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EXILES AND AUTOBIOGRAPHIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURES

The Cases of Es'kia Mphahlele, Bessie Head and André Brink.

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In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctorate in African Literature.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my beloved father
To my tender mother

To Karim
Mohammed Yacine
And Amina

With all my love

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to explore the relationship between exile and autobiography, a literary genre, produced in the particular context of South Africa. It seeks to demonstrate that the condition of exile engenders this form of writing which literary theorists and critics have not yet been able to define, nor to set limits to. Through the study of three South African 'autobiographical writings', namely, Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* and André Brink's *A Fork in the Road*, I will try to examine both the form of exile each writer went through as well as the kind of writing resulting from it. It is important to note, for the sake of analysis, the fact that the three writers, belonging to the rainbow nation, are Black (Mphahlele), Coloured (Head) and White (Brink). The distinction or comparison made between them, far from being discriminatory, aims at shedding light on a reality imposed by Apartheid, a system which affected the works of each of them. How many 'exiles' they have experienced, and what literature they have produced will be discussed within four chapters.

The first chapter deals with a theoretical study of exile in its diverse forms, manifestations and interpretations and its link to autobiography, as a universal and as a South African literary genre.

The second chapter introduces Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, as an 'autobiographical novel', through which the account of his life-story shows and reinforces the idea that exile in his case is primarily racial consequently psychological and cultural.

The third chapter studies Head's auto fiction *A Question of Power*. The latter offers an insight into the tormented life of a writer whose exile was triple as she suffered from racial, tribal and gender discrimination. It will be seen how through autobiography, Head like Mphahlele re-inscribes the past and reactivates it so that she recovers an identity.

The fourth chapter examines the memoir of André Brink, an Afrikaan writer, witness of three generations of revolted writers both Whites and Non-Whites. His autobiographical oeuvre, *A Fork in the Road*, can also be considered as a historical document whereby events and psychological experiences are called to reenact powerful memories. His exile was first and foremost cultural, but no less painful and alienating than Mphahlele's and Head's.

Through the scrutiny of the relation between exile and autobiography, this thesis seeks to show that in the depths of Africa, a nation wearing the colours of the rainbow, has become the cradle of extreme sensibilities through time. Facts and fictions will never be enough to recount, record and why not sing with an 'I', 'he' or 'we' the life-stories of human beings wishing to call themselves a nation.

Key words: exile, autobiography, South Africa, Apartheid, literatures, identity, discrimination.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

A N C : African National Congress.

B C M : Black Consciousness Movement

N P: National Party.

P A C : Pan Africanist Congress.

Titles of books studied will be referred to through initials:

A F R : *A Fork in the Road.*

A M M: *Afrika My Music*

A Q P : *A Question of Power.*

A W N*: A Walk in the Night*

D S A : *Down Second Avenue.*

GLOSSARY

Afrikaans: is a West Germanic language namely spoken in South Africa and Namibia. It is a daughter language of Dutch, originating in its 17th century dialects, collectively referred to as Cape Dutch. Although Afrikaans borrowed from languages such as Malay, Portuguese, the Bantu languages or the Khoisan languages, an estimated 90 to 95 percent of Afrikaans vocabulary is ultimately of Dutch origin. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaans)

Afrikaners: Afrikaans-speaking ethnic group in Southern Africa, mainly of Dutch descent.

Afrikaan: adjective.

Baas: boss.

Bantu: name given to the Blacks in South Africa. Bantustans or what has also been called 'homelands' since 1972 are areas or 'reserves' assigned to the black people.

Batswana : citizens of the Republic of Botswana: bordered by South Africa to the south and southeast, Namibia to the west and north, and Zimbabwe to the northeast. It meets Zambia at a single point.

Boers : are Dutch-speaking Calvinist farmers.

Dorp: little village.

Harraga: is a term given to people also called 'boatpeople' crossing the sea borders illegally.

Heathen: is from Old English *hæðen* "not Christian or Jewish" .It was used as a pejorative by adherents of monotheistic religions (such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam) to indicate a disbeliever in their religion. In South Africa, it was used by Afrikaners to Blacks and Coloureds.

Kaffir: from the Arabic word كافر i.e. infidel, also used by Afrikaners to Blacks and Coloureds.

Khmers: is the adjective attributed to the Cambodians. Here the reference is to the system under the ruling of Polpot's dictatorship (1975) which caused two million deaths.

Laager: establishment, order, camp.

Ntate: means father in Bantu language.

Pass: **"Dampass"** (damned pass) is a reference book issued after a 'pass law' has been adopted under the *Bantu (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act* of 1945. It is an instrument of control imposed by the National Party on Africans (Bantus), from the age of 15. No African has the right to circulate in areas not assigned to him without carrying a pass. The law was amended many times but always to the detriment of the Non-Whites. The origins of the Pass Law go back to the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, 1923, and to the politics of the *Homelands* (1913 and 1936) which aims were to dispossess the Africans from their lands. The pass law was abolished In 1952, only to be replaced by a 96-page document, named a reference book. The identification book had a fingerprint of the holder. The book had to be carried at all times, from Doctors to academics and laborers. Failure to produce the document on demand to a policeman was a punishable offence. Black Africans had no right to appeal to courts if they were removed from an urban area. Police and authorities had the right to raid any dwelling inhabited by blacks in search of "illegal" black residents.

Sobukwe, Robert: founder of the Pan Africanist Congress; splintered from the ANC and promoted a Blacks-only front against Apartheid.

Sotho: a group constituting the Bantu population which settled in the north of South Africa in the 17th C.

Verligte :Afrikaan word meaning "enlightened".

Volk : people.

Vuvuzela: The vuvuzela is a sort of trumpet (much contested for its deafening sound) used by South African football supporters during the world cup matches.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Here were people with different shades of brown. Those who looked white, those who looked brown, those who looked like Indians,and those who looked like blacks.

(Head in Abrahams,1990:4)

It is said that the story was born from the time man came into being. Spontaneously and necessarily stories were to be told and communicated so that human beings would be able to have acquaintance not only with other human beings, but also with God, Nature, some Oracles and other deities - with all such powers that men often recall to give some meaning to their existence. The story also was -and still is- a way to and into the self, to try and find answers to a series of questions and inquiries occurring if only once in one's life. Whether it is a product of imagination or a testimony of real events, the story seems to be man's twin, his inseparable companion since it is told by him, to him , about him or about himself.

In fact, a survey of literature throughout the world and for ages reveals an almost fatal tendency of writers to turn towards - or inwards - their life and 'tell' its story. Be it a need to record what has most significantly marked them with the aim of understanding and perhaps reordering it, or a need to explore the self in quest of some truth, writers have, through the process of reconstructing or reinventing their life, resorted to, not to say fallen in, autobiography as a genre. The latter's width and 'elasticity' has made it very difficult to set rules to it and

to define it. Actually, a great amount of writings ranging from the memoirs, diaries, journals, 'autobiographical novels' or 'fictional autobiographies', auto fictions or 'personal novels', despite their varieties, share one characteristic which is the recollection and recounting of their authors' lives. This particular point is what makes the genre a very interesting field to explore, an interest that grows even more when one realizes that the most successful works of fiction are autobiographical: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*[1], D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down SecondAvenue*, Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*, Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* and many others can be cited as examples of autobiographies or, to be more prudent, as 'autobiographical writings'.

In the course of this reflexion, I will attempt to explain why men –or women- are so tempted to write autobiographies, and why we, readers, are so attracted by this literature. A chain of questions will follow to clarify the reasons why writers pretend to write novels while they are simply revealing their life. Why do they hide behind a 'he' or 'she' narrator where they could use an 'I' narrator? What effect or importance has the appearance or absence of the narrator in their works? What does the 'I' narrator represent, an individual or a collectivity? Do readers sympathize with writers in this process? Do they identify with an 'I' narrator ? Have they ever shared the same experience, ever felt the same emotions? Have they found any answer to their preoccupations?

Without pretending to bring decisive answers to all these questions, I may still put forward some hypotheses on which I intend to build my work, the first of which is the essential link that exists between autobiography and exile.

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[1] It is formulated as such and constructed as to make the reader believe in the facts of fiction recounted, but it is not autobiographical at all, though inspired by his journeys all over the world as a sailor and mainly documented if not a pastiche of the allegory produced by Ibn Tuffeil "*Hay Ibn Yakdan*".

Throughout my reading of autobiographies, the theme of exile –in all its forms- has imposed itself permanently and inevitably. Whether physical or spiritual, exile has proved to be very often a condition that generates this genre. Dealing with the literature of South Africa, in particular, I will try to show that this link is a constant feature in non-white as well as white writings, choosing for that purpose three South African authors of 'three different colours'. It is important to note here that this expression is used with much embarrassment as it sounds like categorizing human beings, and to a certain extent discriminating between them; the fact is that in South Africa one seems condemned to speak in terms of colours, the origin of the tragedy being absurdly one of difference of colour.

Why choosing South Africa? The choice is made because in the history of humanity, no community has been subjected to so a cruel and dehumanizing system of ruling mankind. The Nazis have tried in Europe; the Afrikaners (see glossary) have implemented it over half a century in this country. No literary expression in the world, beside the Palestinian continuing doom, may provide us with so a pathetic and at the same time incredibly humane insight into the beauty of the soul, as this sample of authors have done. There is so much to learn, that unveiling a tiny part of the truth they tell, becomes a duty for whoever dares say "literature".

The other question that will very probably be asked is why not including an Indian author in this research work? A fourth writer of this origin would have certainly enlarged the scope of this dissertation and would have brought new and enriching aspects of the South African literature. However, the selection of the three writers cited above was guided by an idea – very liable to objection, I admit – that Head, being a coloured author could fit in with the 'neither black nor white' category which is also the Indians' in South Africa. In other words, because she is considered as a Non-White, she can stand as a representative of

this fringe of society even though she does not have the same racial and cultural identity. As may be noticed, what is problematic is that one is trapped in categorization even while trying to criticize it. For if one is led to think and work in these terms, it is because the reality of Apartheid has imposed itself so much and for so long that it has become almost a necessary tool to be used in our literary studies. Now, by representative, I do not mean the mouthpiece of the Indian community with its specificities but that of the Non-Whites of which they are part and which are regarded as such by the South African system (See notes). In other words, all those who are *not* white, or as long as they are *not* white, are the others, and among the others there are 'various shades of browns'. Besides, it is interesting to note Lewis Nkosi's reaction to the phrase "non-white". To him, it is an expression of negation and otherness. The message he read in "Non-Whites Only" notices, brought to his mind "*the fact that in the eyes of the world [his] life represented something negative, something non!"*(1967-1983:32). In that prefix put before the word white, he saw "*the entire burden and consequence of European colonialism.*"(1967-1983:32). It is this, he says, that made him aware of his Africaness. But it could also be this that made the Blacks and Coloureds aware of the Whites' 'non-blackness', only to widen the gulf between them.

'Representative' is therefore a term used in the sense of the position Head holds in relation to the system. The axiom would then be: Indians are Coloureds and Coloureds are Non-Whites so Indians are Non-Whites. A relationship of hostility is immediately established between the establishment and these categories which Nkosi qualifies as "*innate hostility*".(1967-1983:32). Obviously, this reasoning is based on the Apartheid ideology which is full of paradoxes, for in reality, Head is not 'neither black nor white'; she is both black and white as she is the daughter of a white woman and a black man!

The third question that may also be asked is about the choice of two male and one female writers. Again, it seems to me that Head is the most representative choice I could have made , for she is the manifestation of many genres and literatures at the same time (fiction and autobiography; female, exile, psychoanalytic literatures..). Furthermore, she is , one might say, Coloured, Black and White, a fact that had a great impact on her personality and writings. More significantly , her view and voice as a South African woman writer are worth probing.

I will therefore be content with the study of three 'autobiographical writings' which will be referred to as autobiographical novel (Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*), auto fiction (Head's *A Question of Power*) and memoir (Brink's *A Fork in the Road*). Categorization in the field of autobiography will also be taken into account to classify each work in its specific genre with the aim of probing the complexity as well as the diversity of the autobiography which Sebastien Hubier considers as an 'archigenre'(Hubier,2005:9). This analysis will be undertaken in relationship to exile as the main theme of this work.

The first chapter of my dissertation will introduce the theme of exile in its various aspects. It will be explained why and how the condition of exile whether it is voluntary or not generates a particular form of writing, producing thus a literary genre known as autobiography. The latter will be studied through the definitions of some of the most important critics like Philippe Lejeune whose 'autobiographical pact' is the reference in this genre, and Sebastien Hubier whose recent research on 'personal literatures'[2] has brought answers to many questions in this field. I will try to make a few distinctions though very slight between the autobiography, the memoir and the auto fiction with the aim of

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[2] In the quotes, and unless stated otherwise, the translation from French to English is mine."Littératures intimes » is translated as "Personal literatures".

recognizing the works under study within the genre and its corollaries (or subgenres as they are sometimes referred to). The attempt to theorize may seem pretentious and perhaps unsuitable to a South African literature which is still emerging from an unforgiving criticism which considers that it lacks art and creativity. In fact, African writers in general have refuted western criticism as a barometer of their literature, contending that each literature has its specificity in spite of a universal heritage. The argument that may be advanced then is that the autobiography as 'one's life-story' is first of all universal although the concept is Anglo-Saxon. Because it is personal, it could have existed long before it was even traced. The 'story of one's life' is not the particularity of a people or a nation. It is the natural expression of men's need to tell their story whether they live in Africa or in Europe. The only difference lies in how, why and perhaps to what extent the story is going to recount their life. For these very reasons, we will understand that all of these theoretical forms determining the narrative processes being worded in prose and constructed in the form and length of 'novels', though not in structure, incite me sometimes to use the word 'novel' to refer to these works. It should be borne in mind however, that the debate over such a generic category is certainly open, and that I do not intend to question it as a concept. For the convenience of our purpose, 'novel' tells the life of a character, as it is understood to distinguish it from a novella or a short story.

The second chapter will be concerned with the study of a black writer's autobiographical novel. Es'kia Mphahlele is selected, for he also is a representative – as well as an original- figure of the literature of exile in South Africa. His exiles at home and abroad were a painful experience to which he put an end after twenty years of wandering as he decided to return home whatever the price was. It will be interesting to see how, in spite of his numerous attempts to produce fiction, this author was always 'caught' in life-story telling. He

himself once argued that it was impossible for a writer who lived in oppression to organize his whole personality into creating fiction.

Actually, a striking fact in South Africa is the departure of a great number of writers - Whites and Non-Whites - abroad. It seems that the 'choice' to quit the country was the only alternative to be rid of Apartheid, a system whose heavy and repressive machinery caused the abortion of any literary production meant to denounce or just reveal it. Suffering under censorship which most of the time determined or conditioned their lives, the South African writers faced a dilemma: either to stay at home and endure silence or to leave the country and "tell freedom"[3].

As was the case for Mphahlele, Head too went through the ordeal of exile, which provides the content of the third chapter of this thesis. The latter's life was traumatic as she underwent and deeply suffered from many forms of exile: as a Non-White in a racist system, as a woman in a society governed by men whatever their colour was, and as an illegitimate child born from an 'illicit' union between a black man and a white woman. Head drew heavily upon her own personal experiences in most of her narratives and especially in her intense and powerful auto fiction, *A Question of Power,* unveiling thus her mental disorder and her desperate effort to come to some resolution of her mind with the questions of her racial identity. Like her contemporaries, she left South Africa in search of a place where she would find peace and stability. In her everlasting quest of identity, she leads the reader into both her conscious and subconscious worlds, uncovering the hidden parts of a tormented and torn life.

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[3] Expression borrowed from Peter Abrahams's *Tell Freedom*(1954).

In the fourth chapter, we will see that men's condition does not separate races as South African literature is also white in its outburst against injustice. Thus, among the white authors whose works were frequently banned because of their political tendencies – namely communism- André Brink stands as an illustration of those who resisted all forms of harassment aimed at silencing them. His departure from South Africa to France in the 1960's was very instructive and enlightening. Staying in this country was a kind of rebirth, "*I was born on a bench in the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, in the early spring of 1960.*"(1983:29). He had gone there for a post-graduate research in comparative literature. He learned much about literature at the Sorbonne, but as he said: "*I learned more about the world, about life, about myself.*"(1983:29). In fact, it was an opportunity for him to question the rigorous Calvinist education he had had as well as the principles of differentiation it had inculcated in him in the name of God. Contrary to non-white writers though, Brink expressed the necessity to return to South Africa which he thought was the only place where he had to write and be "*prepared for every word [he] would write in future*"(1983:29). He suggested that one should deploy all efforts to attack censorship frontally and not just denounce it, which would be the most effective way to bring about a real change to the socio-political and cultural climate. Furthermore, the creative energy of the writer, he thought, should be invested in writing because he was certain that in one way or another what was written would be read even if it took time. So, according to him one could remain in South Africa and continue to write and look for means of circulating what was produced inside and outside the country.

The part reserved to André Brink in my work will expose his latest autobiographical writing, more exactly his memoir, *A Fork in the Road.* Again autobiography imposes itself or comes naturally as an achievement of the writer's abundant production. So, a comparison will be drawn between white and

non-white literary works sustaining or destroying the argument advanced by non-white writers as to the impossibility to 'create' under the Apartheid system.

If Mphahlele and Head, among others did not respond to Brink's strategy against censorship, it was probably due to the fact that they were much more sensitive and more often confronted to the humiliations and threats of Apartheid than Brink was. Not that the latter was indifferent to the cruelty and meanness of a racist and authoritarian regime as he himself was a victim of what he thought was an aggression against the free enterprise of the mind, but it is important not to ignore the difference that did exist between Whites and Non-Whites in the social as well as in the cultural milieu of South Africa. South African writers who went in exile never could have written more than a few pages before being besieged by the police while white writers produced hundreds of pages without being subjected to the same treatments.

In reality, the black writers' 'impatience' was often justified by the necessity for the black people to recover their human value, and by the duty to utter the truth long falsified and distorted. In other words, the mission to be achieved was to inform and to communicate with the masses so as to make them aware of their right not just to survive but to live and to aspire to a respectful and happy life. Unfortunately, in South Africa, there seemed to be no way for the fulfilment of such an aim; neither could a non-white writer enjoy a decent and quiet life, nor could he assume his role as a writer and even less develop his gift as an artist.

Unlike Siniavski for whom "*a sheet of paper is like a forest to a fugitive*"(in Heywood,1976:87), the black writer saw in that sheet of paper not an escape nor a refuge from his environment but rather an instrument of consciousness and a weapon directed against Apartheid. The media that were the most easily and quickly accessible to the black audience but also the ones that could be produced

and published with or without the risk to be banned, were the short story, poetry and drama. Requiring less time for reflection and writing, they proliferated especially in the 1950's and the 1960's when *Drum* (see notes), a South African magazine founded in the fifties, offered an outlet for black writing. As for the rareness of the novel in South Africa, it was justified by the fact that there could not be any artistic creation in a country where people were struggling for survival. Head often wondered how one could communicate with the horrible. This is the main reason why, she said, South Africa had no great writer, "*because no one can create harmony out of cheap discord.*" (Head,1990:103).

Mphahlele who produced a collection of short stories entitled *Man Must Live* (1946) when he still was in South Africa, also explained that the short story came to one as a reflex and that its form was a response to ever-present stimulus: "*I had never studied the short story form; I was just writing as my feelings dictated.*"(1971:164). The circumstances dictating the form, "*fragmented and restless*" (Gordimer,1976:179) as Nadine Gordimer defined it, one can understand why literary products lacked the "literary" as Peter Widdowson sees it or "literariness" in the formalist sense . As for Richard Rive, a coloured writer, he considered that style was a luxury to indulge in later because for the time being, he thought, he had to write to an enormous audience whose interest was not stylistics but an analysis of their position in a society where they were lost. (Rive in Lindfors,1980:47).

If this statement and others sustaining it are to be interpreted as a recognition by non-white writers of their inaptitude in 'creating' at a certain moment and in a certain place, it may be deduced again that only exile could offer them the opportunity to ponder over a whole situation and over themselves within that situation whence their recourse to autobiographical writing.

The complexity of the literary expression of this country, the variety and richness of its trends along the racial rainbow of colours of the skin as instrumentalized by Apartheid and the extreme brutality this people went through, determined so many outstanding literary personalities (two Nobel prizes, Nadine Gordimer in 1992 and J.M Cotzee in 2003). This fact therefore suggests that we use 'literatures' in the plural form so as not to impose methodological constraints on other ways and approaches to tackle this object of investigation.

Through a thematic and structural analysis of Mphahlele's, Head's and Brink's writings, I will therefore endeavour to loosen the nets of communication these works present and see whether complexity has not, after all, set itself as a rule of autobiography.

CHAPTER ONE

Autobiography and Exile

A Theoretical Study

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CHAPTER ONE

Exile and Autobiography

A Theoretical Study

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Which lament more painful than that of absence has not re-echoed in the letters , the songs, and the 'stories' of exiles? History 'recounts' to us that all over the world there has been a perpetual movement of people leaving their homes and lands in search of a place where they would live better. Some had to move because a natural catastrophe compelled them to look for food and shelter in a more secure place. Others emigrated because their socio-economic situation did not allow them to live decently in their own country; another fringe of society, and this is most common, fled political and religious persecutions. The Twentieth Century for example, witnessed a massive departure of people whose lives were threatened because of their creeds or what dictatorial systems often call 'subversive' ideas. Some others were proscribed, relegated, deported, ostracized or banished depending on the sentence passed on them. It also happened that some people, without expressing openly their opinion or their disagreement with the system set off to other countries where they would fit and get rid of the malaise and the feeling of humiliation and contempt they had unjustly fallen into.

Whatever the risks were, those for whom the tunnel had been too long and too dark and had finally reached a dead-end, ventured on uncertain routes and 'seas'. Between a suicidal dream and a slow death, the 'choice' was made by desperate men and women whose ultimate and final claim was at least to dream. Among them writers whose words were silenced and whose voices were choked, burst out to give birth to an exile literature often addressing the readers through an 'I' narrator, to tell them their adventures and vicissitudes, to cry out their anger and bitterness ; whatever experience they went through, these half-liberated writers most often expressed a need to speak of themselves or, to put it simply, recount their life-stories which sometimes also turned to be the world's stories. In this chapter, exile will be presented in its various forms. It will also be shown how exiles in their diverse but converging experiences have produced a literary genre known as "autobiography".

1.2. A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF EXILE

'Exile', a concept so often and commonly used is, in fact, semantically and symbolically overloaded. Suffice it to survey the literature of any country in the world to realize that it bears its marks in its various forms. Essayists, novelists and poets provide the reader with so many interpretations that a survey of the historical development of the word 'exile' would be necessary to elucidate it. It would be possible then to grasp the many implications that have been associated to exile throughout time, an association that makes the "literature of exile" a thorny and vast area of research, yet a very interesting one.

Although the word 'exile' was introduced by the Greco-Latin civilization, the notion of exile has always existed. According to the Judeo-Christian vision of the world, also shared with the Islamic one, Adam and Eve were the first exiles on earth. Because they ate the fruit God forbade, they were expelled from the

Garden of Eden. Even though it is not agreed on which fruit it is (since in the Koran only the word “tree” is mentioned while it is the “apple” in the Christian religion), the important fact to be retained is what caused Adam and Eve’s expulsion , which is disobedience and sin (known as the original sin). The first connotation of exile is therefore punishment, followed by banishment. In the Koran, for example, translated by M.H Shakir, it is written in the Surah “*The Elevated Places*”, verse 22:

> “In the name of Allah,the Beneficent,the Merciful”,
>
> Then he caused them to **fall** by deceit; so when they tasted of the tree, their evil inclinations became manifest to them, and they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden; and their Lord called out to them: did I not forbid you both from that tree and say to you that the Shaitan is your open enemy?” (1984:95)

In another verse of the same Surah, Allah also says “*He said: **Get forth** , some of you , the enemies of others, and there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time.*” (Ibid). In both verses, the reproach is made to Adam and Eve not to have obeyed Him ; consequently they are evicted from Paradise as a chastisement for their sin.

In the Bible, a reference is made to another sin, which is the first crime committed in the history of humanity. Cain kills his brother Abel. He is then expelled from the Fertile Soil, damned and condemned to roam the earth without ever knowing peace:

> You are placed under a curse and can no longer Farm the soil. It has soaked up your brother’s blood as if it had opened its mouth to receive it when you killed him. If you try to grow crops,

> the soil will not produce anything; you will be
> a homeless wanderer on the earth.

(Good News Bible,1976-1979:7)

The tragic situation of the exile is already announced in the Bible. The phrase " a homeless wanderer" makes it even more precise. An exile is a person with no fixed place. It is someone who cannot enjoy the warmth of a home, nor the soothing thought of going back to it, which explains the everlasting appeal to 'return' home. This lack of stability is always accompanied with a feeling of insecurity and fear (as will be seen later in this chapter). Cain expresses his anxiety about the threat that may await him in these words: "*I will be a homeless wanderer on the earth and anyone who finds me will kill me.*"(ibid).

