped by the enticements colonialism offers. She rejects one of the main tenets of African beliefs in polygamy because she is modern and literate. This leads to the irretrievable break-up of her marriage.

Mphahlele further shows that cultural conflict leads to regression as it is a self-defeating and self-consuming phenomenon. He, therefore, conscientises people that they should acknowledge the two selves found in each one of them, they "should not deny the fact that we have two selves, and come to terms with that, and work towards an integrated personali-

ty" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986:24). This view is also shared by Achebe when he states that though he grew up in a Christian family, this did not stop him from being attracted to pagan practices in his uncle's household. This indicates that he also "lived at the crossroads of cultures" (Achebe, 1995:190). He confesses that "those idols and food had a strange pull on *him* in spite of *him* being such a thorough little Christian" (Achebe, 1995:191), in an acknowledgement of the co-existence of the two cultures in people. In support of cultural synthesis, Mphahlele, in *Down Second Avenue*, argues that about eight out of ten educated Africans, most of whom are also professed Christians, still believe firmly in the spirits of their ancestors (DSA:64). He asserts that often the two selves exist alongside each other hence it is "unlikely that you would find anyone so totally Christian that the traditional would have been phased out" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986:30). Though statistical figures can be disputed, the fact is that there are many Africans who embrace the imposed culture without completely shedding off their own, thereby engaging themselves in a concurrent cultural practice. These Africans confirm Said's (1993:15) assertion:

At the same time, paradoxically, we have never been as aware as we now are, of how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains, cross national boundaries, defy the *police* action of simple dogma and loud patriotism.

It is this need for cultural overlap which Said points out defies "the police action", which encourages Mphahlele to strongly advocate for hybridity. The view further begs the following question: Is hybridity beneficial or detrimental to the growth of African identity? Essentialists believe that it

is a sign of weakness in that it implies succumbing to the demands of the oppressive culture. This view is incongruous with the fact that culture, any culture, loses its authenticity and purity if it comes into contact with another one. This, therefore, gives credibility to hybridity. Because hybridity extracts the best out of both cultures, it appears to be what Africa needs at the moment. Griffiths (1995:240) comments on a hybridised writer:

Thus in a sense he embraces his hybridized position not as a badge of failure or denigration but as part of that contestational weave of cultures which recent critical theory argues is the inescapable condition of all post-modern experience

Ashcroft *et al.*, (1995:183) echo the same sentiment when they contend that "most post-colonial writing has concerned itself with the hybridized nature of post-colonial culture as a strength rather than a weakness". Mphahlele sketches his characters as hybrids in order to indicate that there is no untainted cultural identity. Chirundu, an educated politician marries two wives. Tirenje claims to uphold African culture but refuses to accept polygamy due to the influence of Western education that she has received. The same cultural taint is prevalent in urban-rural settings and the characters depicted in *Down Second Avenue* (1959), *The Wanderers* (1971) and *Afrika My Music* (1984) testify to that. These characters are trapped in their two selves in which case they choose what is beneficial for them from both worlds. Ashcroft *et al.*, (1998:233) call this process "trans-culturalism", which he describes as a process in which "subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or a metropolitan culture".

Though hybridity seems to be a viable solution to the African identity crisis, it is not void of weaknesses. The most salient one is when the colonised group ape the coloniser. Ashcroft *et al.*, (1995:139) assert:

When the colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather the result is a 'blurred' copy of the colonizer that can be quite threatening.

Chirundu, Tirenje and Monde are such "blurred" copies. Their endeavour to "mimic" the Europeans while still holding on to their culture puts them in a challenging situation. Chirundu is charged with bigamy and sentenced to twelve months in prison while Tirenje loses her husband because she is educated. It is this cultural mimicry which makes them oscillate from one culture to the next, thereby plunging themselves into an identity confusion. Mphahlele argues for cultural synthesis (hybridity) as the only panacea to Africa's identity dilemma. He regards it as "something that one has to live with, and hope that at a later stage there will be a synthesis somewhere, which will strike a point of equilibrium, a point of balance" (Mphahlele & Haarhoff, 1986:24). He acknowledges "cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group "purity", and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilised" (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998:36). It is this "synthesis", this "termination point" which contemporary Africa and the world should desire to have in their "search for guidelines for future programmes" (Ntuli, 1999:189) because it is indispensable to their prosperity.

The foregoing discussion validates Mphahlele's belief that in order for Africa to prosper alongside other nations, she must, as a point of departure, restore her cultural heritage which includes, among other things, African indigenous languages, African humanism (*ubuntu*), their rites and customs such as forms of worship, songs, and dance, the value they attach to land, and the manner in which stories are told (the oral tradition). Omotoso (1996:iv) agrees with Mphahlele when he regards the following African rituals worthy of restoration: "birth, naming ceremony, food, drink, coming of age, marriage, managing success, growing old and death". To him, the African's whole behavioural pattern forms part of his/her rituals.

Mphahlele accepts that Africa should maintain her identity in this age of globalisation through the interrogation of her "cultures for ways to modernise that will not radically change the character of [her] African values" (Asante, 2006:25). This means that Africans should enter the global world in the full knowledge and acceptance of their identity and actively and proactively participate as such. The main reason is that the world comprises of different nations with diverse identities which should co-exist in unity and harmony. Thus, now that Africa is politically free, other areas of her life also need freedom, and cultural freedom is one such area, looking back to the past to seek for the lost identity of the self in order to shape the present with the future in mind. This, indeed, shows that Mphahlele's hopeful African prophecy which encompasses his intellectual identity about Africa, is timeless. It is so timeless that on the 25th of August 2010, the University of South Africa organised "The First Annual Es'kia Mphahlele Memorial Lecture" in remembrance of this great son of Africa. The event took place in

Mphahlele's home province of Limpopo in South Africa. The keynote speaker for the day was Ngugi wa Thiong'o who, like Mphahlele, is also one of the celebrated African writers of note. Indeed, Africa needs to rejuvenate her identity in order for her to reclaim her unique position in the global community.

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