The Bible gives another image of exile through the history of the perpetual flight of the Israeli community. The Book entitled *Exodus*, which means 'departure' in this context, refers to the most important event in the history of Israel. Under the protection of God and led by Moses, the people of Israel fled from Egypt where they were persecuted and killed. On their way to the Promised Land, they faced the hardships of a very long journey. The omnipresence of God saved them from starvation, thirst and enemies, but in spite of His help, they disobeyed Him. Thus, after offering His protection and blessing , and after forgiving the numerous errors they made, He condemned them to being uprooted for the rest of their lives. In the Book "*Kings",* for example, it is written: "*He will uproot the people of Israel of this good land which he gave to their ancestors, and he will scatter them beyond the river of Euphrates....*"(Good News Bible,1976-1979:353). The rejection of the people of Israel was indeed a form of exile. It was an exclusion from God's protection and a denial that made them suffer intensely. Worse, they were devoid of their old status – the Elect- hence, exposed to danger. However,

it is important to note that these exiles were not overwhelmingly despaired since they lived with the hope to be redeemed and continued to believe in a happier future which only God could offer. While the prayers addressed to Him sound like elegies and laments, they suggest their hope to be blessed . For instance, the recurrence of the expression "*why have you abandoned me*?" in almost all the psalms is not only a complaint but also an imploration and an expectation of pardon and bliss. On the other hand, "*The Prayer of a Man in Exile*" (Good News Bible,1976-1979:559) clearly tells about the cruelty of exile as well as man's wish to return home. In this psalm the 'man in exile' is described as sad and troubled, always in tears, remembering the past and praying God to forgive and save him. Actually, the theme of exile in the Bible provides an insight into the exiles' state of mind. Exile can be interpreted as a curse and a damnation, but mainly as a punishment, a psychological burden which is the exile's essential source of pain. From a religious point of view, it can be said then that exile suggests damnation, punishment, insecurity, grief but also redemption and a perpetual hope for return, features that draw the portrait of any exile on earth as will be discussed further.

In the Greco-Latin civilisation, exile no longer a divine chastisement, varied from one case to another. The word "exilium", occurring at that period, meant an exclusion from the essential elements of life which are water and fire[4]. Deprived of the latter, exiles were compelled to leave the place where they were prohibited and look for refuge elsewhere. With the introduction of the juridical status of the exiles by the law, their position was defined more clearly. Thus, each case was carefully and minutely studied. The court declared them as ostracized, relegated, banished, deported or proscribed depending on what form of exile they were

[4] Prohibition of water and fire was also known as *Aquae et ignis interdiction* inflicted as a punishment to outlaws. For more details see the study of Gordon, P.Kelly (2006), *A History of Exile in the Roman Republic*. USA:Cambridge University Press.

subjected to. Regulated and determined by the law, the new status helped distinguish one exile from the other and to a certain extent measure up the degree of gravity of the sentence. An explanation of these juridical status will give an idea of what exiles were assigned to and what they underwent. However, it should be observed that this clarification is not intended as an all-inclusive treatment nor a fully detailed examination of the judicial question of exile. It is rather meant to show that the concept of exile can have various meanings and implications. So, exile could mean *ostracism*, for instance. This sentence was the least harsh condemnation to exile. It concerned those who were suspected not to conform to the norms of the society where they lived (outlaws). They were therefore sent away from their country for a period which did not exceed ten years and which was often reduced to two. They did not lose their status as citizens, enjoyed certain rights and fulfilled certain duties. Moreover, their reinstatement in their country was planned. *Relegation* was less easy to endure. It confined the exiles to a particular residence and prohibited them from moving to or visiting any place judged forbidden to them. A famous case of relegation often referred to is that of Ovide, the Roman poet, who was charged for his 'daring' writings and who died in exile without ever having the chance to return to his country nor see his relatives. Still dealing with the juridical definitions of exile, *banishment* is much more repressive than ostracism and relegation, for it is a firm prohibition from returning home, with a loss of civil rights and a declaration of infamy by the law. Worse, if the banished were condemned to a perpetual exile, they no longer featured among the citizens – as if dead - and their properties were confiscated. The situation was the same with *deportation* except that the deportees were transferred to a given place decided by the law. As for *proscription*, it was an arbitrary sentence which was passed on any person suspected to be a political opponent, and this was effectuated without any trial. Generally, the proscribed were political refugees.

All these descriptions of exile[5], determining juridical status and distinguishing exiles, did not, however, bring any change to their state of mind. Whether they were proscribed, relegated or banished, they were not relieved from that anguish of heart and feeling of alienation which Cain, Ovide and the Israeli people knew. All longed for their native lands, fatherlands, or motherlands, compound nouns suggesting an affectionate and essential relationship between men and their lands. It is a relationship that denotes a strong feeling of belonging , in other words an identity. Man's connection to the land is as old as the history of humanity and is forcefully recurrent in religious texts. In both the Koran and the Bible, it is said that man is made of earth , " *In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful: And Allah created you of dust, then of the life-germ, then he made you pairs*" (translated by Shakir, 1988:94). In another Surah, "*The Originator*", it is also written "*He said: I am better than he: Thou hast created me of fire, while him thou didst create of dust*" (Ibid.,p.287). As for the Bible, it states directly the physical link man has with the earth saying, "*Then the Lord took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it*".(Good News Bible,1976-1979:5). Hence, man's attachment to his land is irrevocable and can explain time and again the sense of loss and the agony felt after a rupture with one's home – country. Nevertheless, how can it be explained that in spite of the pain and grief engendered by exile, many have 'chosen' to quit and venture at their risks and perils?

1.3 THE DILEMMA OF EXILE

Nowadays, a recent phenomenon which cannot be overlooked, has appeared in Algeria under the name of 'Harraga'(see glossary). Though not exclusively

[5] Descriptions of forms of exile taken from J.Mounier (ed.) (1986). *L'exil et la littérature*. Grenoble: ELLUG.

Algerian, it has yet become tragic in this country. Hundreds of youths, driven by despair, have been planning their journey to the "Promised Land" while it often turned to be a journey to the "heart of darkness"[6]. For most of them the dream became a nightmare, and yet, the temptation, the attraction, proved to be more powerful and convincing than any statement of wisdom or patience, than any promise heard in an official speech or read in a newspaper.

In an article or what may be called a critical fiction entitled "*The Old Child and the Sea*" [7](see notes), El-Yazid Dib invites the reader to live the vicissitudes of a 'harrag's experience in the sea till his rescue from death. Yet, while one expects the 'old child' to be happy for being safe, one is surprised by what crossed the latter's mind at the very moment he realized he was still alive,

> I Conceive that I come from another world; not the one my dreams have gone through. I was born again like a wreck, stranded on a coast by misfortune. The sea with its ferocious claws could not be my last sepulture. My own mother with her smooth, kind gestures presses me against her breast, murmuring, crying her joy. I told myself: **and if it had to be done again?** My mother without knowing it, tightens me even more.

(Dib, 2008:11)

The thought of 're-doing' it sounds as the expression of an incredible will – some kind of stubbornness, perhaps even obsession -- to depart, at the same time as it reinforces the feeling of despair and disillusion mentioned earlier.
On another continent, America, some of the Mexicans who have been deported – as they themselves say- from the USA to Tijuana think that "*life is easier*

[6] A phrase borrowed from Joseph Conrad's novella '*Heart of Darkness*'(1999).
[7] « Le vieux môme et la mer » (See notes).

there".[8] Followed and interviewed by Bodinier and Vigne, reporters working for ARTE, the French/German TV Channel, they recounted their daily adventures and especially their often vain attempts at jumping over the line that separated their country from the USA, stressing the dangers they faced each time they did it. Either they succeeded to overstep the frontier and join some friends or relatives safely, or they were caught and sent back home because they had no identity documents. Once in Tijuana, they were arrested and put in jail. As for those who ran away from the police, they lived underground with and like rats, trying to share and perpetuate their dreams of a better life thanks to a magic potion called heroine. The images of the documentary were quite shocking; the testimony of these excluded men, these persons who almost lost the appearance of human beings, these 'creatures' belonging to nowhere, homeless and rejected, both abroad and in their own country, cannot but shake the conscience of whoever pretends to be more lucid and conscious than them.

A reality as tragic as the Mexicans' if not more, is the Cambodians'. A tour of Asia stops us in a part of the world where the traumatic reign of the Red Khmers (see glossary), left terrible traces on the people. Sathaya Kim, a magistrate and living witness of the massacre of her compatriots, explains in her book entitled *Jeunesse brisée* (2008) **,** how a great number of families were dislocated and destroyed in an acutely planned process consisting in separating men from women and children from their parents. 'Living apart', another form of exile, as Kim testifies, was a condemnation to utter solitude and isolation, to the loss of a long span of one's life, namely youth as far as she was concerned. She recalls those years with a lot of sorrows to the extent of seeing the past as a chronic

[8] Documentary on the deportation of Mexicans caught in The USA broadcast by ARTE TV channel. *Mexique:Les déportés de la "Tierre de nadie* » by G.Le Gouil, J.L. Bodinier &A.Vigne,24/05/2008 at 18.00. (See documentary recorded on C.D).

disease which passes and comes again, violently, to remind her of the horror she lived.

The film of tragedies such as the ones cited above is endless, and the reasons that induced certain people to quit their native lands are comprehensible and justifiable. However, whatever the status of the men and women who have been condemned to leave their motherland are, and in spite of all the arguments advanced to legitimize their departure, they feel the same torment, the same solitude, the same separation and the same grief once they cross its boundaries. Even emigration, perhaps the mildest form of exile, is seen by Siniavski as quite destructive,

> For many, emigration becomes a chronic disease to which more than one succumb. Within the narrow circle of my friends and acquaintances,I count three cases of suicide and five deadly accidents due to a lack of experience on new grounds.As for those who are overwhelmed by madness, tormented by mental breakdown, those who lost their faces, I will not count them.(See notes).
>
> (Siniavski, 1985:15)

Such a poignant testimony is reminiscent of the many non-white South Africans who committed suicide in exile like Nat Nakasa and Selby Mvusi, or those who died out of grief and homesickness like Arthur Nortje, Can Themba, Todd Matshikisa, Alfred Hutchinson and others[9]**.** Would it not be partly for this reason that Nadia Guendouz, the Algerian poet and militant forced into exile in her own country, refused yet to leave it ?

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[9] Nat Nakasa and Arthur Nortje among others are names of South Africans who committed suicide. They are listed in Mphahlele's *Afrika my Music* in a chapter headed '*The Living dead'* and which reads like an elegy (pp.124-126).

I am in prison in my country, but I
would not exchange my prison with
the freedoms of exile.[10]

(Guendouz,2001:124)

Those who, however, exchanged their prison with the freedoms of exile never denied the fact that the latter had a strong and cruel effect on them. Regardless of how despairing and unbearable the environment they decided to depart from was, exiles found it very difficult to cope with the new world they were transferred to.

Among those who experienced exile most intensely, the writers are most probably the first ones to point to. A look at the World's literatures provides us with a variety of examples and versions the most recurrent of which is loneliness and distress. In the majority of texts, both fictional and factual, exile remains an expression of pain. As said earlier, exile suggests uprooting, absence, loneliness, oblivion. Whether they are at home or abroad, exiles suffer from not being heard nor understood. Here and there, they are the 'others', the excluded, the alien. In their quest of freedom and peace, they feel the sweetness and bitterness of nostalgia. Their writings continually express the hope to return home in spite of a long and difficult wait. A variety of nouns and adjectives associated with exile show how rich but also how ambiguous the term is. Only through an attempt at understanding what is meant by the literature of exile would it be possible to dissipate this ambiguity.

The writers' exile is more intense than other people's in the sense that theirs goes through many stages. Primarily, as artists, the writers are by nature exiles since they are always in quest of a something, different from what the common men look for, a something that would give a meaning to their life, that would

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[10] « Je suis en prison dans mon pays, mais je n'échangerais pas ma prison contre les libertés de l'exil ».

bring, as it were, a response to some sort of lack. The suppositions are innumerable, but the lack is essentially one of trying to comprehend the world one lives in or one's existence within this world. The lack may also be one of communication and affinities with one's environment. Aware of such a void, the writers consequently feel different from the others and therefore isolate themselves more and more in their own universe. Conscious again of their difference, they suffer from being isolated but at the same time invite loneliness which proves to be a necessary condition for reflection and understanding. As Drevet says in his article, " *The Writer's Solitude* "[11]

> Solitude is the only state that suits the writer's imperative feeling to say everything including what he did not think he would say.[12]
>
> (Drevet, 1991:58)

This state of self exclusion or internal exile creates a strong need for expression, whence the inevitable relationship between exile and literature. Goloboff, an exiled writer from Argentina, explained that perhaps he wrote on exile because

> Nowadays, literature is in itself a permanent exile. No one writes because he feels at his place but rather because he feels displaced.[13]
>
> (Goloboff,1985:44)

[11] « La solitude de l'écrivain ».
[12] « La solitude est le seul état qui convienne à l'impératif que l'écrivain ressent de dire tout, y compris ce qu'il ne pensait pas avoir à dire ».
[13] « La littérature aujourd'hui est en elle même un exil permanent. Nul n'écrit parce qu'il se sent à sa place, mais plutôt parce qu'il se sent déplacé ».

Considering Goloboff's remark on the relationship between literature and exile, one may think about writing as a kind of therapy. To compare writing to a treatment is not an exaggeration, for the 'displacement' alluded to is nothing but a malaise writers constantly suffer from. In order to cure it, the latter will look for its causes; so in the loneliness they have imposed on themselves, they meditate, understand and write. The texts produced in such circumstances are very often autobiographical, a genre which exiled writers resort to almost instinctively as will be seen later. These texts generally display an attempt to get out of confusion; sometimes the artists succeed in freeing their minds from that heavy load, but sometimes their efforts reach a deadlock, which explains the fact that some exiles commit suicide. In any case, writing contributes enormously to the psychological reconstruction of the writers' attitudes to all forms of pressures. In other words, whatever the result writers come to, they will have tried to solve their problems or at least relieve their minds through writing.

It may be thus confirmed that in the context of exile, writing has an ambivalent even ambiguous interpretation. On the one hand, the act of writing is seen as a form of exile, a displacement because of the writers' natural withdrawal; on the other hand, it offers a refuge and a response to the pressures of exile, whence the need to take root in the artistic production, in this space which is the text and which will allow them to re-build their own life and their own self. Trying to expound the conception of exile in Farès's works, Meddeb argues that man has no place in this world except that of writing and it is only through writing, he thinks, that a writer can find his roots and recreate his identity. (Arnaud in Mounier, ed. 1986: 67). As for Siniavski, he sees in the act of writing a condition for physical and spiritual survival. According to him, emigration is a hard experience for any writer. It is a harsh kind of test of the emigrant's resistance and capacity of adaptation to a new, unfamiliar environment. Furthermore, Siniavski explains that the process of the writer's survival is largely assured by

the process of writing; in other words, survival is guaranteed by writing.(1985:15).

So far, there has been an attempt at explaining that the innate curiosity of the writers, their anxiety and their difference from the other persons turned them into exiles. It has also been shown how in their situation, writing is summoned to satisfy a personal need which Brink, the South African writer, sees as "*vital as hunger* " (Brink, 1983: 67). Yet, besides this insatiable desire for writing, writers seem to have a mission to accomplish. More than that, it is for them a matter of conscience to write about a situation they judge intolerable. In this respect, Brink uses two words in his conception of what a writer should be: 'rebel' and 'fighter'. Obviously, in the particular context of South Africa, these are two key words which clearly define the position of the writers as committed ones, serving a human cause and engaged in a genuine battle –'rebellion' meaning reaction to oppression and 'fight' suggesting all the necessary means, legitimate for this purpose, to recover the dignity denied to them and to the people. So, through the publication of novels, poems and essays meant to denounce and subvert an unwanted political regime, they endeavour to make their voice heard. The task is very often hard and risky, for whatever they produce is put under embargo, censored or simply banned. Sometimes they are arrested and jailed or banished. They may even be killed, and in this respect, the fate of Steve Biko (see notes) remains a case in point. All this entails a condemnation to silence which is the utmost form of exile for writers.

In fact, one may distinguish two kinds of exile: the imposed and the voluntary one. This is certainly an oversimplification meant to reduce the infinitely large field of exile. But it sometimes proves helpful in dividing the exiles into two important categories: those who are forced by the government to leave their countries and those who decide by themselves to set out to a new land such as the

emigrants for example. As far as writers are concerned, being devoid of the right to choose their own way of life, of expressing their opinions and of communicating with the masses, they feel exiled in their own country. Worse, they feel impotent and useless since they cannot contribute as they could and would like to against the 'enemies' of freedom. Thus, failing to fulfill their aims at home, many writers 'choose' another exile which would at least allow them to "*get something off their chest*" to quote Rive. (1980:47). However, one is tempted to ask: does one ever choose to leave one's native land willingly? To what extent would it be right to talk about a choice? There seems to be various reasons which lead to exile as hinted at earlier, and because of these reasons the choice itself becomes a constraint. Exiles do not *'choose'* to flee political persecutions but are compelled to run away in order to save their lives and their ideas. In any case, the difference between the voluntary and the imposed exile does not seem to alter the moral condition of the exiled writers because their stay just as their departure are always for them a dilemma.

1.4 PRISON WRITINGS.

Actually, writing seems to have been a refuge and an interlocutor for exiles throughout times. Ovide, cited previously, is a poet whose famous case of relegation is worth mentioning. This unfortunate Roman poet of the 7th century was killed by exile after being expelled from Italy by Emperor Augustus because of the publication of "*L'art d'aimer*" (in Monsacré,1985:17), a collection of erotic poems praising adultery. He never could endure the harshness of exile. For a very long time, he had been writing to his relatives and to the emperor letters known as "*Tristes*" and "*Pontiques*" (ibid) which related his exile and which implored the latter to let him return home. Nevertheless, his numerous attempts to arise his compatriots' compassion were vain, for he never received any reply

from them. Ovide continued, however, to write about himself as a way to release his mind and body from that disease which was loneliness and which consumed him day after day. Never did he recover from being separated from his family and friends. Through writing, he also wanted to assert his existence. Recalling the past, he tried to abridge the distance and feel closer to the beloved ones, confirming thus an exiled Canadian poet's assumption that when one tells one's friends that s/he does not forget them, s/he is asking them not to forget her/him. (Ethiers-Blais, 1965: 8-9). Ovide died without ever returning home and certainly with the painful feeling of being 'forgotten'.

If Ovide's example has been chosen among others, it is because he can be considered as a representative of the literature of exile and its close link with the autobiographical genre. Perhaps did he start to write about himself because he was physically and morally confined to a certain residence. One might imagine that the 'walls' surrounding him reduced his field of creation to a sort of 'transcription' of his own immediate life as he wrote only about himself in relation to his exile. In other words, Ovide wrote of himself and to himself because he could address no other audience than himself. Finally, because there was but silence as a reply to his hopeless letters, he died worn out by endless wait. Not all exiled writers have had his tragic fate, but like him, most of them have been writing about their own experiences, which generally gave birth to autobiographies.

Unlike Ovide who did not have the chance to escape from exile, prison and death, some centuries later, Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian writer and Nobel-prize winner(1986) whose detention was much more violent, survived and revealed through his famous book *The Man Died* (1972), the atrocities inflicted on detainees in Nigerian gaols. Soyinka was a virulent political writer, a rebel who opposed the tyrannical military regime of Nigeria. He was arrested and framed

for his denunciation of the Biafra war[14] and for his activities outside and inside prison, notably his attempts to recruit the country's intellectuals who would form a pressure group against the government in place. He tells us with an ' I' narrator about his frightening experience and most of all about this particular state of mind that jailers worked out to create especially "*for those whose minds they fear[ed].*"(1972:12). *The Man died* was written after he was released and decided to go into voluntary exile, but its seeds were sown in prison –his first exile. They came to fruition at a period which, in spite of being somber, was the writer's outlet. In an interview to The Guardian Review, he confided that the condition of exile was far from being a release:

> I consider that I live in limbo. I've not yet accepted the condition of exile and largely because I'm kept so busy on the Nigerian question, the Nigerian crisis,that it's almost as if I'm right in the center of the cauldron.

(Soyinka in Wanene, 1995:3)

It seems that Soyinka did not cease to live in limbo, for this unbearable feeling is also that of the prisoner whose only way to affirm his presence was to try and communicate with the others through writing. To illustrate this necessity, Soyinka quotes the letter of George Mangakis, a victim of Greek fascism who considers writing as a self-defense and a protection against solitude, oblivion and why not madness:

> Among so many other things, the anguish of being in prison is also a deep need to com-municate with one' s fellow human beings. It is a need that suffocates one, at times.

[14] Biafra War is a war of secession that took place in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970.

> Self-defence. That is why I write. That is how I manage to keep my mind under control. If I let it loose, unsupported by the frame of written thought, it goes wild. It takes strange sinister by-ways, and ends up by begetting monsters.
>
> (Soyinka 1972:12)

Soyinka quotes, sustains and testifies to the strange monsters prison begets. His outcry, as usual, pierced the walls of silence to let truth reach the oppressed people and remind them that "*the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny*". (Soyinka,1972 :13).

The latter statement is an allusion to censorship and more precisely self-censorship for which Nkosi, substitutes the concept 'gagged'. In his book, *Home and Exile*, he devotes a chapter to the effects of censorship on people and writers who are speechless, silenced, strangled and 'gagged', and who, tragically, become almost accustomed to this situation as he says:

> It is sufficient here to note that South Africans are, as a nation, a speechless people whose fear of the spoken and the written word has created a terrible fatuity in their lives, both private and public.
>
> (Nkosi, 1983: 126)

This idea of fatuity is found again in Soyinka's *The Man Died,* an autobiographical account which should be read not just as a personal experience, a protest against the government, or a denunciation of a political system but also as the description of a society of men and women who reached a state of aphasia and fear that are questioned and refused by the writer who sees in such attitudes –certainly due to tyranny - a sort of suicide encouraging and reinforcing

dictatorship. Soyinka tells about the blows he received and those he 'gave' in the sense that his resistance and determination not to be subjected to debasement and daily insults could be seen as a form of rebellion and therefore an expression of hostility to the regime. The humiliation and mental devastation he describes send us back to South Africa where a worse climate is prevailing. Nkosi explains very well that in a society where the "law", by means of clauses and acts, like The Sabotage Act, controls and bans any article, comment, book or whatever expression or thought formulated by a writer, it would be naïve to expect people to 'speak' or great works to be produced:

> It is by no means an accident that we have produced no great playwrights in South Africa and that characters in our fiction seem, most of the time at a loss as to what to say to each other. Language must be inhabited, it must be enlarged by usage; South Africans abridge it and stop it from referring too closely to those emotions which they spend almost all their lives trying to obliterate or deny.
>
> (Nkosi, 1983:126)

Not in a novel, nor in an autobiography does Nkosi recount his exile; however his essays are all about real, lived experiences and just like autobiographers, he recollects them employing the 'I' narrator. Twenty one years after leaving hastily and in an incredible way his country -without a passport but a document, an 'Exit Permit', granted after a declaration to leave permanently is signed - Nkosi re-visits the past; a past which reminded him of "*the ugly world in which [he] lived [his] trapped life*" (1983:7) and from which he had to run away whatever the deprivations of exile were. Exile, he confides, is not all pain for he could never have developed as a writer nor as a free man, had he stayed in South

Africa. So it is once again in exile that the relationship with literature is consolidated.

In the mode of essays, notes, letters, tracts or pamphlets, prison writings always translate a personal testimony, an implication or a complicity and therefore become for a while autobiographical. Noteworthy is the example of the Egyptian writer, Said El-Kafraoui[15] who also was imprisoned for his 'dangerous' ideas. Fighting against the same monsters that haunted Mangakis and Soyinka, El-Kafraoui evokes the nightmarish moments he spent in prison invaded by solitude and anxiety. Like Soyinka, he testifies to the dehumanizing and humiliating effects tending to regress the prisoners' minds. In a deeply moving account of his sojourn in prison, he recalls being identified as N°23, which was the number of his cell; a cell whose walls he describes as a mosaic of writings betraying the diversity of prisoners; walls tattooed, bearing the prints of men whose voices were silenced but whose 'pens' –or any tool used for writing- carved or scratched words forever engraved in their memory.

Thus, for both prisoners and exiles, writing and re-writing of self is a fundamental reassessment of their existence and their presence even if out of sight and touch for a long time. Writing offers and represents a space for expression and communication, a perspective for a probable better future out of the confines of prison and exile, and hereby, tightens the fragile thread that attaches these men and women to the outside world. In fact, writing functions as a therapy for them since they are going , on the one hand, to relieve and extricate

[15] Said El Kafraoui , a writer and living witness was invited in AL JAZEERA channel to tell about his experience as a prisoner in one of the most notorious jails of Egypt: "AL- KALAA Prison", realized by Ahmed Rachouan, produced by Yasser Abdenaim, 20/12/2008.

themselves from the psychological load they carry as prisoners and exiles; on the other hand, they are going to establish a dialogue with the readers, the thing they mostly need and aim at but also the thing that will really give a meaning to their life and their combat. Convinced that words of truth will always reach the hearts and minds of the readers, they chose to do it through a genre that is the 'truest' i.e. the autobiography or auto fiction.

1.5 TRUTH AND THE POWER OF THE WORD

Albie Sachs, a South African lawyer, condemned to the '168 days detention', 'inscribed' in his book entitled *The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* the following words:

> I write and I write- I must record my story
> as accurately and honestly as I can. Then they
> should take me in again I will know that there
> is something of me outside which will continue
> to exist whatever they do to me.
>
> (Sachs 1990:285)

Sachs undertook to write about his experience in jail just as Ruth First, Molefo Pheto, Kantor, Zwelonke, Breyten Breytenbach did, to name but a few South African detainees. All these writers assumed the role of witnesses and announced in their narratives their intention to report facts and to tell the truth about their detention.

In spite of the Prison Act (N°8 of 1959), which forbade the publication of any information about prison conditions or the experience of imprisonment, contacts were made possible through illicit writing on cell walls, toilet paper, letters or newspaper smuggling. The most difficult situation for the prison writers,

however, was to obey their conscience and resist all forms of torture under which they were ordered to write what they were dictated. It happened sometimes that the word was compromised --through being forced to confess- and therefore turned to be the regime's. In *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing; André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J.M. Coetzee* (1996), Jolly explains how through this process a prisoner loses his voice since the 'I' he uses in his text is not really his but an 'I' his interrogators force him to use, that is to say an 'I' who would always plead guilty, an 'I' who would betray the very principles he was imprisoned for and who would alienate him from her/his 'brothers' . She advances the argument that a prisoner needs to make a distinction between the 'I' who is the subject *of* the speech or the confession and the 'I' who is subject *to* it in order to avoid the erasure of her/his voice. Illustrating Breytenbach, a leading Afrikaan writer sentenced to nine years imprisonment in 1975 (who justified his imposed testimonies as the product of someone "raped"), she states:

> In a position precisely contrary to that of his interrogators, Breytenbach considers his survival to consist of recognizing that the 'I' who speaks the confession does not coincide with the 'I' who is the subject of the confession and who is also therefore subject to the confession……
>
> (Jolly 1996: 74)

To be aware of who is 'I' and to demarcate him/her from the other 'I's' is for Breytenbach a matter of survival and a first victory against torture. Even if some prisoners succumbed to the warders' dissuasive techniques, most of them pursued their mission with an almost holy vow which was to tell the 'truth' whatever it cost.

The continuity of the struggle through the power of the word is what exiles and prisoners relied on, for the word "*acquires a new resonance: it ceases, in fact, to be 'merely' a word and enters the world as an act in its own right.*" (Brink, 1983:165). Moreover, the thing that allowed them to survive the atrocities of detention was a strong belief that the words they produced in such circumstances generated 'truth', an ideal for which they lived and died; 'truth', the most performing weapon pointed against a dictatorial regime like Apartheid; 'truth', a sacred word defined by Nietzshe as "*a mobile army of metaphors*" (Nietzshe, 1974: 46-47) but which in South Africa can only be a connotation of the noblest war a writer has ever been engaged in. Truth, Brink tells us, is immortal. And the more it is silenced, the greater the writer's determination is to break that silence: "*When the conspiracy of lies surrounding me demands of me to silence the one word of truth given to me,* ***that word becomes the one word I wish to utter above all others***."(Brink, 1983:56). In a lecture he delivered to the memory of Mahatma Ghandi, he evoked the latter with an immense respect. He talked about the man who was dead but who would never be dead because of his undying legacy to the world. In the same lecture, he called up Bram Fisher an Afrikaner who was serving a life sentence in jail for his ideals of racial harmony and the right to determine the form of government one aspired to. He assured the audience that this man would never be forgotten just because he said the truth.

> The government –any government- can effectively Silence or incapacitate an individual or even large numbers of individuals, but all the battalions of fear and all the organizations of hate, all the formidable destructive, power of armies and police, of Saracens and jails, of BOSS-laws and banishments cannot kill an idea in which the light of truth is burning.

(Brink, 1983:56)

Sharing the same conviction, Breytenbach, who was particularly affected by this battle against lies in prison, reported in his "*True Confessions*" that the police agents used such perverse questionings and interrogation that it became an "*ongoing process of dissecting and undoing the psyche and washing the brain*" (1984:180). Nevertheless, in spite of all the manoeuvres employed to divert prisoners from 'truth', the latter always triumphed. In what could be visualized as a battle between 'lie' and 'truth', Gready explains in his fully detailed article on prison writings in South Africa (1993:489-523)) how the antagonists held tightly their positions: the generation of Apartheid political power had the capacity to generate lies and have them believed while prison writers' power depended on their capacity to generate truth and their truths believed. (Gready, 1993:493).

It is indeed difficult to imagine that human beings under torture and in such a state of mind as described earlier, could yet have the capacity of thinking and transforming lie into truth as Breytenbach implies. Such acrobatics must have demanded a considerable energy, both physical and moral, to sustain prison writers. In reality, there were two fundamental elements that helped them to resist; solidarity and mobilization. It was essentially from these that they drew their force and owing to these that they continued their struggle for change and freedom.

1.6 ROBBEN ISLAND

Talking about the struggle for change and freedom in the particular context of South Africa will inevitably lead us to a historically renowned place that has been classified as world heritage by the UNESCO. This place can justly be considered as the cradle and symbol of the literature of exile as well as 'prison

literature'. Robben Island, a piece of land surrounded by water, isolated and detached from the rest of South Africa and the rest of the world, was also called "Hell-Hole" and "Island in Chains"[16]. Robben Island was synonymous of extreme oppression and cruelty. It was a 'laboratory' of physical and psychological torture where great names such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Dennis Brutus were registered. As if prison were not enough for confinement and uprooting, it needed to be geographically situated apart, afar, in a sort of prison within a prison or a transplanted prison. To play with the word prison turns to be ironically interesting as it gradually narrows towards an utmost imprisonment of both body and mind as most prisoners testify.

Robben Island, which has become a museum nowadays, is a fundamental illustration for our study. Like all museums, it bears on its walls and shelves precious pieces of art, the marks of a glorious or shameful past, archives to be consulted, and among these a whole body of literature which this prison has generated. The amount as well as the variety of writings produced in this space is very instructive as it informs us on prisoners' life, organization, relationship, encounters, political resistance, ideological debates etc..; in addition to the documentary aspect it offers, it provides us with a genre that we are particularly concerned with i.e. autobiography. Actually, an analysis of the texts produced in this prison namely the narrative techniques used by different writers going through the same experience at different times reveal the one and same struggle 'voiced' by many writers. In other words, the various expressions and views of writers converge at the end towards the same idea since they are all defending it. Driver describes their attitude as follows:

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[16] The reference to Robben Island as 'hell-hole' and 'island in chains' was inspired by the titles of prison accounts written by M.Dlamini, *Hell-Hole Robben Island: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner,* 1984) and I.Naidoo, *Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island* (1982).

> Robben Islanders provide a powerful manifestation of a common characteristic in prison literature: an autobiographical agenda linked to a collective and political identity and mission.
>
> (Driver 1975:119)

On the other hand, Gready, divides the periods during which Robben Island saw the proliferation of writings into three: 1963-1968, 1968-1976-77 and the 1980's. These dates correspond to the most critical events in the history of South Africa. It was the time when protest movements initiated by the African National Congress[17] (see notes) and the Pan Africanist Congress[18] culminated in the most bloody confrontations between the police and the black people. The Sharpeville massacre in 1961, followed by the arrest and imprisonment of Nelson Mandela (see notes) in 1963 are pages of history hardly to be turned. A decade later, the Black Consciousness Movement was founded (1972)[19]. The latter contributed to the gathering storm that burst out on 16 June 1976. Thousands of South African adults and students launched the first massive strike since 1961, which resulted in the killing of hundreds of Blacks, another massacre that stirred the conscience of the world. As for the 1980's, they saw not only the emergence but also the multiplication of organizations more radical and more aggressive than the previous ones, all obeying the commanders' call (in exile) for arms and boycotts. In parallel with this restless struggle, repression, banishment and imprisonment were maintained by the National Party[20] (see notes) as a response to the South Africans' rebellion. Finally, negotiations between Afrikaners and

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[17] African National Congress (ANC): organization created in 1912 to promote black Rights in South Africa led by Nelson Mandela.(See notes).

[18] Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) : formed by the ANC after the arrest of Nelson Mandela in 1956. It was led by Robert Sobukwe and advocated a black dominated South Africa.

[19] Black Consciousness Movement (BCM): founded in 1972 by Bantu Steven Biko.

[20] National Party (NP) : nationalist party expressing the supremacy of the Afrikaners, formed by Dr.F.Malan in 1913.(See notes).

black South Africans started seriously only after Frederick DeKlerck , a "verligte" (see glossary) Afrikaner came to power on September 1989, marking thus a new and promising era for South Africa.

It should be reminded that the three periods just mentioned are also those of three generations (see notes) fighting for the same cause and making of Robben Island " *a laboratory of major political experiment*" as Dingake says in his autobiography *My Fight Against Apartheid* (1987: 203) . As said earlier, a close look at the literature produced at those times reveals a unique concern and goal articulated by different writers whose individual "I's" converted, gathered or united into a collective, massive and threatening "we" inside prison. Far from erasing individual identities as one may suppose, the collective identities in this particular case reinforced both the self and collective existence. The individual experiences recounted by each of them are more or less similar: all suffered from racial discrimination, deprivation, poverty, violence. All fought against Apartheid, joined political parties or took part in protest movements. Inside prison, they were subjected to the same ill-treatments and persecutions, and all together developed the same desire of revenge and the same objective: rebellion and freedom.

I am a rebel and freedom is my cause

(Brutus,2009,http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/files/
dennis%20compleate poems.pdf)

Taken from a poem (see notes) written by Dennis Brutus in Robben Island, this line is a loud appeal to war. The 'I' is not just the poet's. It is a tacit 'I'; the 'I' of all whom he exhorted to join him in his fight and whose cause was freedom. As a matter of fact, the use of the pronoun "we" in Robben Island was forbidden for

the simple reason that it represented a political interlocutor speaking in the name of a community of prisoners considered as dangerous and therefore susceptible of forming a block against the regime. The instability of the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘we’ was by no means a sign of weakness but rather a permutation that confirmed the power of the addresser as representing both an individual and a community. Thus the ‘we’ in non-white South African literature is not an echo of the “***We** are the hollow men….leaning together*” by T.S Eliot (in Modern British Literature,1975:491) but a resounding ‘*We* are the determined men… standing together’ by Brutus, or Zwelonke, or any other detainee determined to break the chains of slavery. Therefore, it could be said that the ‘I’ narrator used by these same persons in their autobiographies memoirs, diaries or journals is not just personal, but it is the mouthpiece of a whole people. In South Africa then the idea sustaining that identity is first of all collective and political is confirmed. It furthermore supports the thesis according to which western societies are individual while Africans’ are collective.

1.7 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS: BY WHICH STANDARDS?

In effect, autobiography is par excellence an occidental genre. Although its origins could be dated as early as St Augustine’s *Confessions* i.e. fourteen centuries before the invention of the word ‘autobiography’, the latter first appeared in its English form in the 1800’s with the publication of an article written by Robert Southey, an English poet. (in May, 1979:18-19). The word is said to have spread in European languages at that same period, but the genre in its various styles and names existed long before the term was coined. Autobiographical texts often came out under the titles of memoirs, journal, diary, letters, souvenirs, cahiers, essays, etc… They generally recounted their authors’

life-stories but with a particular focus on self-examination, consciousness of sin , apology and justification.

The definition that is often borrowed to distinguish an autobiographer from a novelist does not completely conform to the South African case. Besides, it would be interesting to refer here to Ghandi's *An Autobiography* which he also entitled *The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. In its preface, he confides that writing an autobiography was a very risky enterprise, an adventure which his intimate friend tried to dissuade him to embark on. The argument was that autobiography, being a Western genre , would be very difficult to handle by an Eastern person; he quoted his friend who assured him that writing an autobiography was a practice peculiar to the West. The following words, he admitted, had some effect on him:

> I know of nobody in the East having written one, except among those who have come under Western influence. And what will you write ? Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today, or supposing you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your word, spoken or written, may be misled? Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet?
>
> (Ghandi 1927: 13)

Indeed this quotation holds one's attention as it sheds light on the difference that lies between the Westerners' and the Easterners' reasons and objectives for writing autobiographies. It reveals a cultural background, education and mentality which impose a sincerity coupled with a certain restraint, discretion and prudence. These are diametrically opposed to the principles of autobiography

as produced by Rousseau and Montaigne who profess to tell the truth, to confess and to unveil what is most hidden: "*I have ordered myself to dare say all that I dare do.*»[21] (Montaigne in Bellenger, 1988:22).

If Ghandi's *An Autobiography* tells the story of his experiments with truth which for him is only God, Rousseau's *Confessions* also establish a relationship with God in the sense that they are " *a testimony at the bar of eternity*"[22] (Delon, 1988:23). This is to say that writers from different areas of the world and from different religions are finally using the same medium (autobiography) but are dealing with it in their own ways.

As far as non-white South Africans are concerned, they wrote autobiographies without totally obeying the western standards of this genre. Nor did they compulsorily take into consideration Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique* (1975) which sets the initial terms of the autobiography, namely that the 'I' narrator refers to its true author, that it is announced from the beginning (on the cover of the book) , in the preface or introduction and that all that follows can be verified by the reader. What he designates as "pacts" are in fact the criteria he suggests through his definition of autobiography as being: " *a retrospective narrative in prose of one's existence by a real person, when focusing on one's individual life, in particular on the history of one's personality.*"[23](Lejeune,1975:14). According to Hubier, this definition helps distinguish a certain number of pacts; for if the author, narrator and principal character are the same, the text establishes an autobiographical pact with its reader. The text is therefore the expression of truth and authenticity (Hubier,2005:45). On the other hand, Starobinski for whom the autobiography is

[21] « Je me suis ordonné d'oser dire tout ce que j'ose faire »
[22] « Un témoignage à la barre de l'éternité ».
[23] « …récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité ».

" *the biography of a person made by him/herself* " (1970:257),[24] adds a detail to Lejeune's pact insisting on a text being more narrative than descriptive. In other words the author-narrator-hero should put the accent on the narration of his life more than on his person's description, which distinguishes the autobiography from the auto portrait (another subgenre of the autobiography).

Another definition of autobiography which, if applied to South Africans, would prove partly inappropriate is that of May. The latter considers that the autobiography holds a particular position in literature. It is not only and most often the oeuvre of mature, old persons, but it also is very frequently conceived by the autobiographers as their supreme work, the one which encompasses, explains and justifies all that precedes its completion and the crowning of its author's life (May,1979:33)(See notes). This is not the case for South-African autobiographers. Firstly, most non-white South Africans wrote autobiographies at the beginning of their career, and generally the latter were their first production and success as for example Mphahlele's *D S A,* or Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom*. It is true that these writers may have considered their works as an important achievement, perhaps even the first since they did not have the chance to do it while they were in South Africa, but it still did not enclose their whole life experiences, thoughts and ideas . Another span of their life which was no less important was yet to be recounted. This is in fact what Mphahlele did when he wrote *Afrika My Music: an Autobiography 1957-1983*, (the third autobiography) which can be seen as the crowning of his life. Nevertheless, he still felt the need to write his memoirs *A Round Trip to Liberty* (announced in his book) even after what was thought to be his last accomplishment.

Secondly, South Africans' motives and objectives differed from the westerners', for their project was more historical than autobiographical, and if sometimes it

[24] " la biographie d'une personne faite par elle même".

proved to be a fusion of both, the discourse of the autobiography still reflected a form or an act of resistance. The question that arises then as to the extent to which the South African autobiography observes the 'rules' of the autobiography as defined by western standards has been partly answered. What remains to be known is the impact of such a 'dissent' on the value of this literary work which is hardly qualified as a work of art.

1.8 THE DIFFICULT ART OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

So far a tentative effort has been made to link the text to the context in which it was produced. It has been seen how some forms of exile, among which prison, gave birth to autobiographical writing. To recapitulate very briefly, it will be said that the essential elements being loneliness (solitary confinement), distance and uprooting, the exiled writers more or less succeeded in writing a work of art derived from their life experience. Actually, it seems that an autobiographer should be gifted enough to be able to record and portray events without falling in a monotonous or linear narration which might 'de-dramatize' a tragic moment or make dull a comic action. Being generally so much concerned with authenticity and sincerity, the autobiographer's efforts concentrate on rendering 'reality' as faithfully as possible, in its crudity and nakedness, often forgetting the artistic element. In his book justly entitled *The Difficult Art of Autobiography,* Lord Butler shows how delicate the task of making of an autobiography a piece of art is:

> Portrait painting is difficult enough.
> But the self portrait, whether through
> the medium of a mirror or of a book,
> is even more so.
>
> (Butler, 1968: 4)

Two decades later, Jean Starobinski, James Olney, John Pilling and other specialists of the autobiography agreed on the fact that this genre was a difficult, lawless and various one.(ed.Olney 1980: 73). After vain attempts at defining the latter through the study of the style of different autobiographical texts, they seem to have come to the conclusion that it is the personal writing of an author who must have something important and interesting to say to the reader. For this one would probably not be attracted by the account of a flat, ordinary life unless this is interrupted by a particular event that would bring an 'extra' to the 'ordinary'. However, without being necessarily 'marked' by an event in the strong sense of the word, the autobiographer might judge a life rich with experiences worthy to be narrated. The narration can then take different 'autobiographical forms'. The author may choose the memoirs as many statesmen like Charles DeGaulle (*Lettres, notes et carnets 1905-18, 1980*) or Taleb Ahmed El Ibrahimi (*Memoirs* tome1 and tome 2, 2008) have done, the confessions best illustrated by Rousseau (*Les confessions*, 1971), the diary or journal like Franz Kafka's (*Journal*,1954). These deriving or sub-genres of autobiography (except the memoirs which are older than the autobiography) allowing a certain freedom of writing, have not added more rigour or conciseness to the autobiography, which supports what Starobinski says in his essay "*The Style of Autobiography":*

> Autobiography is certainly not a genre with rigorous rules. It only requires that certain possible conditions be realized, conditions that are mainly ideological (or cultural);that the personal experience be important, that it offer an opportunity for a sincere relation with someone.

(Starobinski in Olney 1980:77)

Not only is it impossible to set rigorous rules to the autobiography, but it is also extremely difficult to set definite frontiers between the latter and the memoirs for example. According to Pascal, there are no clear boundaries between the two because autobiographies are to a certain extent memoirs and the latter also contain autobiographical traits. Both are based on personal experiences, and both follow a chronological order. The essential difference that exists between them lies in the object on which the authors focus their attention. While in the autobiography, they are more concerned with their own person, in the memoirs, they are more interested in the others.(in Richard, 1988:77) The ambiguity that occurs when dealing with these two personal writings is, however, partially solved by Peyre whose analysis of autobiographies and private diaries led him to the definition of the memoirs as a retrospective genre whose author is

> a man of action who, retired from the struggles of life by age, by events,or by changes of political future, perhaps forced to the contemplation of his career through imprison-ment or exile, undertakes to reinterpret his achievement in the light of the present.…He records events (conspiracies, battles, negotiations, sieges laid to feminine fortresses which seldom refused to parley), but he seldom analyzes his thoughts or his own sensations.
>
> (Peyre 1963:205)

So, the fact that there exist analogies and affinities and what is sometimes called ambiguities between the two forms of narratives makes it even more delicate for the specialists to agree on the exact nature of autobiography since the latter has not yet been distinguished from the older genres from which it has developed as May explains in *L'autobiographie* (1979:116). The distinction, he argues, can only be approximate, and what a reader may consider as autobiography could as well be memoirs or even novel for another reader, which he says, is a part of the charm of autobiography. However, what May considers as charming is rather

problematic for Hubier. Indeed, the latter qualifies the definitions of autobiography as being problematic. The example he gives is that of the auto fiction, a new concept, very often used nowadays but which has given rise to controversies among theorists. Many of them find the concept still confusing in spite of all the attempts made to clarify it. Coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977, who mentioned it in his own 'personal novel' *Fils,* auto fiction is proposed as a solution to palliate the 'faults' of autobiography. After examining Lejeune's autobiographical pact and all the combinations he presented to decide whether a text was autobiographical or not, Doubrovsky advances his own arguments concerning the auto fiction. According to him, the 'pact' may also be auto fictional in the sense that the auto fiction also seals a pact about the truth of what is written; in his own words, auto fiction is " *the fiction of events and facts that are strictly real. We may say auto fiction has confided the language of adventure to the adventure of a language in freedom*"(Doubrovsky,1988:68). Thus, what should be retained is that auto fiction or 'faction' as it has come to be called after fusing the words 'fact' and 'fiction', is a text that uses a narrative technique borrowed from fiction and a narrative based on real facts. It is , as Laurent Jenny defines it in *Methods and Problems, the Auto fiction*, (2003), a 'bag-word'[25], suggesting a synthesis of autobiography and fiction prone to diverse interpretations. What is even more interesting in this genre (though sometimes qualified as bad) is the freedom it gives the author to say and interpret facts, recount stories in the most incredible way, endowing thus their autobiographical writings with an effect of fiction. It is a mixture of dream and reality, of the rational and irrational, sometimes related in an extraordinary way as will be seen in chapter three. As Hubier sees it, the autofiction is therefore an art of trouble where the codes of autobiography are assumed but at the same time disturbed (Hubier,2003:122).

[25] "bag-word": "mot-valise".

1.9 SOUTH AFRICAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A WORK OF ART?

What has been defined earlier as the lawlessness of the autobiographical genre finds a loud echo in Mphahlele's 'autobiographies' which also present a variety in style and structure. Although a certain tone and diction is recurrent in *D S A*, *The Wanderers* and *A M M*, (the three books are autobiographical as mentioned earlier), each of these works is a new experimentation with the genre. *D S A* best known as an autobiography has sometimes been called a novel. Mphahlele clarifies this 'in-between' situation giving his own explanation of autobiography in the following terms:

> It seems to me that autobiography by its very nature has to consist of…. romanticism, lyricism and fact because one writes an autobiography at a certain point in his life far removed from his childhood and youth and you recall a number of things as far as you can…And may be there is no such thing as an autobiography; may be there is only autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography.
>
> (Mphahlele in Duerden and Pieterse, 1972:111)

The hesitation Mphahlele shows when asked whether *D S A* is an autobiography or a novel is another proof of the impediments one encounters when trying to define the genre. However, putting autobiography and novel at the same level, Mphahlele, without realizing it, seems to have given the former a new dimension or simply another figure: that of South Africa. Stating that "*may be there is only autobiographical fiction or fictional autobiography*" , he refutes the idea that the autobiography as a work of art is difficult to achieve. Besides, the success he has witnessed with the publication of this autobiographical novel places him among the few writers who have gained reputation by recording their own actions. For

many critics, *D S A* remains the best piece of work he has produced. This fact which, a priori, contradicts the argument sustaining that autobiography rarely achieves success artistically, awakens one's curiosity about the South African autobiography once again. The other question that is to be asked is: why do non-white South African writers, unlike writers of other nationalities, succeed more in writing autobiographies than novels? Mphahlele tells us that it is a genre which has emerged naturally from South African conditions , " *a genre that depicts the very social conditions that have given rise to it*" and that it has emerged as a literature of self-definition (in Lindfors, 1985:28). He goes on remarking that the problematic genre in South Africa is not the autobiography but the novel because of the nature of society which he describes as a society overwhelmed by small-minded people like the Boers.(See glossary). With such people, one cannot expect a broad vision; fiction can only be "*small, tiny, parochial*". " *It has never grown up, never matured because the people are a small minded people*" (in Lindfors,1985:31). However, one may suppose that the reason for the primacy of the autobiography over the novel in South Africa is due to the different, abnormal life the people have in this country. In other words, what was happening in South Africa was so hard to believe that reality became fiction for the reader who did not apprehend the implications of the Apartheid system. The following passage quoted from the *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et réalités sud-africaines* (1983), gives us an image of the tragic situation of one of the inhabitants of South Africa. The example, by no means unique, is a good illustration of a reality which, in this country, rivals with or goes beyond fiction:

> ……This woman from Soweto who lived with her six children during two years in an abandoned car whose rent was 10 rands per month while she earned 10 rands per week. What else can be said about such a dramatic situation but that in the republic of South

> Africa, it is so frequent that it becomes banal. [26]
>
> (Raoul ,1983: 187-188)

Is it because tragedy becomes banality in South Africa that the Non-Whites excel in writing autobiographies?

It is very difficult indeed to imagine that such an environment might yield any artistic creation. Gordimer also testifies to the impossibility to "*create and imagine*" in a fractured society the members of which are still fighting for survival. As a foreword to a study on the dislocation of the black community - subsequent to the Bantustan policy (see notes) - entitled *The Discarded People,* Gordimer states:

> The physical conditions of life are such an appalling desolation that one is almost unable to think beyond bread and latrines. That is to say, the sense of urgency one feels on behalf of people whose struggle for existence has been reduced to a search for wood to make a fire, a bucket of clean water to drink, bus fare to a clinic, is inclined to set the mind safely on ameliorating such unthinkable concrete hardships.
>
> (Desmond, 1971:XV)

Nevertheless from this dehumanized and desperate world, many writers emerged and attempted as much as they could to express their bitterness and cry their anger through whatever works they could produce in a state of emergency. Most of them if not all will tell us that they needed to depict this 'banality' to the

---

[26] ……..cette femme de Soweto qui vécut pendant deux ans avec ses six enfants dans une voiture abandonnée dont le loyer était de 10 rands par mois alors qu'elle en gagnait 10 par semaine. Que dire face à ce drame sinon qu'en république sud africaine il est banal à force de se répéter.

world through the most spontaneous, immediate medium that presented itself to them and this generally was poetry, drama or definitely autobiography.

Once more we will stress the fact that in South Africa, there are no individuals talking in their names but in the name of all and that their autobiographies are not revelations of intimate or psychological problems which differentiate them from one another. After reading two or three or more autobiographies by non-white writers, one realizes how considerable the impact of the 'community' on the 'individual' is. On the one hand, this situation supplied the force of these people when it translated a political act, as we saw in Robben Island; on the other hand, it could bring about the dissolution of the Blacks' personalities and drown them in anonymity. In South Africa there is no distinction between Blacks, which Mphahlele deplores. About this issue, he said in an interview:

> I would like to be recognized in any literature as a person with a distinctive way of life, a distinctive way of dying, a distinctive way of being born, a distinctive way of being sick, a distinctive way of moaning, a distinctive way of crying; those are the particulars that lend color and meaning and authenticity to any work of fiction.

(Lindfors 1985 : 32)

1.10 CENSORSHIP: A DAILY EXERCISE

Even the right to difference , as Mphahlele pointed out, was denied to the Blacks, and this is probably the reason why they used the same medium to express the same anger, the same bitterness and the same pain. This is also one of the main causes that induced writers to flee so that they could tell and cry freedom, for in their country they had to fight against the worst instrument of repression legalized by an infinite list of acts which forbid the publication of

certain books, or articles which would "propagate communism" or "threaten the security of the state" etc… Nadine Gordimer explained that writers turned "instinctively to poetry" because

> In South Africa there are 97 definitions of what is officially "undesirable" in literature: subversive, obscene, or otherwise "offensive". They are not always but are there when needed to suppress a particular book or silence an individual writer. (See notes)
>
> (Gordimer, 1973:52)

Censorship which has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter and which will certainly be referred to throughout this reflection deserves a great attention as it is truly the most dissuasive strategy meant to paralyze writers both Whites and Non-Whites. It wears many masks, for it manifests itself in different ways. Thus, a writer whose work contains some passages that might 'harm the readers' because they are 'obscene' for example, may attract the security's attention. The book would not be banned but its author would be 'summoned or invited' to revise it. The threat would be more subtle even though subtlety sounds rather strange in the context of Apartheid. A permanent control punctuated by an impromptu 'visit' of the police - when it is not simply a raid - is another much less subtle manifestation of censorship. The clear decisions supported by the law to ban a work that does not conform to the ideas, thoughts and visions of a handful of people who govern the country is another obvious means of censorship. In fact, as Nkosi said, censorship's " *manoeuvres have become everyday necessities of South African life*" (1983: 127). One wonders then how it would ever be possible to sit and produce a piece of good literature in such a climate.

So far, I focused more on censorship that 'silenced and strangled' non-white writers while white writers were also subjected to it. One thinks about Gordimer, Breytenbach and Brink who were engaged in the same fight against Apartheid. The latter's works were frequently banned because of their political tendencies. Like Non-Whites, they tasted exile and prison and they knew what mental harassment meant. Nevertheless, they succeeded in writing great and very long novels -- more novels, in fact, than autobiographies. The privilege of imagining and creating, of sitting for a long time in front of a pile of white papers soon filled with fiction, colours, emotions, thoughts and ideas was a dream never fulfilled by non-white writers unless they left South Africa while it proved possible for white writers. This is most probably why the attitude of Brink towards censorship was less radical than his black counterparts as he recommended them to remain in South Africa and continue to take risks and write. In a round table discussion held at Rhodes University, he spoke about a conviction he shared with other writers in South Africa,

> Whatever creative energy we have we' d Like to channel in the direction of writing rather than trying to fight a system which is going to be with us for a long time to be. And I think there is this effort to, at least, try and ignore to try and not waste too much energy and time on censorship as such and rather to concentrate on the next book one would like to write.
>
> (Brink 1979:2)

Although Brink's proposition and strategy against censorship sounds interesting and inviting, he seems to forget that the problem lies in the difficulty, not to say the impossibility, for the non-white writers to "*concentrate on the next book they would like to write*", to borrow his own words. Actually, 'concentration' and 'next book' are exactly what they aspired to but could not attain. Even the perspective – implied by 'next' - of writing a book was out of reach so oppressed

and frustrated they were, which explains why most of them turned to other mediums or forms of writing like the short story, drama and poetry. Requiring less time for reflection and writing, these genres responded to an ever –present stimulus: "*I had never studied the short story form; I was just writing as my feelings dictated*", Mphahlele said in *D S A* (1971:64). As for Manganyi, a South African psychoanalyst, he argues in a search on the human imagination and creativity thus,

> Poetry and to a lesser extent the dramatic form appear to be the most appropriate mediums for creative individuals in the grip of an **experiential overload.** The artist who has a lot to say and wants to express it **forcefully** and in a hurry will choose the poem, a play or for that matter the short story. Harassment and the kind of daily encounters with tyranny that is the lot of blacks breeds an experiential overload that forces the creative imagination into a decided preference for bold strokes.

(Manganyi 1979:30)

What seems to be valued in these quotations is the ability of the short story to capture a particular instant and convey the immediacy of the situation. Mphahlele who is a representative writer of the short story said in many occasions that it was impossible for a writer who lived in oppression to organize his whole personality into creating a novel, a truth that was sustained by Peter Nazareth who compared the non-white writer's condition with that of Gordimer for example. The latter, he said, had the time to write a five-hundred page novel and could afford to spread herself out while La Guma or any other South African writer who were then in exile could not have got through twenty pages "*before being subjected to a raid, or having pages stolen or being beaten up, or whatever. So South African had to find a way of communicating in the minimum of words."*(Nazareth in Lindfors,1985:37).

Nazareth depicts a state of things as true as the fact that discrimination occurred even among enemies of the system according to the colour of their skin. This other form of Apartheid was visible inside prison as Breytenbach reports with very grim humour: "*Food in South African prisons is still graded according to the race of the prisoner*". Even the condemned man's last meal, he recounts, is subject to Apartheid. Before being hanged, the white prisoner gets a whole roast chicken whereas the black prisoner gets half a chicken. As Breytenbach sees it, " *It's like a kind of reaffirmation of apartheid in the final moment before the gallows.*" (Breytenbach in Shava 1989:42).
Such a mean and vile attitude towards men meeting death, without the least hope of return, men who would rather inspire compassion and respect if only as human beings, is quite suggestive of a system without a shade of humanism and even less a sense of equity .

1.11 CONCLUSION

When it becomes just impossible for some writers to express their indignation against injustice, to communicate with an audience , to let a message out and when through this frustrating apparatus, which is censorship, any mental or spiritual nourishment dries up, then comes the time to leave. When the word becomes a challenge and when the unique outlet allowing freedom of expression is exile, they will resort to it. In the next chapter, we will see how a black South African was led to exile , the alternative that offered him "*the freedom to take control of [his] own life*" (Mphahlele, 1984:112-113). We will also weigh the heaviness of loneliness, the long silences, "*the solitude that mutilates*" (in Mphahlele,(1984:126) as Nortje said depicting exile, all expressed in his autobiography *D S A*. We will also pore over the unavoidable theme of the return of the exile permanently alluded to in his autobiographies.

CHAPTER TWO

Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*

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CHAPTER TWO

Es'kia Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*

Racial Exile

2.1 INTRODUCTION

> ***Down Second Avenue*** *moved me so much. It was a story about myself; it told me how an ordinary boy could become a writer despite and because of living in South Africa.*
>
> Chris Van Wyk (2008)

'A story about oneself': this is where the success of *D S A* lies. For most non-white South Africans, Mphahlele's autobiographical novel is a book that tells the painful story of a community, but it is also one that offers great moments of pleasure and hope, so truthful, sincere and human. In fact, *D S A* has been a reference and a guide to those who, in South Africa, felt lost, homeless, and were in quest of identity; those who, like him, could interpret their lives and emerge from anonymity "*despite and because of living in South Africa*". To read and recognize oneself in the long, harsh but so rich life of Mphahlele was gratifying for both the writer and the readers of this life-story. It was also another proof that this genre of literature in South Africa was more collective than individual; however, it never erased the individuality and identity of its authors. On the

contrary, it reinforced a sense of solidarity, a belief and an ideal all Black South Africans shared and "*hoped to live for and to achieve*"(Mandela,1965-1987:189), the ideal of a free and democratic society as Nelson Mandela cried out during the Rivonia Trial (see notes)**.** No wonder then that Mphahlele's *D S A* opens with a chapter entitled '*The Tribe'*, a concept not suggesting any form of xenophobia or discrimination, but rather representing an entity speaking with the same voice as the author himself hoped to be identified as a person who was "*detribalized, westernized, but still African*"(in Osborn,2008). Most often qualified as a *vivid* account and a landmark work of South African literature, *D S A* has pioneered the black South African township autobiography with its description of the ghetto, 'locations', police raids, communal fire around the local water tap and the whole atmosphere rendered by the everyday life of an oppressed and alienated community. The book has therefore made of its author a chronicler of Apartheid who has succeeded in preserving art while documenting, describing and reporting facts. Evaluating South African autobiographies, Olney noted that while black writers were "*oppressed by politics*", they wrote "*not political manifestoes but literary autobiographies*"(1973:42). Concerning *D S A,* he remarked:

> Although the novel is usually considered to be closer to art than autobiography,there are works, such as *Down Second Avenue*, which in their unique blend of art history and document must be called works of art while being nevertheless, autobiographies.
>
> (Olney,1973:42)

Writing an autobiography is also considered by most critics as an expression of Mphahlele's African Humanism. The principle of Humanism situating Man at the center of the universe and being, interprets "*the very act of writing an*

autobiography [as] a humanistic one, placing the author squarely at the center of his own 'self-discovery and self-creation', shouting 'I am' ". (Eakin,1985:3)

So, who is Mphahlele? In *D S A*, the answer to this question starts with the author's evocation of his childhood memories and ends with his exile.

2.2. CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Ezekiel, Zeke, preferably Es'kia Mphahlele's first years of exile were marked by the publication of *D S A,* the first of a series of three 'autobiographies'. It begins with a significant statement of displacement to end with his actual departure to Nigeria. The apparently naïve question that the child Mphahlele asks himself right at the outset of the work will initiate the whole process of 'wandering' and the actual movement from an internal exile to a final removal from home. As if confiding to the reader that his life began with a question mark, he writes on the first page of his autobiography:

> I have never known why we –my brother,
> sister and I –were taken to the country
> when I was five…that was in the autumn
> of 1924.
>
> (Mphahlele,1959-86:11)

An apprehensive tone is set thus right at the opening of the story. Very early, an element of sadness - conveyed through the seasonal motif of autumn - seems to predict what is going to happen. It is a grey season, without gaiety, for which only the presence and warmth of a mother could make up. Already, the setting is suggestive of migration; but while birds move in search of a warmer place, "Eseki" is taken to Maupaneng, a village where he always feels cold, lost and

insecure. For Mphahlele, it is the first exile he is to tell about. Apart from the tales he listens to at the communal fire-place and the two goats his parents buy him, he cherishes no happy memories of his childhood in Maupaneng. The seven years he spends there - at his grand-mother's - are hard times from which he retains images of fear mostly.

> Things stand out clearly in my mind from those years: my granny,the mountain on the foot of which the village clung like a leech and the mountain darkness,so solid and dense and my granny seemed to conspire with the mountain and the dark to frighten us.
>
> (Mphahlele, 1959-86: 11)

At the age of twelve, Mphahlele leaves Maupaneng. His mother, Eva , brings him, his brother and his sister back to Pretoria where they will live together. However, the return is not what it was hoped to be as neither love nor protection is offered to the children. They find, instead, a violent father , always drunk , and whose aggressiveness terrifies the whole family. Compared with the brutal father, Maupaneng seems much less frightening. The ghoulish images associated with the mountain and the darkness of the country is now superseded by physical blows which his mother receives frequently, especially on that Sunday morning when his father takes a pot from the stove and throws it on her head. He hears his mother screaming "*with a voice [he has] never forgotten till this day*" (1959-86: 28). This incident will be evoked in both *The Wanderers* and *Afrika My Music*. Mphahlele gives even the date of that tragic day when he saw his father for the last time, so vibrant it is in his memory,

> That was the last time I ever saw my father, that summer of 1932. The strong

> smell of paraffin gas from the stove
> often reminds me of that Sunday.

(Mphahlele, 1959-86: 28)

Mphahlele "remembers", "never forgets", is continually "reminded" and "things stand out clearly in his mind" ; these key words and expressions which are unmistakably met in autobiographical writings, are recurrent as well in *D SA*. In the first chapter (four pages), the author repeats the verb "to remember" four times making the reader travel with him both in time –the past- and space , and see and live things just as Mphahlele experimented them. Revisiting those years, he finds himself following the route to Maupaneng. He rewinds the film of his life and remembers his childhood "vividly". The image of the mountains, of the cattle and goats and of his grandmother comes back to him provoking the same sensations as before…..unfortunately. Even when he writes his third autobiography, two decades later , he is haunted by the same images ,

> Those terrors of rural life became rooted
> in me so that I could never even in my
> adult life outgrow them.

(Mphahlele,1984:11-12)

In *A M M*, he tells the reader that during his 'excursions' in Maupaneng, the writer's love and apprehension of the landscape are nevertheless accompanied with fear, just as he describes it in *D S A*. He needs to revisit these places to resume the link with what he has been cut off for too long a time. It is as if he has recovered one part of his personality without which he would feel mutilated. In the following passage, he shows how his meeting again with his environment takes place:

> On these excursions, I try to recapture the
> smells of the place. So often I am jolted

of my reverie by the bird song of my youth.
I pick up morula fruit and berries and the
taste travels back forty seven years.

(Mphahlele, 1984:2)

Here, it is interesting to note the impact of the senses on memory and the capacity to awake it however far reminiscence may be. It seems that the smells, tastes and sounds constitute the main elements that send him back to the past which is then described "vividly" (this adverb is borrowed and repeated because vividness is the main characteristic of *D S A*). In a seminar devoted to an analysis of his autobiography *Aké* (1981), Wole Soyinka, points out the important role that senses play in autobiographical writings. He explains how in his case, they helped to counter the obstacles he met while writing his book. After completing his first chapter, he had to wait two years before he could reenter his childhood world and continue his autobiography:

> I found that I could not reenter that world, get back into its smells, its sounds, the whole physical property, the ambiance….. so to re-enter that world physically as an adult is something that I find very, very difficult to do. I just have to wait… may be some triggering incident …..some smell…. and then –phfft sit down and it all comes very rapidly.

(Soyinka in Gulledge,1988:62)

It is therefore crucial for autobiographical writing to recapture space in physical terms, a fact which is furthermore confirmed in Mphahlele's 'autobiographies'. For example, in *D S A,* "*the strong smell of paraffin gas from a stove*" still reminds him of that terrible Sunday; in *The Wanderers*, the sounds of drums make him think about death and lead him to Sekoting – a place where drums are always played; and in *A M M*, he recounts how the slum where he lived while he

was studying for his M.A. called to his mind " *another slum fifty miles away of [his] place of birth, and it could have been that Pretoria slum transplanted*".(1984:13). All these recollections are what he calls "the Tyranny of Time and Place" which he will try to organize in his writings and which will be evoked later in this chapter.

Still talking about senses but with a slight digression from the context in which they have just been conveyed, it would perhaps be worthy to refer to the famous British writer Joseph Conrad and his reflection on art as being first of all an appeal to the senses. Having himself written auto fiction, "*Heart of Darkness*" (published in 1902) for instance, he gives his own definition of art and explicates what the artist's task and achievement should be:

> My task which I am trying to achieve is,
> by the power of the written word to make
> you hear, to make you feel – it is before
> all, to make you see. That and no more and
> and it is everything.

(Conrad in Kermode, 1973:107)

Without pretending to contradict or even doubt of the judgment of many literary critics concerning South African literature, one should still take the risk and provoke a new debate and outlook on the evaluation of the latter; the question to be asked is on which basis and by which standards is South African literature assessed? For if Conrad's 'canons' of art were to be taken into consideration, then *D S A* and other literary productions like La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* , or Head's *Maru* for instance, are more than 'appealing to the senses'. One really feels, hears, sees and even smells in these writings. Again, if one relied on Forster's argument according to which the merit of a story is to make the audience want to know what happens next (1974:42), then these works have this

merit. In *D S A*, which is in midway between fact and fiction (auto fiction), the reader is always avid of more and more informing details that construct day after day and period after period the captivating life of the author. In effect, the question "*what will happen next?*", which is characteristic of the novel with its main element or aspect, the plot, is continually asked by the reader of Mphahlele's auto fiction who is expecting the latter to unravel the 'intrigue' of the tumultuous, uncertain and fragile life of an exile. It is true that the reader's curiosity is not completely satisfied since the writer's life is still evolving. However, the open end of the autobiography or what has been called here auto fiction (exchangeable concepts in this context) gives way to ceaseless questionings until *A M M* brings a great deal of news and clarifications. In other words, *D S A* can be considered as a work of art since it displays, namely through its interludes, curiosity, suspense, aesthetics and creativity; it is furthermore confirmed as a masterpiece of literature for its skillful handling of themes and characters. So, an attempt at revisiting South African literature and reexamining the long believed idea that it is more politics and history than literature seems to be necessary if only to shed some light on non-white writers whose power of imagination and artistic talents could not be definitely choked by Apartheid.

Blamed and criticized, they defended their writings as being primarily concerned with the analysis of a situation specific to South Africans, a fact that cannot be denied. Besides, Mphahlele was aware of this aspect of South African literature; he admitted that it did sacrifice art for politics and that it always dealt with the racial conflict as a "God-sent-theme", to borrow Nkosi's expression (1983:33). However, in his own works, one may read utter bitterness and disillusion but would rarely meet 'goodies' versus 'baddies' characters. The ugly side of some of them - like his own father – is frankly described, and no attempt is ever made to overvalue the Non-Whites, nor to blindly devalue the Whites. About

Mphahlele's ability to step over the boundaries of colour, Obuke writes that the writer's intention is to present the "factual" history of South Africa and the "facts" of his own life in a work of art without overdrawing the "horrors" of Apartheid . He states that, in reality, Mphahlele does not attempt to hide the ugly facts about his own family ,and that he never idealizes the African; "*he does not seek to apportion blame on Apartheid for everything by Africans; rather he attempts to present life in South Africa simply as he experienced it*." (Obuke in Jones,1979:199).

The objective evaluation of South African writings by non-white writers attests to a certain maturity acquired through the years even if they were far from South Africa. The exiled writers have very often been reproached to lose contact with the reality of their country, but in fact it seems that distance has more often allowed them to analyse objectively - which is not easy in the context of South Africa - the situation of the country they have left. In *Writers in Exile* , Gurr tells about the necessity for a writer to be out of his country to be able to reflect on its problems and subsequently produce a piece of literature that would not be narrowed by the vision he would have had if still at home.

> To be out of the country about which one is writing seems to be a vital prerequisite for poise in many writers. Distance gives perspective, and for exiles it also creates the kind of isolation which is the nearest thing to freedom that a 20th C artist is likely to attain.
>
> (Gurr,1981:17)

Mphahlele, being one of these writers in exile, paradoxically rich with his experiences as a 'wanderer' must have well studied the problems of South Africa. He must have come out with the fact that this country suffers deeply from

'apartheids' in the plural form, that is to say, political, socio-economic, cultural and not uniquely racial. The achievement of this new vision has also been praised by Nkosi who has very early criticized black South African fiction as being devoid of "*any significant talent which responds with both the vigor of the imagination and sufficient technical responses to the problems posed by conditions in South Africa*" (1983:131). According to him, Mphahlele is aware of the weaknesses of black South African fiction and this is the reason why "*he has been moving in the direction of saying something positive about black experience in South Africa instead of writing as so many of his compatriots do as though everything the blacks did in the country was a reaction to white oppression*"(Nkosi, 1983:133) However, there are, as cited earlier, exceptions to whom can be added the name of Peter Abrahams whose novels have been written by what Heywood calls "*an ordinary, normal man*" who "*sought a view of life that transcended his own personal problems as a member of one oppressed group of humanity.*"(1971:164).

Actually, the polemics around the quality of a work of art or what should a work of art be seems to raise more and more controversies among critics and creators not just in South Africa. As far as the "*Récit concentrationnaire*", i.e. narratives generated in and from concentration camps during the second World War is concerned, this type of writing has also provoked reactions as to its artistic quality. Bertrand explains that there is a taboo character in the notion of literature in the sense that the latter has always been considered as ornamental and fictitious and therefore difficult to be accepted under other aspects than these. One would understand then that "Prison writings" and "Récit concentrationnaire" do not belong or are incompatible with literature since it is presumed that there can be no beauty in a world of suffering. In her article, "'*Récit concentrationnaire'* et '*Prose d'idées'* "(2008), Bertrand , quotes in this

respect Dresden, a famous scholar, who predicts the responses to the title he gave to his book , *Extermination and Literature,* stating:

> The title of this book will undoubtedly seem as a sacrilege to certain persons for whom the fact of combining the atrocities of the World War with the *Belles Lettres* is unacceptable. They consider it as scandalous as the sufferings and intolerable persecutions of millions of victims be covered with a beautiful literary varnish.[27]
>
> (Dresden, 1997:7)

Nevertheless, these writings transmitted what could not be transmitted otherwise. On the other hand, Widdowson gives us an even more interesting vision and definition of what he thinks literature is and more exactly what he calls "*the literary*", turning the adjective 'literary' into a substantive noun. Including within "*the literary*" all types of writing, 'serious', 'popular', 'major' and 'minor' variety, he advocates a sort of "*republic of letters*" which "*enfranchises the diverse plenitude of literature, and in which, as a necessary reflex of this, evaluation is always provisional, variable and justified by function.*"(1999:96). He also insists on the tacit agreement between writer and reader who are both aware that what is produced and received is a literary work. In other words, the literary text, "any literary text", emits a consciousness of its being literary in the sense that it is the product of both the writer who "elects" to write a poem or a short story, or drama, or a novel, and the reader who "recognizes" that what is elected is indeed a literary text. Widdowson explains then that "*a poem identifies*

---

[27] *Extermination et littérature* : le titre de ce livre paraitra sans doute sacrilège à certains, pour lesquels le fait de réunir d'un trait les atrocités de la guerre mondiale et les belles lettres est inacceptable. Ils estiment scandaleux que des souffrances et des persécutions insupportables subies par des millions de victimes[…] soient recouvertes d'un beau vernis littéraire.

itself as belonging to the 'literary' genre of poetry and its 'poem-ness' helps to determine how it is read"(ibid), which is also the case for the novel or another literary genre. In Widdowson's view, these genres "*are in fact fundamentally constituted by announcing their location within 'the domain of the literary'* (1999:96).

To these literary genres, another one can be added which is the autobiography and which Mphahlele has chosen to 'locate' in 'the literary' with the self-consciousness Widdowson emphasizes. Indeed, *D S A*, conforms well to the definition of "the literary" presented above; for, on the one hand, the writer is quite conscious of writing an autobiography , and on the other hand, the audience is aware of being in the presence of such a genre of writing. At the risk of falling in redundancy, one can borrow Widdowson's expression and say that the South African autobiography may identify itself as belonging to the 'literary' genre of autobiography and its 'autobiography-ness' helps to determine how it is read. How it is read , how it is apprehended, how much readers feel concerned and how much they are touched and find answers in what they read, such are the questions to which the work of an artist should reply, whatever the subject of writing is. As for Mphahlele, he has been able, as an author, to seal his name in world literature namely with his first autobiography whose writing, most critics agree, retains a freshness rediscovered by each new generation of readers. For Rafapa, the first reading as well as rereading of *D S A* feel like a discovery process (2006:257-258)**,** which is another mark of creation and art.

"*Art*", says Hardy, " *is a disproportioning of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities*".(1975:228-229) What if applying this definition of art to the South African context where realities are already disproportioned by violence and fear for example ?...

2.3 FEAR: A COMPANION TO LIFE

D S A reads as a long, true, captivating account of a man who could have probably transcended his problems but who never was able to overcome his fear: a fear with which he was very early acquainted. One may even ironically speak about the variety and richness of this word in the South African environment. Indeed, fear which Mphahlele cynically calls "*a sixth companion in the room*"(1971: 25), is to accompany him all along his life. After that Sunday, when his mother comes from hospital, he moves again to a new place, living as it were another exile. He is to stay longer in Second Avenue which provides both the setting and the title of his autobiography. Here, the writer's maternal grand-mother, his uncles and his aunt Dora - to whom he dedicated his book - live in community with other black families. As a child, transferred from the country to the city, Eseki notices things and takes them for granted just as the other children do without comprehension nor worry. For example, he does not know why he has to take the whites' clothes back to their houses after they are washed by his mother, grandmother or aunt; nor does he know why the elders have to carry a bit of paper called 'pass' to move in town. He does not quite understand why the blacks live in ghettoes while the whites occupy rich and comfortable villas, and if he ever asks why, he is warned to "*get out of the white man's way*" because "*the white man's dangerous*" (1971:106).

Mphahlele grows up with this warning in mind, and so, the fear of Maupaneng and of his father gives way to the fear of the whites represented in his mind by the police, the superintendent of his college, the missionaries, the school inspector, all of whom control and direct his life. The passage below shows how the mere sound of the police's whistle haunts and assails the narrator with its various connotations:

> Policeman? Saturday night. The men in
> uniform may even now be sniffing about
> in the yard. Far to the West end of Mara-
> bastad the police, the barking of dogs – no
> it must be in Fourth Avenue, may be because
> I hear heavy footsteps, it's sure to be a
> person running from the law, the police cells,
> the court and jail.(1971:45)

Even his moments of rest are marred by the obsessive image of the police who soon become the main symbol of fear that seems to have lodged in his heart and mind…. The very rare moments when he withdraws from the pressure and noise of the town and in an attempt to forget it and live a fleeting instant of peace, he is still subject to the haunting presence of the police. For example, in a passage where he describes nature, his contact with the coolness of the earth, while he was laying flat on his tummy on the bank of the river, he immediately interrupts this image mentioning that of the police station "just below" (1971:73-74) as a permanent reminder of fear and repression.

Nourished first at home then extending to the outside world, fear is all pervasive and constitutes thus the pattern that shapes the 'rhythm' of his life. It is furthermore explored in *D S A* as a feeling that has been inculcated through three centuries of indoctrination whereby white supremacy is natural; a belief clearly asserted in the expression of comparison used by his folks:

> Fancy, does he think he's a white man!
> They think they are white people. He
> speaks to me as if he were a white Man.
> (1971:64)

The whites are even given a divine dimension since they are identified with a God to whom they yield because " *he is strong and can do many things [they] can't, and so [they] think he can protect [them]*"(1971:106).

Not different from the subject under discussion is Said's interpretation's of how the 'White Man' was viewed in colonized countries. In *Orientalism* (1978), he explicates the perception and conception of Kipling's "White Man" as "*an idea, a persona, a style of being [which] seems to have served many Britishers while they were abroad*."(1978:226). As he contends, being a "White Man" was an idea and a reality that meant holding a certain position, a form of authority before which both Whites and Non-Whites had to bend.

Such an authority was translated as fear in South Africa, and perhaps the expression that is best illustrative of it, is the representation of the white government as being " *a strange person*" (1971:31) but whose strangeness terrifies Dinku Dinkae, a highly symbolic character in *D S A*. The latter is the father of Rebone, Mphahlele's first love and best friend. He has all his life been frightened by the police, but his terror ends with the murder of a policeman and by proxy the killing of his own fear. The act itself functions as a kind of exorcism as it finally brings peace to him and rehabilitates his dignity as well as that of his people:

> I'll never be afraid of a policeman again…
> I killed him. He insulted me and everyone
> who carries my blood in their veins.
>
> (Mphahlele,1971:142)

Dinku Dinkae is an interesting character in the sense that he is the first one in *D S A* to react to the state of resignation of the non-white community. To Mphahlele's grand-mother's conviction that " *Baas and Missus did your thinking for you*" (1971:106), D.Dinkae opposes his refusal to work for a white man: "*Why should I work for a white man when God has given me* brains *to work for myself* ? "(1971:117) , showing hence that he has largely overcome the

frustration of his own community. The writer devotes a whole chapter, "*Dinku Dinka's Terror"*, to this character whose individual and courageous act represents a nascent awareness for Mphahlele the child. To a certain extent, one may compare this personal deliverance with the author's writing of an autobiography, an act that suggests both a kind of exorcism and an emergence from anonymity. It also implies a strong need for expressing oneself as a person different from the others even though the 'I' in South African autobiography is deeply rooted in community and is viewed as its mouthpiece, as said earlier.

The theme of fear is recurrent in Mphahlele's works and is treated with the same intensity of feelings and emotions in his following autobiographies. In *The Wanderers* for example, which starts where *D S A* ends, that is with the writer's leaving to Nigeria, he expresses almost in the same terms the fear that damages his life. Decades elapse but Timi, the main character, still shivers when he remembers his childhood. Each time he recounts it, he unveils his apprehension of the countryside, and the same images that haunt Mphahlele in *D S A* obsess Timi as well; the looming image of the mountains, the river, the rain and the fear of which they are reminiscent reappear forcefully in this passage:

> On and off, the silence and the dark reminded of my boyhood, and I felt that same fear of the mountain dark creep into me, seeming to seize me by the throat…And I knew that the mountains, the dark nights, the torrential river of my childhood were going to be with me for a long long time…..(1984:77)

The harshness of the countryside being supplanted by the violence of the city is again evoked with details that recall point by point the unforgettable Sunday morning event narrated in *D S A*. The brutality of the father whom he has lost forever, the feeling of fear the latter has left in spite of his absence; all this is

dwelling profoundly within Mphahlele' heart and memory. At different moments and in diverse situations, the writer gives a new dimension to fear: fear of the whites and of everything they symbolize, fear of the present and of the future. Through a variety of examples, he shows how non-white South Africans have brought up in their entrails a monster named *fear* and how the latter has become the essence of any of their acts. Talking about it with his son, Timi says in *The Wanderers*:

> You know, Felang, throughout in any crisis
> I've been a frightened person. Like in a school
> exam for example.
>
> (1984:299)

The image used here is suggestive of a high sense of insecurity. The way Timi expresses his fear brings to mind Richard Rive's description of a society living in "*a state of emergency*"[28] or what André Brink calls "*a state of siege*"[29].

2.4 "*TO BE OR NOT TO BE*" IN SOUTH AFRICA: CASES OF ALIENATION.

In such a society, Mphahlele explains that people - and he among them- are generally "*aware of only one purpose in life: to be*" (1971:49). It is important to note here that the verb "to be" loses its philosophical, political and even 'Shakespearian' implications, for it no longer alludes to an assertion of the self or of identity, and even less to the luxury to decide or choose whether 'to be or not to be' ; nor does any commitment underlie the word which here may simply mean an acceptance of life as it comes. The tragedy, then, is expressed by the fact that the Blacks' perspective is basically reduced to how 'to be' rather than

[28] Rive,R.(1964) *Emergency* .London : Faber & Faber.
[29] Brink,A. (1987) *Mapmakers : Writing in a State of Siege*.London: Faber & Faber.

projected in how ‘to become’. In other words, it is simply a question of survival for them, but at the same time as the writer depicts a life that is limited to “*bread and latrines*”[30], he inevitably hints at the process of alienation resulting from it. When the bitter feeling of denial, of being rejected by other human beings, suspecting the land itself not to bear them, is concretized by laws then it is insurmountable. The example of the ‘pass’(see glossary) known as the ‘dampas’ or ‘damn pass’ is perhaps the strongest illustration of estrangement in South Africa. The latter is a special permit on which the blacks are identified with a number. It confines the Non-Whites to a certain area and controls all their movements, making of them stateless, illegal visitors in their own country. It also categorizes them, for there is a series of passes attributed to them according to their ‘status’. In Peter Abrahams’ *Tell Freedom,* a black man defines the ‘pass’ as “a thing of fear” of the white man:

> If you have many enemies and you are
> not sure you have conquered them, then
> always you want to know where they are
> what they do, where they go. If it is possi-
> ble, you want to know what they think.
> For that passes are good.
>
> (Abrahams,1954:142)

The pass becomes therefore a symbol of fear, frustration and alienation, for it exiles the black man at home. Concerning Mphahlele, the fact of being reduced to a number on a card is an utter humiliation and a deep hurt about which he says:

> It cut inside me like a razor to be
> regimented this way, and I felt
> as if there were a liberal leak in

[30] Gordimer’s expression previously quoted.

a bag of gall somewhere deep into
my stomach.

(Mphahlele, 1971:170)

Often, he has been confronted with questions his son, Motsiwiri, asks about the pass. Clinging tightly to his father whenever "*he sees a constable walk up and down the road*", he would say," *Ntate* (see glossary) *is the policeman going to arrest you is he going to take mamma*?" (1971:206). Another time *" Motsiwiri comes to you with imitation handcuffs crudely made of wire and shouts bring your hands here, where's your pass, I'll teach you not to be naughty again.*"(1971:206). Anthony, Mphahlele's eldest child "*keeps telling you in the morning when you go to the shop, usually Sunday mornings, that you mustn't forget your pass*"(1971:206). Mphahlele finds the situation agonizing, and for this reason he decides to leave South Africa although the measures established by the Apartheid system initiate already a form of exile. First, the Non-Whites are dispossessed of their lands and then they are deprived of their identity, of their dignity and even of their brains since "*..the whites do the thinking here.*" (1971:49).

In a lament over what has befallen South Africa, Reverend Desmond Tutu[31], a legendary political and religious figure of this country, sums up the debate on the blacks' alienation within four lines:

When they first came,
They had the Bible, we had the land;
Now, we have the Bible,
They have the land

(in Chinweizu,1987:1)

[31] He is a Peace Nobel Prize winner ; this is what made him a political figure.

In spite of his Christian creed, Reverend Desmond Tutu admits that a well-studied process has been wrought out to alienate a people from what constitutes their 'being' itself. When one is denied the least of human rights even that of thinking, one cannot pretend to exist. If Mphahlele the child does not yet fully realize the implications of anonymity, he is nevertheless offended by the Whites' indifference and more particularly by the Afrikaners' attitude at a very early age:

> The Afrikaan people for whom aunt Dora washed made no bones about the fact that they didn't want me to get into their kitchen. Their children merely peeped through a win-dow otherwise I didn't seem to exist.

(Mphahlele,1971:102)

A few years later, another experience shows the writer that indeed he does not exist in South Africa and that is when he is kicked out of a bus reserved for Whites only. No passenger turns to look back, no one cares about what is taking place, and it is this attitude that strikes him; this indifference that hardened their backs and necks… So shocked and so hungry he was, that he started to hate the Whites, a feeling he did not know before: " *Every step I took that afternoon seemed to accentuate the pulse of my anger against the whites and my hatred of them*" (1971:127).

In fact, in his three autobiographies Mphahlele cries his exiles, for wherever he is, he bears with him a feeling of exclusion. Indeed, he has to put an end to a state of being - or not being – that is depressing. Stranger, alien, outsider are all synonyms that he uses to tell about himself as an exile and anonymous person. In South Africa, he complains about a system that deprived him of his identity; abroad, he realizes that another sort of repression exerts the same impact on the personality of the exile. Mphahlele suffers from not being 'seen', which does not mean he wants fame as he himself says. He just needs to feel that he exists.

When he first settles in France, he knows only one word in French and that is the verb 'to be', which is quite significant: *" We knew no French. All I knew was the conjugation of the verb 'être'.* "(1984:31). Twice in *A M M*, he tries to clear up the concept of identity saying:

> It isn't fame you want in my line of work,
> it is having your shadow noticed as we say
> in Sesotho, to have seriti –a presence.
>
> (Mphahlele, 1984: 21-22)

Mphahlele refuses to be Ralph Ellison's "*invisible man*"[32]**.** He needs to be noticed if only for his colour which he says, quoting Louis Amstrong's song, is "*so black and blue*"[33].

Back to the passage referring to Mphahlele's anger against the Whites, what is therefore noticed is that he undergoes a change: he hates. The feeling of hatred denotes a kind of consciousness the child begins to acquire. The reader follows the evolution of his personality as it takes shape through the years; from childhood to adulthood, his progress in studies and his employment in different institutions. The reader is also told about his reactions and growing awareness of the reign of injustice in his country as his political and religious attitudes prove more radical and more skeptical towards the end of the book. At the beginning, his main concern is the fulfillment of a successful professional career:

> My own political consciousness was
> vague in an intellectual sense. I shut

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[32] Ellison, R. (1952) *Invisible Man.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

[33] Expression borrowed from Louis Armstrong's famous song: "*What Did I do to be so Black and Blue*". (See notes)

everything out of my life practically.
I mustn't fail, I mustn't fail.

(Mphahlele,1971:148)

Later, his consciousness starts with his disillusion towards religion. Mphahlele realizes that Christianity as taught to the blacks is a big lie and an instrument of manipulation. In the first chapter of *D S A,* Thema, a black boy born in a Christian family warns his friends not to believe anyone preaching brotherhood between Blacks and Whites: " *Don't listen to anyone bluff you and say black and white are brothers.*"(1971:16). Toward the end of the autobiography, the writer attests that his " *outlook on the church has decidedly changed* " and that he goes to Church to baptize his third-born just because his wife, Rebecca, wants it and mainly because he " *knows that she is following a custom, and not a conviction because they shared the same disillusionment.*"(1971:180). The writer comes to hate the Church because like other religions, he writes in *The African Image,* it operates as a blackmailer: "*The Grand Blackmail: if you want the Hospital, the clinic, the school, you've got to take the Bible, Christ.*" (1974: 48-49).

In all his books, Mphahlele sometimes violently and sometimes acrimoniously manifests his rejection of Christianity and other religions which, according to him, have proved more harmful than enlightening in the African continent. In exchange with this religion whose insincerity he denounces - for him , Church had become the symbol of the hypocrisy of the west- he proposes tradition where spiritual force and comfort are sought by most Africans. In *D S A*, the writer points out to the moral guidance that African intellectuals find in their ancestral heritage. They all keep in touch with the 'dead' who provide them with peace when they need it. About eight out of ten educated Africans whom he knows, Mphahlele tells us, still believe firmly in the spirits of their ancestors

although they are professed Christians. In spite of the fact that they do not speak about it among educated, they always look for a link with their fathers' spirits when they "*seek for moral guidance and inspiration and hope*" which they find "*somewhere in the recesses of their being*" (1971:64).

This link with the ancestors is often stressed in African literature. Leopold Sedar Senghor, the Senegalese political and literary man, as well as the founder of the Negritude movement, shows through his conception of time, the fluidity of the latter in the passage from the past to the present and from the future to the past. The smooth blending of these proportions of time is expressed beautifully in his saying: "*I always confound present and past just as I blend death and life. A bridge of sweetness links them*"[34](Senghor,1974:149) For him there is no barrier between death and life so that he could easily step from one world to the other without feeling the difference: "*I was myself the grand father of my grand father*", he says in *Chants d'Ombre*[35] (1974:32).

So the fact of feeling so close to the ancestors brought peace to those who felt lost or lonely at a certain moment in their lives. Peace can also be found in the act of communicating, sharing one's problems, trying to solve them together just as African families used to do in the past. This is what the writer seems to appreciate immensely and wishes to live with. Later, in *AM M*, he would identify these traditional ways as an African humanist ethic for living. In his article "*Poetry and Humanism; Oral Beginnings*", he explains that social relationships are an aspect of what he coins African Humanism which still "*asserts a powerful presence*"(1986:8-9) in traditional Africa. For those who think that they have

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[34] « Je confonds toujours présent et passé comme je mêle la Mort et la Vie. Un pont de douceur les relie ».

[35] « J'étais moi-même le grand père de mon grand père ».

civilized African People, Mphahlele reveals the harmony in which African societies live. He explains that the system that rules these communities is essentially based on human relationships and that the latter constitute a formidable network in Africa. He explains, for example, that the phrase "extended family" is an English interpretation which is meaningless in the African context because "*people are still family within the mother-father-child circle and beyond*" (1986:9). Moreover, moral right and wrong depend on how one behaves with one's fellow-being; in other words, when an African wrongs someone, he would not address an 'institution', be it a Church or any other authority apart from the ancestors. There is no such thing as confession, and only the ancestors' help is asked to restore harmony.

As can be noticed, Mphahlele is always inclined to draw a comparison between African tradition and Christianity. The more his nostalgia for the past grows, the more his attack against the Whites' religion intensifies. As a 'wanderer' suffering from the 'tyranny of time and place', he endlessly looks for an identity. So, his attachment to whatever constitutes his personality -as an African man- and his resentment against what made of him a lost and uprooted man is comprehensible. His aggressiveness is but an immediate reaction to what represents for him the source of his pain. Nevertheless, the seeds of violence that he plans to sow in his students' brains will be transformed after his return from exile into seeds of love, not the love preached by missionaries for over three hundred years but the one that existed much earlier and which Mphahlele comes back to and calls African Humanism.

2.5 AFRICAN HUMANISM

Actually, one could get confused at the paradoxical attitude Mphahlele shows when he claims to be a Humanist. For at the same time as he praises and defends the precepts of Ubuntu, which means African Humanism, he often manifests the opposite of what he values. For example, Ubuntu demands that one forgives because resentment and anger and desire of revenge undermine harmony. When someone does not forgive, he does not have Ubuntu, in other words he is not really human. Nevertheless, in so many occasions, especially in the first years of his exile, Mphahlele betrays a strong desire of revenge as well as bitterness and violence towards his 'enemies', the Whites but also the Non-Whites. In a reply to one of his detractors, an Afro-American, who reproaches him to criticize the Negritude movement, or more exactly the negritude approach to African literature, he argues that no one could deny the historical fact of negritude as both a protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values, but what he does not accept is the fact of romanticizing Africa "*as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness.*" (1980). In the same article, he says he feels insulted when some people imply that Africa is not a violent continent, for that would mean docility, which again reduces the African to an obedient and passive slave. In what can be considered as a virulent passage, Mphahlele states:

> I am a violent person and proud of it because
> it is often a healthy state of mind; some day I'm
> going to plunder, rape, set things on fire, I'm
> going to cut somebody's throat; I'm going
> to subvert a government; I'm going to hunt
> the rich fat black men who bully the small
> weak black men and destroy them; I'm going
> to become a capitalist………
> Yes, I'm going to organize a strike. Don't
> you know that sometimes I kill to the rhythm
> of drums and cut the sinews of a baby to cure
> it of paralysis? (1968)

The irony and dramatization Mphahlele is using in this article removes the veil on his 'violence' – which he claims almost as a right – but also on a wisdom gradually acquired far from South Africa. It is clear that Mphahlele would not cut the throat of anyone and certainly not the one who would use it to voice freedom and truth; however one can feel in this long and very suggestive discourse the human nature, mind and soul expressing themselves honestly and faithfully, without ever romanticizing or glorifying Africa, nor masking her weaknesses or her violence. Mphahlele presents this truth as being the image of Africa; an image he undertakes to recapture as a way to express "*our independence of mind, a decolonized mind*" , (1984:209) which could not be achieved but through a rediscovery of self and identity.

It seems therefore that the fact of writing an autobiography is a response to African Humanism. The quest of the self and identity starts with his own search for who is Ezekiel Mphahlele? "Who am I?" To know who he is, he is going first to mark his difference from the others or more exactly from what the others want him to be. He begins with bringing a rectification to his Christian name and calls himself Es'kia, which has an African resonance. Altering one's name is very symbolic since identity is revealed through this first reference. It is important to understand in Mphahlele's acts and decisions the necessity for him to culturally distinguish himself from the Europeans. The distance he creates is not meant to sever the ties that exist between the two worlds, but only to affirm an African personality independent from the Western world view, an African way of life based on an ancestral heritage that he alleges and justifies as the reason for his return from exile.

"Afrika", with a "K" is another obvious and provoking index of this so longed for "Afrikan" identity. Spelling the word Afrika (see notes) instead of Africa has been explained as a change from a Eurocentric point of reference to an Afrikan

one, according to the view of Mphahlele who thought that many names were created by the colonial powers with the intention to convey meaning that made sense to their European audience. Concerning this, he wrote in 1975:

> It is no use talking in the abstract about an Afrikan worldview based on traditional values if, at the same time we are content to live in a physical and human landscape created or determined by a European worldview.
>
> (http://eskiaonline.com/content/view/18/33/;)

In *D S A*, this image of Africa and African Humanism is rendered forcefully through the depiction of the Non-Whites' everyday life. In spite of the omnipresence of violence, in both its physical and psychological forms, in this auto fiction, the African mind and spirit are not completely destroyed. The non-white South Africans could preserve something of their identity which helped them survive the atrocity of alienation. For instance, Mphahlele describes the scene of the gathering at the fireside as a source of strength and moral guidance. It is also a place where men and boys –occasionally women- meet and talk about everything but with a sense of togetherness. And most importantly, it is a place where "*we learned a great deal….even before we were aware of it: history, tradition and custom, code of behavior, communal responsibility, social living and so on."*(1971:15). He pursues, "*I still remember clearly how stories were told to us at that fire place*",(1971:16) . Notice that after telling about the diversity of subjects dealt with at the fireplace, the writer adds the detail of "how stories were told" which implies that the way or the manner to transmit the teaching is as important as what is taught. He later lets us know that "*Old Segone was a great story-teller*"(1971:16), in other words an artist, which is another echo of African humanism. For, what Mphahlele also calls African Humanism is the capacity of the language to speak the truth, which only poetry

can do. "*Oral poetry is powerful words expressing powerful feelings which in turn intuit connections between man and other facets of nature*",(1986:8) he writes in his article. Further, he quotes the German thinker Johann Georg Hamman who defines poetry as "*the mother tongue of the human race*".(1986:9) Establishing links, reinforcing social and human relationships, being closer to each other, this is what Mphahlele terms African Humanism; it is indeed a life-style and a state of mind shaping the 'Afrikan' personality and at the same time opening its doors to the external world, absorbing it without the danger of assimilation, acculturation or alienation.

There is , therefore, no doubt that the author has undergone a great change while he was in exile after a long examination of his self. *D S A* offers us an illustration of this change, evolution, maturity of the writer through a particular notion of time that builds up the story and imbues it with an originality which is seen by some critics, once more, as a powerful manifestation of African Humanism; for the writer sets his own rules of writing and demarcates it from the pre-established canons of Western literature, reaffirming thus Chinweizu's view that "*African literature has its own traditions, modes and norms*" (1999:82) against the alienating forces of Apartheid and Eurocentric cultural imperialism.

2.6 THE NOTION OF TIME IN *DOWN SECOND AVENUE*

There is in *D S A* an evolution in the sense of a new conception of life resulting from a long experience and a deep reflection on it. Such a conception first leads the narrator to resignation as the first part of the book reveals. The repetition of the expression "*it was like this in Second Avenue, you know it must be like that*"(1971:29) shows that the narrator is overwhelmed by a sense of permanence and fatality and that he yields to it. He seems doomed to live "like this" and

accepts such a life because he is unable to change it. The sentence "it was like this" not only describes a cyclic and oppressing atmosphere but also provokes a reaction to the latter. Actually, the stage of resignation is replaced by questioning; it is in St Peter's school that he first tastes the freedom of expression. The students are allowed to debate on any kind of subject. Of these days in St Peter's, he reports that "*for the first time in [his] life [he] felt a sense of release*"(1971:125). And because he wants to live with this sense of release, he becomes more and more involved in his people's cause. He joins political circles, meets with determined men who claim their rights, and feels it a duty to adhere to the A N C , to later draft the Freedom Charter's clause "*the doors of learning and culture shall be opened to all…",* a fact which few people know as Raks Seakhoa informs us in the tributes paid to Mphahlele after his death, (2008,www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-188280273.html).

At last, he tries to overcome his tragic situation , which indicates a new political maturity and a new conception of life as has been said earlier:

> Fellowship? Love? Obedience of the law?
> Suddenly I did not know what these meant
> in terms of my place in society, and I revol-
> ted against such preachments.
>
> (Mphahlele,1971:164)

Mphahlele never used the word 'revolt' before. Indeed, "*something dramatic was taking place inside me*", he says. "*Where I had accepted things as part of a normal programme, my personality revolted…*"(1971:164). He can no longer cope with the sort of life he used to accept, and the more he discovers about the reality of his country, the more he feels bitter about it.

This bitterness is accentuated in *D S A* by a fact of utter stagnation lived by the non-white community. This is shown through the writer's particular use of the notion of time, a technique that runs through the works of many other non-white writers. In this auto fiction, the study of this approach is more than necessary, for it allows the reader to penetrate an atmosphere that is specific to the Blacks' world in South Africa, a world that reflects their state of mind as well as their state of being.

In many genres of writing the past tense is, one may say, conventionally used to tell a story or to report a real or fictionalized fact. Its verb (the past's) is part of a causal chain. According to Roland Barthes, it takes part in a group of actions that sustain each other, "*it functions as the algebric sign of an intention*"[36](1953:26) which implies that whatever action or event takes place in the novel, it has its cause and effect. The text is therefore harmonious and organized because the simple past is the expression of an order on which both the writer and society have agreed. In Mphahlele's autofiction, this chronology and causal chain is respected to a certain extent. For instance, when Mphahlele says: "*Three important things happened in 1937, in the final form of the Junior Certificate course*",(1971:133) the reader expects him to explain what the three things are, which he does. The writer also tells about the effect of those particular events on his life later.

However, this apparent order is broken by the interference of interludes that interrupt the sequence of the story in an abrupt way and disturbs the usual notion we have of time. As it is generally perceived, time represents the past, the present and the future of a person. It is almost impossible to dissociate these three dimensions of time, the present being the consequence or the continuation of the past, the future that of the present; while thinking in the present, one still feels

[36] « Par son passé simple, le verbe fait implicitement partie d'une chaine causale…..il fonctionne comme le signe algébrique d'une intention ».

yesterday and foresees tomorrow. In *D S A*, this notion of time takes a new shape, for what appears as a chronological, coherent process of life, is but a cruel sameness which deprives the non-white South Africans of the meaning of existence and drowns them deeper in uncertainty. If men apprehend time because they fear death which they know is ineluctable, the Non-Whites rather fear a life that is imposed on them and wonder "*whether this was the sort of life one was to continue to live until one's death*"(1971:50) and whether they would be "*travelling along a long, long winding road that promised no destination.*"(1971:51). As we have seen, communication with the dead, the ancestors, the spirits may explain the Blacks' serenity in front of death. They may even find comfort and peace in that other world they are constantly in touch with. Thus it is much more a life that others have designed for them that the Non-White South Africans are anxious about. It is this life-time that is described in *D S A* to illustrate and testify of the everyday persecutions, humiliations and alienation of a whole people. It is also the validation of a writer's rupture with a society founded on a racist ideology legitimatized by what became an institution, in other words, Apartheid.

"The long winding road" soon takes the form of a circle within which the Non-White's life revolves permanently. This unbearable rhythm of life is revealed by the structure and the style the writer employs especially in the interludes. In an analysis of this structure , Olney interprets what he compares to

> a circular jazz-like contrapuntal form, relying heavily on five fugue-like interludes written in the present tense that recapitulate poetically and philosophically the main body of the text which is set in the past (1973:28)

as a structure that " *replicates the African view of life as a cycle in which events and ancestors are reincarnate in the present that is 'a ritual repetition' of the*

past and a rehearsal of the future." (Ibid). This may be true but in the particular case of South Africa the view of life becomes an infernal cycle in which only tragic events are repeated as it is proposed to see in the following analysis.

Looking again at the structure of *D S A,* one would notice that it is harmonious and well-balanced. The narrator relates his life, his experiences and the main events that marked him in a chronological, sequential way. The chapters have more or less the same length and contain each a special story focusing on a specific character or event announced by the title. Apparently independent, these chapters look like short stories, a genre which has heavily invested the space of literature in South Africa and of which Mphahlele is a representative figure. It is important to recall here that it was the medium which most Non-White writers resorted to as it responded to the immediacy of the situation. As it has been pointed out earlier, the short story comes to one as a reflex and a response to ever –present stimulus as Mphahlele sees it. His collection of short stories, entitled *Man Must Live* (1946) and reedited later as *The Unbroken Song* (1981) and *Renewal Time* (1988) is an illustration of this reflection although he criticized it ten years later as being escapist writing. However, he justified this by the fact that: *"[He] had never studied the short story form: [He] was just writing as [his] feelings dictated*" (1971:164). The circumstances dictating the form are also suggested in Gordimer's definition of the short story as a

> Fragmented and restless form, a matter
> of hit or miss, and it is perhaps for this
> reason that it suits modern conscious-
> ness –which seems best expressed as
> flashes of fearful insight alternating
> with near-hypnotic states of indifference.
>
> (1976:179-181)

What seems to be valued in these quotations is the ability of the short story to capture a particular instant and convey, as it were, the exigency of the situation. Mphahlele, who is a typical writer of the short story, insists that it was impossible for a writer who lived in oppression to organize his whole personality into creating a novel, a truth sustained by many of his compatriots. It should be added, however, that the reason why the short story started flourishing in the 1950's and 1960's was because it found in Drum, an outlet for black writing and publication.

Thus, in *D S A*, '*Ma-Bottles*', '*Dinku Dinka's Terror'* or '*Witchcraft*' are chapters that could well read as short stories, but at the same time as they show autonomy, they build up the story of Mphahlele. As mentioned above, this order is broken by the interference of interludes – five in all- which is rather unusual in autobiographies. Interrupting the sequence of the story, they seem to be introduced as pauses to break the same, continuous rhythm of life rendered by the balance of the other chapters. In addition, the reader notices a change in style - from a plain, descriptive one to a poetic and highly symbolic one - and a shift in tense –from the past to a predominating present as can be seen in the following passage. The writer retires from the city and the people and meditates on Orlando and on life in Orlando from afar:

> Up there, another part of Orlando with lights,
> not too far to reach, but smiling and blinking
> at you ironically; then far away , clusters and
> clusters of them. They might have been bathed
> in water and emerged bright, clean, with a
> crystal texture, in the magical context of night.
>
> (1971:201)

At this stage two levels of narration could be distinguished in *D S A*. One is autobiographical and occurs in the chapters depicting the Blacks' daily life

through the writer's own experiences; the main events of the author's past are stated with precise dates and minute details. The reader knows for instance that in 1934 Mphahlele went to Maupaneng, that in 1947 he decided never to go to Church and that in 1947, he went to Nigeria. The smell of paraffin makes him feel the past as if it were present. Besides, the characters are given their authentic names like aunt Dora or Rebecca, his wife , Motsiwiri his son, the thing that endows the work with a greater note of a lived reality.

As for the other level of narration -that is to say the interludes- it puts forward a series of reflections on the sense of the life and experiences Mphahlele went through. Thus the curiosity of the reader as to the presence of interludes in *D S A* can be answered by the fact that this technique, in reality, obeys a rule which is pre-requisite to the autobiographical genre. Szavai explains that in the autobiography, *" there are two planes of time interlocked. One of them the present when the book is being written , which corresponds to the end of the process of development*" –which also justifies the use of the present tense in the interludes- "*while the other reflects the past and the different stages of the author's development*" (1984:110) –which is the case in the other chapters of *D S A*. Effectively, the interlocking of the two time planes or narrative planes through interludes is original and very skillful. In the following example taken from the first interlude, the writer depicts a scene without even seeing it; the sound of the police whistle and the curfew bell, once again, sets in motion his imagination: it tells him what he already knows, that is to say, that a black man is being chased:

> Saturday night and it's ten to ten. I can
> hear the big curfew bell at the police
> station peal "ten to ten, ten to ten, ten
> to ten" for the Black man to be out of
> the streets to be at home to be out of
> the policemen's reach. Year after year

> Every night the sound of the bell floats
> in the air at ten minutes to ten and the
> Black man must sleep or have a night
> special permit. The whistle is very near
> now and the hunted man must be in
> Second Avenue but the bell goes on
> pealing lustily and so Black man you
> must run wherever you are, run.
>
> (1971:45)

The repetition of the phrase "the Black man must" suggests something fatal about him: he must run as he has always done and will still do. Ironically, the verb 'run' which should counter a static, permanent condition is used here to confirm it. The Blacks are continuously running within a closed circle without ever 'skidding' or going out of its boundaries. The narrator depicts a situation which is not likely to change and which drives man to despair. The obsessive tempo recurs thus through the use of the conjunction 'and' whose repetition expresses endlessness and through the insistence on the time at which the bell rings –ten minutes to ten. Furthermore, the progressive form of the verb 'to peal' accompanied with the adverb 'lustily' in the sentence "*the bell goes on pealing lustily*" again indicates continuity and to a certain extent sounds like a sadistic reminding of the Blacks' imprisonment. On the other hand, it contrasts two rhythms of life: one implied by the imperative form of the verb 'to run', referring to the black man's, and the other expressed through the gerund form and designating the sound of the bell which symbolizes the white man's. The writer seems to say that whereas the black man lives on the alert, the white man quietly enjoys his time. Moreover, by repeating twice "the Black man" then "the hunted man", then again "the Black man", he identifies the one with the other.

In the chapter entitled "*Water Tap*", the writer describes a daily scene that illustrates powerfully the cyclic and oppressing atmosphere pervading the ghetto. People are queuing waiting, helpless, inert, watching "*time [that] ran out with the same slow, relentless and painful flow of tap water.*"(1971:30). "*It was like this"*, "*you know it must be like that at every other communal tap in Marabastad*".(1971:29) Mphahlele says and repeats; "*it was like this*" describing Saturday nights, and again "*it had to be like this always*", complaining about the Blacks' life in Marabastad. The expression "it was like this" is insisted on not only to reveal the bitterness and fatality of the black man who seems doomed "to live like this", but also to provoke a reaction to it, which is actually manifested by the interludes. In fact, the passage from the narrative text to the interludes without transition marks a new attitude of the author who becomes more objective, more conscious, and more determined than before. Hence, the narrator assumes a new role; he no longer belongs to the personae of the auto fiction – a victim of society – but becomes a witness capable of judgment and comment. The interplay and alternation of memories , reality and imagination which express the past, the present and the future are reduced to an immediate present. Thanks to his detachment and awareness, the narrator seems to have control over time, for he knows what has been happening and will still be happening in the future. This conception of time may be explained by Todorov's "*ritual logic*" or "*eternal return*" whereby an event takes place neither for the first nor for the last time and whereby everything is announced in the text, past, present and future. In other words, "*an event which takes place is the illustration of a prediction"* (Todorov, 1971:141). In *D S A,* this event suggests more than a prediction; it suggests certainty as the black South African is sure to pursue the same activities, to be repressed by the police, and to live in the same ghetto.

The insistence on the notion of time to portray the harshness of life in South Africa is a technique which other non-white writers have exploited. Very often

the black characters in South African fiction are overwhelmed by resentment and do not expect anything from life – nor from time. An example of this is found in Abrahams' *Mine Boy* where the writer describes miners not as human beings but as robots functioning tirelessly, unceasingly, without ever feeling the satisfaction of something being achieved:

> ….but the sand remained the same.
> a truck would come from the heart
> of the earth. A truck would go up
> to build the mine-dump. Another
> would go up….All day long……
>
> (1980:42)

The description of the miners as automatons could be universal, but what gives more intensity to the image of these workers is their desperate, empty stare: "*the eyes of these men were like the eyes of the sheep that did not know where to run when the dog barked*."(1980: 41). They were devoid of the real substance of life that is personality, courage and action. Perhaps, the most illustrative example of this distressing and everlasting rhythm also based on the technique of repetition is found in *Tell Freedom* where Abrahams transcribes the sound of the train that takes him to Elsburg location in this way:

> Every now and then, when the train curved
> round a bend, it screamed its shrill warning.
> And the wheels under me whispered :
> "On a.w.a.y On a.w.a.y On a.w.a.y"
> Then they said: "On away**.** On away**.** On away**.**"
> Then they said: "On away**,** On away**,** On away**,**"
> Then after for nearly all the time they said:
> "Onawayonawayonawayonawayonaway"
>
> (1954:14)

The last line is striking as an image of death flashes through the reader's mind. As it is transcribed, the scream of the train strangely recalls the curve of an

electrocardiogram (see notes), but instead of slowing down the throb of the machine's heart, it draws a straight line and is accelerated as if running to death. This impression of death generated by repetition is also evoked by Kundera who sees in 'rhythm' an echo of death. He expresses his anxiety as to the regular tempos and time measures as follows:

> I abhor listening to my heart's beating which reminds unceasingly that my life-time is counted.This is why I have always seen in the bars of measure marking out partitions, something macabre.But the great masters of rhythm have succeeded to suppress this monotonous regularity and have transformed their music in a little enclosure of 'time out of time'.
> Received idea: the genius of rhythm manifests itself by a noisy, underlined regularity.
> Error: The knocking primitivism of the rock/ heart's beating is amplified so that man does not forget, not a second, his walk towards death.
>
> (Kundera, 1986:181)
> (See notes)

Cry, the Beloved Country by Alan Paton offers another example of the despair of a permanent state of life in 'Shanty Town'. An immigrant family endures the hardships of the city while looking for a house. The writer shows in the way questions are asked to different tenants and in the reiteration of such questions, the hopelessness, the fatigue and the boredom of that family. For instance, in the first dialogue, the narrator uses the modal 'could' which is a form of politeness – "*Have you a room that you could let*?"(1948:48-49) while he omits it in the third dialogue –"*Have you a room to let*?"- inferring that the mother is tired of asking the same question all the time. The narrator's boredom in telling what is happening in that ghetto everyday again and again is also reflected by the repetition of the word 'and' more than ten times in one paragraph on page 54:

"*The white man came to Shanty Town…….and some will not have them anymore*"(1948:54).

In *D S A,* Mphahlele shows that this sense of stagnation and permanence stems from a continuous oppression and from the instability of the Black man who "*keeps moving on as he has always done for the last three centuries, moving with baggage and all forever tramping with bent backs to give way for the one who says he is the stronger*"(1971:157). Moving from the country to the city, from the ghetto to another ghetto, forced into ethnic compartments, the black community is uprooted and dislocated. It cannot enjoy a quiet, normal life, nor is it possible for it to realize any significant progress. In *The African Image,* the author tells us that in South Africa one can move 'up' only within one's ghetto and in relation to what one was before – "*from say working for a white man to owning your own ghetto shop*" (1974:43) This is the reason why the non-white South African is brooding, insecure and uncertain about the future which, in *D S A*, is seen as a reenactment of the past and the present. Even Mathebula, the witch doctor and foreseer proves to be ungifted since he fails to tell the future of the Blacks and to predict any hope for the days to come.

However, in the fourth and fifth interludes something is perceived which foretells a change to take place in the writer's life. First, one may note a shift in tense - namely from the present to the past - which suggests a sort of detachment from the immediate world. The writer seems to return to the past in order to analyze better the present and thus have a perspective for the future. It is much like a retrospective attitude which is going to help Mphahlele in his quest for identity. Progression and hope are also noticed in the fact that from reflection, the narrator moves to action best pointed up by the verb 'to go' : " *I went to Basutoland in search of something*" (1971:184). This impulse towards Basutoland seems to mark the beginning of Mphahlele's future long trip across the world. Besides, the

stars which are symbolic of destination become his companions of night. In the fourth interlude, he wants to rake and splash them in the sky the way a gambler throws the dice and waits for chance, wondering what is in reserve for him. The symbols predicting the writer's destiny splash the interlude with a poetic tinge best rendered in the following passage:

> I scoured the sky with my eyes; in my
> fancy I raked the stars together leaving
> a sieve in the velvet sky.Then I collected
> them and splashed the sky with them.
> Some of the stars were pulverized
> in transit and chalked the blue with a
> milky way.
>
> (1971:184)

The stars are a persistent symbol in South African writings. Like Mphahlele, Abrahams also withdraws from "*the city and the people and the houses*" and raises his eyes to the sky where he sees " *a cluster of bright dancing stars looking down the city. One exploded and streaked across the city leaving a tail of light in its wake*" (1954:157-158). Just as in *D S A,* the stars also symbolize the future and a quest to be undertaken soon:

> I stayed there for a while a little self-conscious
> and ashamed at the intensity of my emotions.
> new feelings, elusive and incontrollable played
> on my heart and mind. A need different from
> all the other needs I had ever known moved me
> to longing and I did not know what I longed for.
>
> (Abrahams,1954:158)

Finally in the fifth interlude of *D S A,* the writer describes himself sitting in the yard and contemplating "*the beauty of distant electric lights*"(1971:201). Once again he is alone looking at these "*little fiery gems set in the fabric of*

night"(1971:201). They are far away, but they tempt him, beckon him and finally obtain a response from him:

> The lights quiver as brightly as ever, looking so clean so jubilant, so fresh, teasing the primitive springs of life in you which in turn respond to that symbolic call of the lights coming across to you,wrapped in the mystery of night.
>
> (1971:206)

Electric lights are more concrete than stars in the sense that they are man made and therefore not so unattainable. Rather, they represent the freedom Mphahlele aspires to. He realizes that waiting patiently will not help him reach his aim and that only action is efficient. At last, the change takes place. In this same interlude, the narrator attacks the system of Apartheid overtly and incriminates its racial segregation. He considers the Blacks' cause first of all as a human cause and revolts at the outrage made against it: "*You hear humanity wailing for help, for food, for shelter; humanity gasping for air*" (1971:204) The Black man is humiliated , killed, enslaved, uprooted and alienated; the revolted writer banned, jailed and his work censored. Therefore he 'chooses' exile out of South Africa, for, as said earlier, he is already a stranger at home.

What should be remarked, is that the interludes are an expression of exile in both their form and content. Through them, the writer has already started his quest and his voyage. Recurring sometimes as an introspection , sometimes as a retrospection, they always are a profound scrutiny of life in South Africa. Moreover, they are one of the rare moments when the writer gives way to his feelings and emotions and lets his imagination draw the sweetest images out of the bitterest world he lives in. This is perceived in the second interlude where he wishes he were like Moses, floating in water; he wondered how nice it was to be

hidden in a basket, "*to be free, so lovable. To be loved and to be fondled and given all you want at the princess's bidding*" (1971:74). He regretted not to be born a king's son.

The child's voice and innocence is not always present in other South African autobiographies. Some writers have tried to indicate their presence while relating past events through the alternation of narrative and analyzing parts or simply through some hints. In some particular cases, the handling of the two planes of narration mentioned above weakens the work , for the passage from the child's to the adult's point of view or from the past experience to the present comment on it, sometimes, proves difficult to achieve. The transition should not make the child lose his innocence or be overwhelmed by the adult as is seen in Abrahams' autobiography for example. While Mphahlele admits naively that he does not know why he was taken to Maupaneng at the age of five, Abrahams begins *Tell Freedom* with this symbolic passage which betrays the maturity of the narrator:

> I pushed my nose and lips against the pane
> and tried to lick a raindrop sliding down on
> the other side. As it slid past my eyes, I saw
> the many colours in the raindrop….It must
> be warm in there.Warm and dry. And perhaps
> the sun would be shining in there.The green
> must be the trees and the grass; and the bright-
> ness, the sun…I was inside the raindrop, away
> from the misery of the cold, inside my raindrop
> world.(1954:9)

According to Ursula Barnett, a critic of South African literature, "*it is unlikely that anyone would remember how, at the age of two or three, he tried to lick a raindrop sliding down a window pane"*(1983:225). She also states that "*the*

incident makes a most effective introduction to the book, but one loses the sense of experience relived that Mphahlele succeeds in conveying to the reader"(Ibid).

Nonetheless, one may wonder at the reason why Mphahlele has chosen Moses in particular. Is it not a way to introduce again the theme of exile under a mask of innocence? Actually, it seems that the author has succeeded in keeping an impression of purity while calling an emblematic figure of exile like Moses, for who says Moses, inevitably refers to the most important event(mentioned earlier) in the Israelis' history: the exodus. As the Bible tells us in the book entitled "*Exodus*"(1979:59), which means departure, it was under the protection of God and led by Moses that the people of Israel fled from Egypt where they were persecuted and killed. The journey to the Promised Land was too long and so hard; so it seems that the evocation of Moses has a religious connotation that alludes to the exile's destiny, announced and reiterated in the Bible through the expression "*a homeless wanderer*", which for the readers of Mphahlele is quite familiar.

On the whole, Mphahlele seems to have solved the problem of transition with the interludes that represent a new experimentation in the autobiographical genre. After playing upon the concepts of time, showing that the present is not a progression from the past but is the past itself or that the past is forever present, the author finally destroys this syllogism by his decision to view the present and mainly the future differently. Now, a perspective which gives a sense to his life and time is shaping. The interludes allow him to dream and hope ….which is unthinkable in South Africa. At last, "*Dawn came and announced victory*"(1971:185). It is a victory against silence, against inertia, against acceptance and resignation. It is also a victory against a static, stagnating, immobile time, a notion Mphahlele depicts successfully in *D S A*.

His departure, announced and decided in the interludes, marks indeed the end of a time and the beginning of a new one. Exile, which is his last resort, is not an easy 'choice', but when life becomes a prison for a man and especially for a writer who is compelled to keep silent while he is 'made' to speak, there is no other alternative than to leave. Yet, after twenty years of exile during which he lived in freedom, Mphahlele was still a hostage of time and place as he deeply suffered from what he called the "Tyranny of Time and Place" far from his home and country, South Africa.

2.7 THE TYRANNY OF TIME AND PLACE.

For how long and against how many tyrants is Mphahlele going to fight? Why should he undergo their diktat and when would he be able to liberate himself from their chains? When he was in South Africa, he complained about a tyrant, Apartheid, begetting another tyrant, Time, breeding it, taming it, feeding it then throwing it on him like a ferocious beast to devour him cruelly, outrageously, repeatedly …

Just as Chronos (see notes) eats his infants in Greek mythology , Time, consumes man in South Africa, and if it does not entirely swallow him, it leaves him mutilated, and psychologically devastated. Time is 'tie-me' to that which I do not want to be tied to and untie me from that which I want to be tied to . Time is always "ten to ten" in *D S A*; it is "walking in the night" in La Guma's novella; it is running but very slowly; it is permanently being hunted whether awake or asleep as in Mphahlele's dreams and nightmares. Time is the Leshoana river that kills Thema and his beloved, the image of the grandmother conspiring with the mountains, the long childhood years spent in Maupaneng and Marabastad, and finally the adulthood enduring the everyday, every minute harassment of the police and the law.

The Tyranny of Time is witnessing one's life passing absurdly without being able to react; it is being paralyzed by fear, damaged by hate, ruled by violence and destroyed by despair. In *D S A* , Time wears all these facets and many more. Mphahlele writes about how he lived each of them making the reader share those pathetic moments which endow his autobiography with a strong sense of reality and sincerity. Time, he shows us, made of him an eternal exile. A wanderer, a traveller, and an alien, very early, the writer came to know uprootedness and displacement. As a child, he had to travel from Maupaneng to Marabastad; he had to move from his family's house to his father's grand-mother's then to his mother's grand-mother's. As a teen- ager he himself gradually withdrew from 'the tribe' , from Second Avenue, not because he did not have the sense of community he always defends, but because he needed some distance so as to ponder over a number of things that were confusing him. Mphahlele was a boy who did not have many intimate friends with whom to share his preoccupations, and he seems to have suffered from it as he revealed to his biographer Manganyi Chabani that "*the alienation and consequent withdrawal often drove me to despair at night.....*"(1983:61).

The transition from childhood to adulthood was as difficult to achieve. Despite his gratifications at school and his accomplishment in education which allowed him to acquire a profession and a certain autonomy (from the family), Mphahlele admits that he still carried a feeling of instability and insecurity in him. When in 1940, at Adams College, the headmaster proposed to him to work in 'Ezenzeleni' an institution for the blind , he accepted although he was intrigued by it :

> I do know that I felt unsure of myself.My personality
> was simply a whirpool of currents and cross-currents
> of ambition and idealism mixed up with memories of
> my home life. I had seldom thought of about my father

> but when my mother sued for divorce,it seemed
> old wounds had revived....sensations that had lain
> dormant for nine years, why were they rekindled?
> .....Suddenly I felt as if my life had been one huge
> broken purpose.
>
> (1971:149)

And once again, Mphahlele finds himself travelling towards a new destination, remembering vividly the afternoon he was fetched from the station in1941; how he felt confused and insecure : "*I was twenty two, a great deal confused, utterly unsure of myself, but feeling a kind of inevitability as I entered the service of Ezenzeleni.*" (Ibid).

The journey was both physical and spiritual, and his life took soon the form of a monologue where a lot of questions were asked without always finding replies. He wondered who he was, and what his life meant. At least one of these questions was answered, for he realized that he was "*born a teacher*" (http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com, 2008); more than realizing it, he was fully convinced that this would always be his profession and his vocation: " *It has been my fate to be a teacher and writer. The imagination is my regular beat as it is also the workshop of my mind; the territories of ideas, knowledge; thought and emotion is my hunting ground*" (in Shava,1989:46) **,** he said after his return from exile. Nevertheless, he had to sacrifice the only palpable truth he possessed when he refused to work under the "Bantu Education" system designed by Dr.Verwoerd, then the Minister of Native Affairs. This system of education was a new tool of oppression against the "Bantu" as well as a mask of Apartheid functioning inside an educational system. Mphahlele rejected it at the risk of losing his work when he badly needed it. He had married and had to provide his family with food, but his commitment to the Blacks' cause, especially after joining the ANC and taking part in the political struggle against Apartheid, cost him banishment and the censorship of any writing he produced.

Working as a journalist in Drum and The Voice was an interesting experience but which did not satisfy his desire as a teacher. He had been condemned to 'witness silently'.

He had, indeed, witnessed entire populations moving from where they were born and had grown up, where generations had relayed and had almost felt some sort of belonging to some place in that country. Unfortunately, came the day when they had to move just as his own family did, from Marabastad to Second Avenue. "*The Whites [had] decided they didn't like Black people so near them*".(1971:151) It was not 'convenient' to have them as close neighbours; therefore they were removed from their locations, uprooted regardless of their opinion and their feelings about it. Whether they wished it or not, whether they suffered or not, they had to clear the place because they were 'unwanted'. So many families were discarded in this process, but very few reacted to the decision which was seen as usual and fatal in South Africa. They resigned to it because they thought like Mphahlele's grand-mother that "*that's the white man's law"*(1971:152) and the law was not questioned. In a fatalistic and ironic tone Mphahlele wrote about this sad reality, about Marabastads that would be going and coming unceasingly and about black men who "*keep moving on as [they] have always done the last three centuries, moving with baggage and all, for ever tramping with bent backs to give way for the one who says he is stronger*"(Ibid.,p.157).

For him, what the Whites called slum clearance was in fact conscience clearance. It was a whole process of disintegration , physically, spiritually and intellectually at work which Mphahlele was aware of and could no longer bear. South Africa was a prison where Mphahlele was asphyxiated. That was the time when he lived his first exile under what he called the "Tyranny of Time". Realizing that all the doors were shut and that the country had indeed become "*the capital of walls*"

(1984:212), he thought seriously about demolishing one of them before they completely demolished him. So, he undertook another journey, experimenting as it were his second exile which he would continually refer to as the "Tyranny of Place".

Sitting out on the stoep of his house in Orlando West, Soweto, waiting for the exit gates to open, Mphahlele was far from imagining that the 'wanderer' he was in South Africa was going to roam all his life, pursuing his quest until it brought him back, at last, to South Africa. When he decided to cross the frontiers, he did not plan to come back home, nor did he think that he would face the greatest dilemma: stay or return. In fact, Mphahlele suffered intensely from absence, alienation and exclusion even in African countries like Nigeria. In his "autobiographies" which can be read as a serial , he recounts his life in exile and his exiles in life, complaining endlessly of the "Tyranny of Place". In spite of the freedom he enjoyed, of the privileges he was offered, and of all the cultural activities he directed, he still felt hindered somewhere. There was no accomplishment because the sense of home was lacking. Mphahlele longed to return to a nevertheless hellish South Africa. He had to stay with the people whose presence he needed. This is what he said when asked why he had rejoined South Africa,

> An African cares very much where he dies
> and is buried. But I have not come to die.
> I want to reconnect with my ancestors
> while I am still active.
>
> (http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica.com, 2008)

While *D S A* reads like a justification for departure, *A M M* reads like a pleading for return; a return which he knew would be difficult. He expected hostile confrontations, and it is actually what took place. During his long years of exile,

Mphahlele was preparing his coming back to South Africa, but he had done it with much apprehension. While giving a lecture at the university of Lesotho in Roma, he was accused by some African students of being a traitor to the South African cause for working under a system he had fiercely condemned. His homecoming did provoke the suspicion of a number of Non-Whites and the disappointment of some writers like Richard Rive and Dennis Brutus for example. Refusing to judge him or doubt his honesty, the latter argued that Mphahlele's basic problem was just homesickness even though he had to some extent compromised himself by approving of the offer made to him. In a letter Dennis Brutus addressed him, he warned against the political repercussions of his projected return to South Africa:

> I must say that I think on logical grounds there is much reason why you should not go –the graves of the school children dying gallantly in opposition seems to me a strong reason for refusing the favours of the racists: if they give you the favour of a visa it is because they *need you* to make them seem less terrible. Let me speak to you directly and appeal to you *not* to go: I believe it will harm our cause – and our fight – if you go now when their hands and the soil of our country are drenched with blood of our people.

(in Shava,1989:46)

What others called treason and compromise, Mphahlele simply interpreted as an ineluctable return home. His decision was made and no one could persuade him to cancel it. On the contrary, the events of 1976, just like those of 1961 urged him to come back so as to contribute to the liberation of his country. It was so much more relieving than being in the position of a fugitive constantly tortured by guilt. In fact, Mphahlele had often posed the problem of the writer's

contribution to the struggle against Apartheid. In a country where there is no time to appreciate aesthetics, literature is effective only if it is accessible to the people. Again in the conference in Roma, he explained to his audience that the kind of literature that should be produced in the South African context should be one that "*moves the people to action*" that is to say an "*everyday prose for directness of impact" rather than one of "images, symbols and metaphors*" (1984:212). So, to the other reproach made to him by the young refugees about his considering the writer's role as a limited one, he answered that a writer could promote a political revolution only if he went among the crowds: "*as a man, go into action*"(1984:13). As for the language that should be used, he recommends the prose of everyday life which speaks directly, deferring aesthetics and creativity to the future:

> He must know that his imaginative Literature is, in public terms, at best an investment in the cultural well-being of his people that will mature, if it ever does, in the distant future.
>
> (1984:13)

In other words, the writer's role as a creator would be to find the words and tone that would reach the people's hearts and minds immediately and most effectively, which validates the view according to which the pathetic can have a more convincing argumentative value than a cold, intellectual discourse (Aristotle, 1960:60);(see notes). Once more, this explains the rise of the short story and poetry in South Africa especially in the last decades. One would even expect from the new position of the writer a certain 'violence' which Mphahlele saw as 'action'. Obviously, what is implied by violence is an extreme solidarity and 'the will to live' contrarily to Can Themba's "*The Will to Die*"[37]. As for the

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[37] Expression borrowed from Can Themba's *The Will to Die* (1973).

exiled writers who are not present in the battlefield, that is in their own country, the gap between them and their audience becomes wider and wider.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, censorship constitutes a major handicap; the people about whom and for whom the non-white South Africans write cannot read their works, which makes their exile harsher. Mphahlele lived this situation with an extreme bitterness. He 'chose' exile to express himself freely, but when the audience he needed did not hear nor respond to his call, the whole design was spoiled. In *A M M,* he refers to the position in which he and his compatriots found themselves and how they resented the fact of being devoid of an audience. In fact, they felt cheated out of the latter as they were content to write for what he called " *a vaguely defined world intelligence*" (1984:130). As he explains, this situation was quite frustrating since he could not know the reactions of those who made the material for his writing and whose concerns were his. He was not interested in critics whose criteria he did not care for. With other South African writers in exile, they were "*indeed like disembodied voices crying out for a dimension that [would] give them meaning*." (Ibid).

On this occasion , Nkosi also said in an interview that everyone read the fiction, the poems and the biographies of South African writers in exile except the people in whose names one was writing. He mentioned in this respect the irony that wanted his story "*The Prisoner*" to be printed in an African collection edited for Japanese readers; "*so the Japanese were going to be able to read [his] story before South Africans could enjoy the privilege*."(1980:68).

Mphalele had already stated in *The African Image*, that he could serve South Africa only if he were in direct contact with his people. As a teacher, he was convinced that one had to teach where he was sure to contribute something real, efficient and relevant for his students. He unveiled his strategy which consisted

in teaching the youth what the government syllabus said "*and use it to sow the seeds of rebellion , and set on fire the passions that [are] already raging, waiting for articulation*."(1974:43)**.** This reflection may clarify Mphahlele's attitude as to the 'compromise' and perhaps demand a little more comprehension on the part of those who suspected him of treachery.

Mphahlele returned to South Africa after twenty years in exile, a life-time punctuated with hope and despair, joy and grief, love and hate; it was a very enriching experience which allowed self-discovery and self-awareness as well as the restoration of an identity after a very long quest. However, the "Tyranny of Place" was overwhelming him and his strong faith in African Humanism commanded him to live back with his people whatever the world thought of it. Although he admits that the trap was set and that he walked in it, he maintained that he had come to claim his ancestral heritage and to assert his role as a humanist, explaining what compromise really meant to him. It was not just the fact of working in a system he rejected before that was a compromise; compromise was also living under the oppression of guilt, knowing that people were suffering in South Africa while he was abroad. Twenty years of exile was a much greater compromise, for exile had become for him a "ghetto of the mind" (in Shava,1989:45). He had to deal with his impotent anger, to extricate himself from his agonizing situation in exile, to function where he could and had to as an African humanist, an empiricist as well as an idealist (Ibid).

Obviously, Mphahlele has always been a tormented exile, and wherever he went (as his works show), he thought about the day he would go back to his country, sustaining thus, a travel-writer's saying that "*travelling [was] coming back home*" and that "*any trip [was] but a long way leading to one's*

place"[38](Fogel,1991:123). Although Mphahlele cannot be ranged among travel-writers who are neither exiles nor refugees but free travelers and writers, he shares with them the same search and the same goal which is to explore the world to better know the self.

2.8 *DOWN SECOND AVENUE*, AN "AFRIKAN" MUSIC.

"It was like this in Second Avenue", "ten to ten", "move, Black man, move", "the Tyranny of Time", "the Tyranny of Space", "the sounds begin again", are phrases and words that resound in the memory of the readers of *D S A* and other writings of Mphahlele long after their pages have been turned. They come back to the mind with insistence as a song's refrain, a song one may have liked or not, but still a song. In music, a passage would retain one's attention and sensitivity for different reasons. Because of its beauty, of its delicacy or of its originality one would like to listen to it endlessly. One could also love it because it expresses one's feelings and thoughts magnificently, sometimes unexpectedly. It could as well be captivating as it often offers a refuge and a spiritual space where to take root.

As far as Mphahlele is concerned, this musical sequence is situated in the far past of "Afrika". What he cherishes most in "Afrika his music", is the percussion sent by the ancestors through ages and which is still reverberating now. Yet, long before this sequence captured him, he had been himself composing a music that was in fact forced onto him. He did it in his autobiographies and short stories. The study of the notion of time in *D S A* has shown how the Non-Whites got used to an unbearable tempo of life in South Africa. Nothing happens that would

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[38] « Voyager, c'est rentrer à la maison. Tout voyage n'est qu'un long parcours qui ramène chez soi »

promise a change in this society. Violence, poverty and fear are omnipresent, and the only alteration that may occur lies in the variations of these three masters of the ghetto. The writer plays unmistakably on the same note to describe the atmosphere in which the Black community lives. He uses the technique of repetition to reflect best the permanent, stagnant and despairing rhythm of life they have to follow. He also insists on the everlasting moves of the people from one place to another. However, the image that is most symbolic of permanence is that of the water tap. The latter is striking as a 'barometer' of time and patience. It reveals the state of mind of the people gathering in the communal place, and the musical effect is that of a stuttering, desperate song, as the water trickles into tin containers. More people came to queue, and the click of tongues alternating with the water trickle accentuated the disgust and impatience those people felt. Mphahlele repeats that "it is like this" in Second Avenue, and he is sure it must be "like that" at every other communal tap. While waiting for his turn, he watched the water long enough and had almost the impression that Time ran out faster, but the illusion soon passed, and he continued to wait; wait as he had always done.(1971:29-30)

Maintaining the same tone throughout his book by means of repetition, Mphahlele successfully recreates the rhythm described above. The balance of the chapters in *D S A* are themselves suggestive of a rhythmical sad music. As if passing from a life in "black and white" into a more colourful one, Mphahlele describes himself in the epilogue sitting in the spacious garden of a Lagos house listening to Vivaldi's "*Four Seasons"*. This music not only initiated him to quietness and beauty but also reminded him that Time had more than one season and that life could be different. That was in Nigeria where he was to start a new episode of his life as an exile. The music he was going to compose from now on would not be the same, but it would still bear heavy echoes of the past.

Unconsciously or inevitably the feelings would dictate a reconstruction of the past, that is South Africa as he left her. Again the sounds began, again the drums beat, these sounds which tell of an immutable South Africa still haunted him, and he could not but associate them with death: " *the drums sounded like the summons of death*" he later says in *The Wanderers*(1984:245*)*. This instance sends us back to Kundera's definition of rhythm as something which reminds him of his fatal meeting with death. However, the message of the drums could move him otherwise, so profound its meaning was.

> The message of the drums, whatever it was beyond the sheer rhythm they provided for the dancers,seemed to set off a pounding in my temples, in the pit of my stomach,in the lower regions of my body.
>
> (Mphahlele, 1984:245)

In effect, a close look at Mphahlele's works would undoubtedly disclose an undeniable influence of the drums' messages on the author. Being an ancestral instrument, it certainly speaks a language of the past but also one of the present and the future because it is a percussion instrument that sends its waves across time and space; the music it produces "*can go on pulsating into the dawn and beyond*".(Mphahlele,1984:246) Better than any other instrument, the drum seems to transcribe the writer's feelings and aspirations. It is a music that absorbs him, incites him to return and make him stay. Furthermore the drum incarnates the history of Africa, its spirit and even its intellect, whence the appellation of the two influential South African magazines *Drum* and *Bongo*. Drum encouraged black writing considerably; it also figures in *D S A* as a significant chapter. Mphahlele joined it as fiction editor, sub-editor and political reporter. Most of his short stories "*Lesane"* were published in it. Later, they were revised and entitled

“*The Unbroken Song*” (1981)**,** a title which hints at the everlasting agony of South Africa.

As can be noticed, music is omnipresent in the non-white South Africans’ lives. It is a language through which they explain the sense of their life. Actually, the importance of dance and music is not exclusive to South Africa; in “*Le Monde*”, Léopold Sédar Senghor explains to his interviewer the role this art plays in Black Africa. To the question whether African dances reflect the rhythm of life, he replies that dances represent for Africans what poetry is for Greeks. Dances are their first art. Like poetry, it has its symbolic images, its melody and rhythm. Moreover, he explains that it is an art through which they communicate, citing as an example his mother’s reaction when he announced to her his success in the baccalaureate exam. She did not kiss him, nor did she utter a word. She just danced. (Senghor,1983:XI);(see notes).

The music embedded in Mphahlele’s works is tuned to the country’s frequency. However, its notes started to alter after the writer went into exile namely from 1957 onwards. His wanderings allowed him to record the diversity of the world and absorb all that his new life offered him. Unfortunately, he could not fully appreciate the latter as guilt pursued him wherever he went. Nevertheless, this feeling was not an obstacle to his quest of identity since he continued to gather and rearrange the pieces of his life out of a very complicated puzzle. As in the “blues” mood, whatever came up in terms of events, memories, thoughts, fancies, dreams….. flew into him perhaps to remind him, in a sensational way, of home. Indeed, Mphahlele found in jazz music the closest interpretation of homesickness. A music of nostalgia, it has been considered as an autobiographical chronicle expressed lyrically. Nostalgia is also synonymous of return which is the theme of the blues. Born in the U.S.A, this music of the

Blacks tells the history of an exiled people who have been suffering, waiting and crying for home. As James Baldwin wrote, it is only in his music that the Negro, in America, has been able to tell his story. It is probably the reason why Mphahlele developed a taste for jazz to the point of "*feeling it in [his] spine*"(1984:63). He seems even to have borrowed its mood to write his autobiographies especially the last one –*Afrika My Music.* In his article "*The Blues: an Afro-American Matrix for South African Writing"*, Jacobs remarks:

> Rather than trying to assess writers like Serote and Mphahlele in terms of European art forms, it may be more useful to understand their improvisations within the framework of the black jazz performance metaphor.
>
> (1989:13)

In his 'autobiographies', Mphahlele the 'composer' varies the cadence, going thus through different episodes of his life. Travelling confusingly but freely in space and time (despite their tyranny) as a musician would do in 'sol-fa', he could choose only the autobiography to undertake his quest for identity and come out with a final answer to it. Not being restrained by strict and rigorous rules (as already stated) the autobiography provided for the writer the best and easiest medium through which he related his life and set down interrogations about it. As Lejeune says, there is in autobiographical writing an idea of manifesting an absence which he interprets as follows: according to him, one does not write to tell what one already knows, but rather to approach what is not known, with the intention to explore the contradictions that constitute us and to manifest, in the construction of a complex language, the truth which is missing while it is the basis of our existence.[39](1980:175)

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[39] « On n'écrit pas pour dire ce qu'on sait, mais pour approcher au plus prés ce qu'on ne sait pas, pour explorer les contradictions qui nous constituent, manifester dans une construction de langage complexe la vérité comme manque qui nous fonde ».

It is actually through the construction of a complex style that Mphahlele explored his self and discovered harmony at last. Hence , the writer has severed the link with the near past – which he has not forgotten yet- to resume the link with the ancestral one as described previously. The past he returned to, taught him to feel "*enriched by love and impoverished by obsessive hate".* It also taught him the way to man's happiness which he later claimed to have fulfilled through Humanism. His new conviction helped him emerge from the state of anonymity in which he was drowned. Now he asked more than simply having his shadow noticed. Better, he deeply believed that the existence of a man depended on another man: "*I am because you are, you are because we are*…"(1986:10). **F**orever hanging on the musical metaphor, Mphahlele recalled that such a wisdom passed on through proverbs, aphorisms and oral poetry.

This evaluation of the South African situation in terms of music certainly contradicts the oft-alleged charges leveled against South African writing which, as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, was said to be unable to create a language that would communicate violence through art. Yet, it has been shown how Mphahlele managed to produce a kind of resonance through the music he has composed in his writings and which was inspired by the very violence mentioned above. During a symposium on South African fiction and autobiography, Peter Nazareth was the only one to observe that there did exist a music in South African literature and that it was rendered by the sounds of sirens, knuckles, boots, police whistles, vans….(in Lindfors,1985:35) Indeed, these sounds are so pervasive in Mphahlele's books that they are fixed in the reader's memory. It is in this ability to recreate -musically – a particular atmosphere that the writer's artistic potential lies. As Sartre says,

---

> Working on style is more than chiseling
> a sentence. It is the ability to permanently
> conserve in one's mind the totality of the
> scene, of the chapter, and beyond, of the
> entire book. If you have this totality, you
> have written the good sentence. If you do
> not have it, your sentence will be discor-
> dant or futile. [40] (1964:137-138)

2.9 CONCLUSION

So far, Mphahlele's autobiographies have been compared to a music that was played by him and for him. As he would have done in music, Mphahlele tasted freedom and sought his identity in writing. This form of expression allowed him to drown his anxiety, his solitude, his guilt and his homesickness. Being his companions in exile, his autobiographies helped him bridge the distance between his native country and the land of asylum. They also fused the past and the present and at the same time suggested a future to be drawn by the writer himself.

After an absence of two decades, Mphahlele seized the opportunity for self-renewal and self-creation never to abandon it. That was in 1978. Mphahlele had to wait another decade before he witnessed the abolition of Apartheid and the great event of elections. The incredible took place; the Blacks rose to power and Nelson Mandela was proclaimed president of South Africa. The images broadcast on television showed the free man dancing on the rhythm of an African

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[40] « Le travail du style ne consiste pas tant à ciseler une phrase qu'à conserver en permanence dans son esprit la totalité de la scène,du chapitre et au-delà, du livre entier. Si vous avez cette totalité, vous écrivez la bonne phrase. Si vous ne l'avez pas, votre phrase détonnera ou paraitra gratuite. »

music. A poem was read in his honour. At last black South Africans would participate in the government. They were then waiting for changes, and the biggest one had already taken place. It was a revolution which had rehabilitated if only psychologically their dignity first as human beings and secondly as Blacks. It is true that, as Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) foreshadowed, the psychological aftermaths of Apartheid were well entrenched and the cure lied far beyond restoring power to the Black majority. Yet, the abolition of the racial system was in itself a recognition even if in principle of the Blacks' dignity, and it certainly initiated a new enterprise.

The study of the undeniable link between autobiography and exile in the work of Mphahele is, to my mind, the illustration of the restriction and limitation - both psychological and artistic – of a system that banished people. Alienated in his own country, the writer tried to restore the link with it by recalling his story in different forms. It is true that the autobiography may be considered as a good example of committed literature in the sense that its author is anxious about giving the real picture of what goes on in a particular context. However, and here lies the restriction, the interpretation of the past is limited to that of the writer, the aim being, to borrow Fanon's terminology, one of discovering the skin behind the mask. With the freedom that the abolition of Apartheid provided, the writers proceeded to a past retrieval with a view of preparing a new future for a society in the making. Mphahlele's return to South Africa and his ensuing new orientation offering better prospects for the future, is a case in point.

"Uncle Zeke", as he came to be called affectionately, died on November 2008 after fulfilling his dream, for he gave more than he thought to South Africa, to African literature and to history. The tributes issued after his death testify of the immense place he filled in the hearts of whoever read his works, namely *D S A*. He was "*the walking history and a treasured library, a great writer and artist*

and even greater human being"(2008) whose message was these wise Sanskrit lines:

> For the family sacrifice the individual;
> For the community, the family;
> For the country, the community;
> For the soul, all the world.

(Tagore, in Mphahlele,1984:1)

Es'kia Mphahlele was indeed a great man and literary stature who '*grew as big as an elephant and dwarfed the rhinoceros'*[41].(2006) Did his message reach his compatriots? Bessie Head seems the first one to have absorbed each of the above lines and more powerfully the last one, for her soul was a jigsaw, the pieces of which she tried to put in their places. How much was this possible when her life was but a series of 'exiles' and disillusionments?

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[41] Expression borrowed from Sam Raditlhalo & Taban Lo Liyong ,*Es'kia May You grow as an Elephant and Dwarf the Rhinoceros*.(2006) Johannesburg:Stainback Associates.

CHAPTER THREE

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

Racial, Tribal and Gender Exiles.

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CHAPTER THREE

Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

Racial, Tribal and Gender Exiles

As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging.

(Head,1974:206)

3.1. Introduction

Alone…Bessie Head has always been referred to as a woman alone, isolated, withdrawn, in other words an exile. Some of her autobiographical writings (letters, short stories, essays and sketches..), collected posthumously, have even been compiled in a book bearing the title *A Woman Alone* (Head:1990). Quite strangely, if a letter of the alphabet was to complete the identity of Head, the 'A' would impose itself rightly. **A**frican, **a**lone, **a**part, **a**patride, **a**lien, **a**political, **a**utonomous, **a**theist and **a**postolic at the same time, these qualifiers tightly fit this woman writer and endow her with an originality that deserves to be probed.

A native of South Africa, Head could be seen as one of the first generation of non-white writers without yet 'belonging' to it, the notion of 'belonging' bearing many nuances when attempting to portray this author. Actually, she was a woman who belonged to no one and to nowhere, but who all along her life sought a 'gesture of belonging'[42]. The terrible void she felt around and within her goes back to the earliest hours of her life when she was denied existence and the claim for any filial connection, for the simple reason that she was born of a

[42] « A gesture of belonging » is the title of a collection of letters written by Head to the editor Randolph Vigne.(1991)

mixed marriage in a country where black and white relationship was considered as a sin.

Growing in a climate of hostility and violence, in a milieu she could not cope with, and with a permanent feeling of instability and loss, Head wrote her life but in a very different style and tone one would expect from a South African woman who had to fight and defend herself against multiple facets of racism: first, in South Africa where Apartheid relegated her to a 'Coloured' status, then in Botswana where she lived as a refugee and where she also had to face tribalism in its cruelest and meanest forms.

Head recounts how these two African societies which did not share the same colonial history happened to be so similar when it came to their attitudes towards women. Hence, she experienced racial, tribal and gender discrimination, for she was not white, nor was she completely black. In addition, she was a woman, a triple status which was the cause of her "weakness" and insecurity. In her autobiographical novels, the themes of racialism, tribalism, madness, exile and power are persistent and sometimes very disturbing especially in *A Q P.* A very complex piece of literature, the most autobiographical of her works, the latter can be regarded as a spiritual arena where all forces and representations of power, both evil and good, contend. Attractive and provocative, the title of the book invites the reader to question power with the preconceived –though justified- idea that in South Africa, power is primarily symbolized by the Whites. Thus, the reader who is familiar with non-white South African literature will most probably expect Head to give a version of oppression echoing that of so many other non-white South Africans who shared the same sad, harsh experiences of life and exile and who spoke in the name of a whole community as stated in the previous chapters. Nevertheless, Head's auto fiction surprisingly offers new interpretations of power, depicts a new setting, and creates a rather singular

atmosphere that distinguishes her work from her contemporaries' and even from later writers' in South Africa. So, for more than one reason, Head awakes one's curiosity as to the reasons for her uniqueness. Moreover, it is interesting to discover through the eyes of a woman, both a South Africa told by a woman and, beyond the boundaries she crossed, an Africa –Botswana- that adopted her only after she died.

3.2. HOW CAN I BE WHEN I AM NOT?

In a desperate attempt to know and recognize herself, in her everlasting quest of identity, Head must have frequently asked the above question. Any moment of the day she tried to think of her origins, she could not go far in time. She never could really 'remember', dig in her memory and search, as Mphahlele did for example. She neither 'gathered' nor 'recollected', nostalgically nor otherwise, spans of her life that she would reconstruct, re-arrange, re-visit, question, as autobiographers generally do. Head's life was shattered in pieces so difficult to join that the puzzle remained a puzzle not only for her but also for a number of friends, biographers and critics who undertook the hard and delicate task to unveil her personality and life to readers keen to know more about her. It was not amnesia, nor was it a refusal to embrace the past again that prevented Head to do it, for she did return to her childhood only to find a story restricted to what was reported to her; a brief story which left heavy stigma on her, a burden she bore for a long time.

In her '*Notes From a Quiet Backwater* I', she introduces herself as a person who had not " *a single relative on earth*", who had "*no long and ancient family tree to refer to*", and "*no links with heredity or a sense of having inherited a temperament, a certain emotional instability or the shape of a fingernail from a grandmother or great-grandmother."* (Head,1990:3).

> I have always been just me, with no frame
> of reference to anything beyond myself. (Ibid)

Head reveals herself as a person utterly alone, deprived of any blood link, of any reference or identity, uprooted, the tree being a symbol of roots, not because she chose it, nor because it was her temperament but because the circumstances – destiny?- wanted it that way. She was born on July 6, 1937, in the Pietermaritzburg mental hospital, and the reason for her peculiar birthplace was that her mother was white and her father black (Head,1990:3). Much more than a short account of who she is, the passage introducing her is a testimony of the self and of all that severed this self from others, inhumanely producing her as 'the Other'. From the very moment she was born, she had no right to 'be', another case of alienation sustained by the Apartheid system.

Among the many reasons for which non-white South Africans, namely Coloureds, cannot 'be', there are laws and acts that prohibit what is nowadays called 'mixed', 'interracial', 'interethnic' or 'cross-cultural' marriage. These terms have recently replaced the offensive concept of 'miscegenation'[43] which was used for a long time and which referred to the mixing of 'kind' or 'type' of people. With its negative connotations, this concept provoked the reaction of some coloured writers like La Guma who showed his opposition and uneasiness at not only being categorized by Whites as Coloured, but also at being labeled by some coloured leaders (for some political reasons) as 'so-called coloured'. As an Apartheid category, the label 'coloured' already raised a debate as to who were so designated. The appendage "so-called" was therefore not welcomed by La Guma who stated that this qualifier made him "*feel like a so-called human, a humanoid, these things who have all the characteristics of human beings but are*

[43] One of the primary characteristics of Apartheid was the prohibition of sexual contact between Black and White, known as miscegenation.

really artificial. Other minority people are not called so-called."(in Nixon,1993:109). It is in fact this feeling of looking like something without exactly filling the criteria of resemblance, this not-really-white and not-really-black position, this in-between situation which was at the heart of the tragedy of Head.

The theme of miscegenation as seen by a number of South African writers is a biological, family and national tragedy. However, in spite of its significance, it has not really held the place it requires in South African writings. Only four writers have been recognized as using it as the central theme in their novels: Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren*, published in 1924, Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* published in 1954, André Brink's *Looking on Darkness* (1974) and Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds*, published in 1987. As noticed, they were published ten, twenty and thirty years apart. The question that could be asked then is: why have South African writers overlooked or ignored this issue in spite of its gravity? One wonders why this theme was not dealt with in a country where such a problem was so obvious and so real. The hypothesis of priority could be advanced, as the main concerns were first to depict South Africans' daily life; that is to say, poverty, violence, injustice due to discrimination. Silence on this theme may also be due to the fact that it was taboo for both Blacks and Whites, knowing that generally such relations were those of rapist to raped, which, for both criminal and victim, is difficult to confess. In the case of Head for example, the problem was different, for the relation between her mother and the stable boy was one of consent, a double crime in the eyes of her mother's family.

The laws implemented to proscribe mixed marriages had disastrous psychological effects on the Coloureds because of discrimination but also because of the sense of immorality they entailed. In 1949, the Prohibition of

Mixed Marriages Act, outlawed marriages between people of different races. It was followed by the Immorality Act (1950) which forbade sexual relations between Whites and Non-Whites, inferring that any infant conceived of this relation would be deemed 'illegal'. Even more tragic for the victims of this union was the latter's interpretation by the authorities as crime and betrayal to the white race. In *A Q P*, Elizabeth, the main character of the story, just like Head, suffers from an illegitimate birth, a trouble she is to face all the time. As Hershini Bhana explains in her article, "*Reading Ghostly Desire: Writing the Edges Of Bessie Head's A Question of Power", "Elizabeth's (white) mother has betrayed the metonymic signifier of the nation-state, the raced biological family, with sexual acts that were illegal in South Africa*". As a result, "*… Elizabeth's existence is impossible both in terms of her parents coupling and in terms of her being born at all.*"(2004:40). Elizabeth is therefore another example of alienation, an exile, in a South Africa that allows only Whites with shades of white.

In addition to the sense of betrayal generated by such a relation, is the sense of madness inculcated to her, for she was constantly reminded that she was born in a mental asylum where her mother was locked because of her 'insanity' or dementia, and that the latter were hereditary:

> You must be very careful. Your mother was
> insane.If you're not careful you'll get insane
> just like your mother.
>
> (Head, 1974:16)

In fact, Head's mother, Bessie Amelia Emery, who came from an upper-class white South African family, was admitted to the Pietermaritzburg mental asylum when she was discovered to be pregnant by their stable boy. Six years after giving birth to Head in the asylum, she committed suicide. Head never met her mother nor her father. She never knew what 'a family' meant as she experienced

displacement and instability at a very early age. In *A Q P,* she reports the situation as it was told to her by her foster-mother:

> First they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nursing-home. A day later you were returned because you did not look white. They sent you to a Boer family. A week later you were returned. The women on the committee said: "what can we do with this child? Its mother is white.
>
> (Head,1974:17)

Rejected because she appeared to be black, was the crime she had to pay for, even among children at school. Elizabeth returns to those days, perhaps the only memories of her childhood, when she was forced into isolation, locked by the principal just because she had defended herself against other children who could scratch and bite each other without being punished while she represented a threat because of her 'probable insanity'. She was sporadically "*isolated from the other children*" (Head,1974:16) for a week or less, hence, experimenting seclusion and isolation in the very place where she received education. She learnt a lot from the books she read, books that taught her western thoughts, ideas and ideals, books that sublimated religion, others that advocated equality, but none of these really offered an answer to the following question: why, in South Africa, the Whites "*were just born that way, hating people, and a black man or woman was just born to be hated*" (Head,1990:xi) Nor could she understand why in this same country the Blacks were not human beings with their own personalities or individualities, but as she said, "*they were races, not people.*"(1974:44).

Ensuing the idea of race, Head refers to a group of people who lived in Cape Town, an area reserved for Coloureds, and who were homosexuals. She tries to give us an explanation for the reason why this 'community' proliferated in this

particular place. What could be interpreted as a complex of inferiority is clearly stated by an African man whom she met and who elucidated the question. According to him, men could not recognize themselves as men when they were always considered as boys. "*How can a man be a man when he is called boy? I can barely retain my manhood. I was walking the other day with my girl, and the Boer policeman said to me: 'Hey, boy, where's your pass?' Am I a man to my girl or a boy? Another man addresses me as boy. How do you think I feel?*"(1974:45).

In *A Q P*, these men who wore women's dresses and who were "*accepted as a disease one had to live with*"(1974:45) haunted her. Their image was obsessing; they visited her at night with Medusa, an evil character in the story, who constantly reminded her that she belonged to them, the Coloureds, that she was not a pure black African and that she " *[would] drown here.*" (1974:44). 'Here' is not South Africa but Botswana, the country where she decided to take refuge.

3.3 THE RAINBOW IS NOT SOLELY AFRICAN

Unlike the majority of non-white South Africans, Head chose a bordering country as a land of exile. She preferred to remain in Africa because as she said: " *In my eyes Botswana is the most unique and distinguished country in the whole of Africa.*" (1990:12). She explains her choice as an intellectual (not emotional) decision, since this country had never been colonized and therefore kept "*a bit of ancient Africa*" (Ibid) that made it her home from 1964.

She perhaps thought her exile would be less painful in a neighbouring country; she would not be far from South Africa; she would remain in the same continent, Africa… But again what a strange attitude for a woman who did not express her 'Africaness', nor viewed Africa as Mphahlele did for example, and if she ever

did, rarely showed it in her major autobiographical novels. One seldom meets scenes like the "communal fire-place" where Africans meet, discuss warmly, or recount stories, in spite of a hellish surrounding. African Humanism, traditions, beliefs, so often highlighted in her contemporaries' writings are almost absent in Head's foremost books (except "*The Collector of Treasures*"(1977)). The attachment to whatever sounds or looks Afrikan (with a K), the return to the sources as a necessity for survival, the origins, all the moral values essential for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the African personality do not really seem to be Head's preoccupations. Achebe's "fundamental theme"[44] for instance, stands hundreds of miles from her conception of the 'African'. Even the immediate brutal, dehumanizing world in which she lived and as it was depicted and denounced in South Africa is not rendered in her novels the way it is done by other writers. We are so far from La Guma's *A W N* , or Mphahlele's *D S A*, or even Rive's *Emergency,* not only in terms of style but also in terms of themes (although racialism always remains the pivot around which other themes and reflections gravitate). For example, while La Guma's *A W N* plunges the reader in an urban area, deep in the ghetto, in the slum's life, with its strong smells and sounds, with its dirt, its violence, in for instance *District Six* [45] where Head herself lived for a while, Head's novels lead to rural areas and villages, where life, though harsh, is so quiet. The 'state of emergency', the particularly brutal atmosphere so well-known to South Africa does not come into view in her novels. There are no police raids, no curfew tension, no whistles, no sirens, no boots' beat. These movements and sounds which are forcefully integrated in the South African setting are absent. As for characters, namely the Whites, they are

[44] « This theme – put quite simply – is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity." (Achebe,1973:8)

[45] *District Six* is a famous Coloured ghetto in Cape Town and has often been the setting of many South African novels.

never described (neither physically nor mentally) as bad, nor antipathetic, nor antagonistic while in La Guma's *A W N*, "*they had hard, frozen faces as if carved out of pink ice, and hard dispassionate eyes, hard and bright as pieces of blue glass*" (1967:11). This description of the white policemen sets a climate of hostility and fear as well as a feeling of diffidence in front of 'the law', for as La Guma says further, " *it was only the very brave or the very stupid, who dared look straight into the law's eyes, to challenge them or to question their authority*." (1967:11). Such a South African unbearable and revolting atmosphere is therefore not visible in Head's works, so invisible in fact, that one may almost suspect a sort of disengagement from a cause powerfully defended by non-white writers.

Revealing this aspect of Head's narratives is by no means an intent to misjudge or criticize a writer who experienced racialism in its cruelest forms, amongst which madness. The aim behind is rather to present a woman who had the courage of her convictions and who dared defy an established 'order' be it white or black. Head's 'lack of commitment', if one may say so, can be explained by her apolitical position, which she proclaimed after being, as she said, disillusioned with politics and politicians. What should be known, however, is that she was an African nationalist and a supporter of the PAC led by the famous Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe whom she considered as a hero and in whom she believed. In one of her letters, she confided that he was the only man she loved and trusted, and that "*the light went out for [her] when he died.*" (1991:220). Head also worked as a journalist for *Golden City Post*, and soon became part of a large circle of political activists and writers. She was known for being once a "*fire-eating Africanist*", who raged at whoever offended her views, as is reported in Vigne's *A Gesture of Belonging* (1991:1). She also had significantly contributed to the seminal periodical, *The New African*. The latter gathered other famous South African writers like Matshikisa, Themba, Mphahlele, Nkosi, all of

whom formed the “Drum School” and wrote in about the same “ *wordly-wise, often sensationalist journalistic style, accompanied by an overtly political content*”,(MacKenzie in Head,1990:xiv). Once again, Head who worked with them marked her difference not only in style but also in her apolitical approach. Nevertheless, if she happened to follow the move in the very beginning, she later regretted it and explained that “*the South African environment completely defeated her as a writer.*” (1990:xv).

The following poem, which is the only one she wrote, reveals a radical change from all that she produced later:

I am Black
Okay?
Hot sun and the geographical set-up
Made me Black;
And through my skin
A lot of things happen to me
THAT I DON’T LIKE
And I wake each morning
Red murder in my eyes
’Cause some crook’s robbed me again,
Taken what little I had right out of my hands
With the whole world standing by
And doing nothing…
Okay?

“*Things I don’t Like”* (1962:10)

The fury expressed in this poem, the reproach made to the world, and the “I am Black” identity she shows off and reclaims, does not occur with such a vigor and threatening tone, in her later works. She seems to have lost faith in any political commitment after most of her colleagues were dispersed and exiled. In fact, 1961-62-63 were very hard times in South Africa. The Sharpeville Massacre followed by a state of emergency, police repression, harassment and arrests,

forced political action into underground, armed resistance but the majority of activists were jailed while the others fled. Shattered and demobilized, their actions weakened and the situation became quite desperate especially for writers like Head who had also planned to leave South Africa. She was finally allowed to depart with a 'one-way exit' permit condemning her never to return to her country.

So, to come back to Head's disappointment with politics, it should be referred to the justifications she put forth in her novels W*hen Rain* C*louds Gather* (1968), and *Maru* (1971) for instance. Criticizing the dishonest practices of authorities and tribal chiefs in Botswana, she evoked with bitterness certain South African political parties which considered themselves as the vanguard of African nationalism while they turned to disappoint the people who trusted them. According to Head, " *to many, Pan-Africanism was almost a sacred dream, but like all dreams it also has its nightmare side.....If they have any power at all it is the power to plunge the African continent into an era of chaos and bloody murder.*"(1972:47). More vehemently, she accused these same politicians of treachery and hypocrisy. In *A Q P*, an interesting discussion between Elizabeth and Tom, a white American, illustrates her contempt with so-called African nationalists who "*sweep the crowd away by weeping and wailing about the past*" then "*steal and cheat people once they get into government*" (1974:133). She came to hate "*labels like Black Power or any other rubbish of that kind*"(Ibid) because her main interest lied in a greater and larger foundation which was universal. Head's cause transcended the continent, the race, the tribe: it is not an African Humanism that she displayed, but simply Humanism that she believed in and claimed: "*I've got my concentration elsewhere'*, Elizabeth says, "*It's on mankind in general, and black people fit in there not as special freaks and oddities outside the scheme of things…*"(Ibid).

Is it because she was not totally Black that Head had the ability to think beyond colour, or is it a certain 'maturity' attained in spite and because of oppression? Is it an excess of goodness very few people living in desolation would understand and accept? Ignoring these questions, would mean hiding very important features of Head's personality which she herself disclosed not only in her autobiographical works but also in the numerous letters she wrote to her friends. Besides, the latter were published after her death and can nowadays be consulted as a testimony and complement of her life-story. Ironically, while she lived her hybridism most often as a handicap, she found in it the key to intellectually penetrate both worlds. She could measure, weigh and analyze in a more objective way the madness, the meanness but also the grandeur of mankind which she always asserted to be her identity. In *A Q P* she announces it through a significant statement made by Sello, a protagonist representing the good side of human soul. The book opens with the following description of this character, the first line astonishingly appealing the reader:

> It seemed almost incidental that he was African. So vast had his inner perceptions grown over the years that he preferred an identification with Mankind to an identification with a particular environment. And yet as an African, he seemed to have made one of the most perfect statements: "I am just anyone".
>
> (Head, 1974:11)

As pointed out earlier, Head seems to have acquired through years a certain ripeness that allowed her to surpass her immediate problems without yet suppressing them. She seized the world differently, with a new vision which outdistanced her from politics and which told her how more wonderful the colours of the rainbow were than the white versus black dye. For she no longer

trusted any kind of commitment except that to Mankind with all its shades and hues.

3.4 AN OUT-AND-OUT OUTSIDER

'To be just anyone' could be a euphemism for 'to be every one', just as 'to be every one' could be an antonym of 'the Other'. In other words, otherness is excluded from the very moment one identifies oneself as 'everyone', which leads us to the interpretation of Head's statement as a very subtle way to refuse to be regarded as the other? Is it not the gesture of belonging she always sought and found in what she called Mankind? How else would it be ever possible to disenfranchise, free herself from this 'given' name, this title, or this label which is the 'Other' and which she bore wherever she was? For wherever she went, she was an exile. In her own country, South Africa, in her ghetto, *District Six*, in her place of work and manifestly abroad. She was the misfit, the "out-and- out outsider"(Head,1974:26), and how much difficult it was for her to integrate all these worlds when she could not be understood. Elias Khoury, a Palestinian writer and journalist, witnessed it as a refugee. In an interview to *El Pais*, he said about the 'Other': " *You cannot integrate him/her in your history if you do not understand him*".(2009) Head was not and could not be understood for all the reasons Femi-Ojo gives in his article "*Madness in Africa*", which he sums up as a "non-identity",

> The victim of racism and apartheid is, of course,the black man or woman. It is Bessie Head's Elizabeth in *AQP,* a "masarwa", a half- breed exiled from South Africa into Botswana, a stranger in her homeland, and still a stranger in the place she would like to call a new home. A low breed. A bastard. Daughter of a mad woman. Her non-identity, statelessness, chronic loneliness, and life on the verge of her terrestrial hell, added to her inherited

> mental anguish, all make her a logical guest of the madhouse. She remains a victim to the end.
>
> (1979:135)

So how could she be understood? How hard was the fight against her exiles, both physical and psychological, and how much have they affected her? The answer is to be found in *A Q P* which recounts her story in a very curious and particular manner.

Using the third person singular, Head introduces the protagonist Sello whose statement *" I am just anyone*" reflects her own thought and point of view. This is furthermore confirmed when she announces, just after introducing him that "*a woman paralleled his inner development*" and that "*most of what applied to Sello applied to her because they were twin souls.* "(1974:11). The woman's name is Elizabeth, the principal character (heroine) through whom Head is recognized. Head's text, in fact, is a sort of 'confessions', but not the ones we know or are used to: she confesses in her own way, relating, not through an 'I' narrator but through a character, Elizabeth, her fragmented life. Elizabeth speaks for her (Head) and about her. She does not 'completely' sign Lejeune's "autobiographical pact", but rather what is termed an "oxymoronic pact" that associates two opposed types of narrations. It is a narrative founded on the principle of the three identities (the author is also the narrator as well as the main character) as in the autobiography, but it claims its fictional quality in its narrative techniques, title etc… In other words, *A Q P* establishes a 'pact of truth' through a fictional text, whence its terming auto fiction or faction. As stated earlier, *A Q P* is an auto fiction or a "personal novel" that answers the description and criteria proposed by Doubrovsky. Being an 'adventurous' type of writing (Doubrovsky's definition of auto fiction), it also raises the very interesting question of who narrates the story. It has often been asked whether the

'I' narrator was compulsory or necessary for a personal writing to be called 'autobiography', and whether it was not possible to write an autobiography using the second or third point of view. Indeed, *A Q P* is an 'autobiography' told with a 'she' narrator which sometimes dissolves in or fuses with an 'I' narrator, which confirms the identity of the author as well as the genre i.e. autobiographical . The choice of the third person narrator is explained by Hubier as the author's will to create a distance between the subject and the object of narration so as to know himself or his self better, recalling Rousseau's famous saying that one is well portrayed only when portrayed by oneself, however unalike the portrait is (Hubier,2003:47). There are many reasons for which some authors choose to recount their own stories borrowing other voices than theirs'. The possibilities are open for exploitation and are very tempting indeed. *Je est un autre* is Lejeune's other book dealing with autobiography. The title itself suggests that the equation author =narrator=character is not forcibly canonical. Who or what would prevent an author from calling him/herself 'you' or 'he' or 'she'? Concerning this question, Genette also gives his own interpretation of autobiography, admitting that the relations between narrator and author, and the question of voice are always "*thorny topics*" (1993:69). Taking into account Lejeune's convincing demonstration of the form of autobiography i.e. author=character=narrator, he goes further in the examination of these relations explaining that the dissociation between narrator and character (N#C) defines the *heterodiegetic* narrative regime (in fiction and elsewhere); as for their identification (N=C), it defines the *homodiegetic* regime. On the other hand, the dissociation between author and character (A#C) defines the regime of *allobiography* and their identification (A=C) that of autobiography. The remaining combinations that are the relations between author and narrator (A=N) reveal an equation which Genette considers as a factual narrative whereby "*the author assumes full responsibility for the assertions of his narrative*" (1993:70), and a dissociation (A#N) defining fiction as "*a type of narrative whose veracity*

is not seriously assumed by the author." (Ibid). The formulas proposed by Genette, though attractive, are sometimes confusing especially when one tries to adapt them to the work under scrutiny, for if they clarify a part of it, the other still remains hazy. It is not surprising then that the polyphonic utterance should be seen as "parasitical" (Austin in Genette,1993:75). However, these multiple combinations that are quite similar to a 'master-mind' game reveal, in the context of autobiography, either an ability of the writer to remain somewhat discreet or enigmatic, or, on the contrary, the impossibility for him to respect the pact of truth and authenticity which the autobiography requires. The statement "*It is I and it is not I* " (Genette, 1993:77) which invites the reader to believe or not, *who is who* is therefore welcomed in Head's *A Q P* where the equation and dissociation of author, narrator and character prove to be much more serious than a game.

Elizabeth then who is the main character but who is also recognized as the author-narrator of the story, draws her image in various ways namely through the acceptance or negation of the other characters (ghosts) with whom she interacts in dream and reality. For example, the relationship between Elizabeth and Sello is so close that Elizabeth always turns to the latter to find out who she is when she feels lost or when the world becomes a nightmare for her. Sello symbolizes, as already stated, the wise man and the spiritual guide who has turned his back to evil after a long experience. He is represented all at once as a monk, a prophet, a God, anyone, and most often as a ghost whom she meets each day in her room, sitting on a chair and waiting for her. He is the one who gives her advice, who informs and teaches her the philosophy of life –and death, but Sello is also her "*because they were twin souls*" (Head,1974:11).In the first page of the book, Head announces it faintly informing the reader that "*most of what applied to Sello, applied to her*." (Ibid). Sello is also the man who gives her the best definition of love, the one she longed to hear and that she considers as a

perfect statement: Love is freedom of heart…(1974:11). She lived with the illusion of loving someone and might have died with that illusion if Sello had not told her that "*Love [was] two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other like a "ghoul".*"(1974:13).

With an extreme humility and a loud appeal to love, Head opens her auto fiction. However, the smoothness of the first pages turn to be a complex story which the reader 'follows' without being entirely sure to understand everything. The main reason is the difficulty to enter a totally irrational world peopled with ghosts, with symbolic representations very often unfamiliar to readers, especially Africans, as they are heavily based on Greek mythology and Buddhism; besides, it would not be inconvenient , I think, to pause here and question Head's choice of Greek mythology as a means to express her inner thoughts and emotions instead of the African one. The hypothesis that could be advanced is that the author felt more at ease inviting what is assumed to be a universal heritage, a civilization that anyone can be imbued with, herself claiming universality as an identity as stated earlier. In fact, she is not the first African writer to use Greek mythology in her writings. Chinweizu, a virulent African critic, pointed to the effect and affect of African texts 'infected' by such borrowings. He spoke of African writers' "*addiction to archaisms*" and tendency to be "*craggy, lumpy, full of obstructions, unnecessarily and artificially difficult*"(1980:166). Addressing mainly poets, he stated: "*a poem cannot just **be**, it must also **mean***"(Ibid) explaining that poetry was not a puzzle. Chinweizu reproached to these poets to make their writings even more difficult by importing imagery and attitudes from alien environments. The result was that they became senseless, awkward and superfluous. Mentioning the Nigerian poet Clark who spoke of Io (Greek mythology) in "*Cry of Birth*" and of Joan of Arc (medieval France) in "*Olumo*", he deplored the fact that the latter did not look for a reference in his own culture: "*Can't he find an outcast or a woman of stubborn heart in*

indigenous African mythology or history?" (1980:168) Not content with 'attacking' many poets whose literature has not yet been decolonized, he reprimanded Soyinka for example, for not cursing in his own language. He could not conceive an African cursing in a language that was "*a blend of Shakespeare and the Victorian English poets*." In '*Malediction*', Soyinka cursed, but Chinweizu observed:

> He does not curse the way his forefathers cursed, nor the way his contemporaries curse –for it is important to remember that African orature is at once traditional and contemporary………. All that the poet has to do is open his ears, and listen to his contemporaries who have not lost touch with tradition, and write the way they speak. (1980:170)

Although one may agree with Chinweizu and even smile when he gives examples of how to curse in traditional style ("*May you go mad at the height of your prosperity*"), one cannot accept all his critiques especially when these, as I see them, are 'colonizing' the mind while striving to decolonize it. Seemingly, Chinweizu is not aware that his assaults, being an expression of violence, can prove more damaging than edifying. Arguing as he does against "Euro-centered African" writers, sounds like accusing them of being traitors while they should be acknowledged for their commitment and nationalism as well as for their great achievements in literature. His allegations, even if true and substantial, may not serve his objectives because of their imposition on the reader and also because they read often as insults. Chinweizu seems to demand us to write and read as he wants and as he thinks is right, which sounds rather dictatorial. In any case, the point is not to judge Chinweizu, but his criticism could not be overlooked since it is relevant to the analysis we are trying to make of Head's complex writing. Here again, he strikes a sensitive chord which is audience and the responsibility a writer has towards it. According to him, " *the African writer and critic should*

understand that what makes a good work of art is in large measure defined by the central expectations and concerns of a given culture. They should therefore work from the standpoint of the African community, not the Euro-American, not that of some abstract Civilization de l'Universel"(1980:242) Ousting *l'Universel,* Chinweizu awkwardly puts his finger on Head's essential vision and concern. Obviously, these two Africans do not share the same 'language' nor the same perspectives and even less the same 'sense of duty' as writers.

Greek mythology is not the only obstacle the reader encounters in *A Q P*. The story also conveys a stressing atmosphere where psychological violence is extreme. Moreover, one may be very embarrassed not to say aggressed by repelling, obscene scenes through which the writer herself expresses pain and disgust. Thus, the author drives the reader into her world ignoring the latter's pre-disposition to comprehend or even grasp the meaning and message of her story. Widdowson comments on such an attitude by distinguishing a literary discourse from an ordinary, social one , stating that , "…*a piece of literary discourse is in suspense from the usual process of social interaction whereby senders address messages directly to receivers*" while "…..*the literary message requires no response*".(in Leech & Short,1981:261) In other words, Head may have addressed an audience without really calling for a response, which is conceivable if one bears in mind that *A Q P* is first of all an 'autobiography', therefore a re-writing of the self, questioning first the self, analyzing it, discovering it, re-constructing it, in which case the audience would to some extent be secondary.

Actually, Head met big obstacles with the publication of *A Q P* . She was to quarrel with more than one publisher who rejected the book which they sometimes found shocking and other times shameful. Even Giles Gordon who had published both *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* "*rejected it with a very stupid letter, jumping about the hedge on my misuse of the English language*",

(2008:222) Head reports. The book had antagonized many before it was at last judged exceptional by the novelist Richard Lister who, in a letter to James Currey(editor), encouraged Head enormously:

> I think it is a wonderful book. I feel very strongly opposed to the idea that the author should be asked to do any re-writing…It is a considerable achievement,a prolonged spiritual crisis seen from the inside and powerfully described.
>
> (Ibid;.p.224)

In another letter to Head, he said: '*it is an unfamiliar world, and one has to feel one's way through it with an open apprehension rather than reasoning*." (Ibid). In fact, Richard Lister sums up the situation and sort of guides the reader and shows him/her how to read or *apprehend A Q P.*

Presently, it was referred to the writer's 'intention' whether or not to reach an audience, as well as to the latter's response or reaction. The fact mentioned was that the reader was faced with an unfamiliar world, as Lister confirmed, and that the author did not seem to bother about what most readers and publishers considered somewhat as a handicap. Head was not likely to change anything in her work and she made it clear to the publishers who had shown hesitation as to its publication. Concerning this attitude, Leech offers a very interesting explanation in his discourse analysis. According to him, " *the author can assume knowledge which any particular reader might not necessarily have*", concluding that the addressee in literary communication is not the reader but what Booth calls the 'mock reader' or the 'implied reader' i.e. " *A hypothetical personage who shares with the author not just background knowledge but also a set of presuppositions, sympathies and standards of what is pleasant and unpleasant good and bad, right and wrong.*" (1981: 259-260). Hence, a contract between

the writer and the reader is established which supposes that the latter feigns to believe what is recounted to him and that the former forgets that all he writes is invented and therefore looks like a real document, a lived experience or a biography.(Robbe-Grillet,1961:29-30);(see notes).

However, with the best will to become the hypothetical personages Leech and Robbe-Grillet refer to, most of the readers - or as suggested 'implied readers'- of *A Q P* admitted that the understanding of this auto fiction was not easy even if it transported them in a worthy adventure, even if they sometimes responded to it sensitively and even if Head's appeal could be discerned. One of them, James Currey, who helped her getting her manuscript published, wrote to her the following impressions he had while reading *A Q P*:

> *A Question of Power* numbs me. I go back and back to it … It is big.You know the lot on us and I really can feel, feel, feel though I cannot always understand. I know that you have laid the inside of your head on the paper and I think perhaps we are all asking you to do the impossible….The book will never be easy.But it has to be slightly more accessible. It is a public exposure of a very private thing. Having got so far with your public exposure can you go a little further? Can you go back to it? Can you stand outside it?...
>
> (2008:222-223)

How could it be possible for her to stand outside it when she was writing 'herself'? How could her autobiographical text take effect – even if it were not really her aim- if she had to reconsider her emotions and feelings, correct her thoughts and ideas? It would be asking her to lie to herself and to the others, an art in which she did not excel. Although Head did not sign Lejeune's autobiographical contract, there is a sincerity in *A Q P* that may not be found in declared autobiographies. She, for instance, did not write her autobiography

probably because she had written a lot about herself in her fictional works (or auto fictions). Actually, she thought that it would not be attention-grabbing to just transcribe her life, for she considered herself as a quite ordinary person, a belief she reiterated on each occasion: "*I fear any biographer would be bored to tears with my own life story……I look back on myself as a personality, plain and ordinary, without any glamour or mystery*" (1990:5). Head's humility and honesty make of her a still more attractive personality and no one would agree with her on its plainness or ordinariness and even less on its mysteriousness, for it must be acknowledged that 'mystery' with its numerous connotations constitutes a very important aspect of her individuality and of the history of her life.

An aspect of this mystery is met in *A Q P* where Elizabeth appears as an overpowered, overwhelmed victim who tries hard to get out of hell. Head blurs the frontiers between fiction and reality, dream and consciousness, through constant shifts from one world to the other, increasing thus the reader's perplexity as to the meaning or *coherence* of the story. Aware of the impenetrability of her book, she writes on its first pages the following words as if to prepare the readers to embark in her odyssey without assuring them yet of its outcome:

> It gave her a strange feeling of things being there right inside and yet projected at the same time at a distance away from her. She was not sure if she were awake or asleep, and often after that the dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality was to become confused.
>
> (Head,1974:22)

While it is known that Head wrote *A Q P* while she was suffering from a mental disorder, some literary critics would explain this writing as a way of seeking and

fictionally constructing identity through memory, which opens anew the debate on the blending of genres. Kundera, for instance, refuses to distinguish genres. According to him, a book can contain "*multiple and diffuse generic categories: anecdote, autobiographical narrative, critical essay on a feminist book, a fable on angels and devils, historical narrative..*"(in Berlatsky,1991 :119-120). He also asserts that characters in a novel are "*experimental selves*" (Ibid) for the author , just like Elizabeth and Sello in *A Q P* and that the author may as well be both author and reader of one's own life. On the other hand, defining memory's intersection with imagination in the famous American architect-writer, Louis Sullivan's *The Autobiography*, Stone offers an explanation likely to clarify Head's position and purpose in *A Q P*. He sees in the fusion of fact and fantasy ,

> …a deliberately constructed "dream" whose psychic meanings, as in all dreams, are symbolically manifested in event, image and metaphor. These metaphors of self, which identify the dreamer arise naturally from a remembered past but are conjoined in patterns created by psychic pressures within the sick and aged author.
>
> (1982:104)

If the word coherence has been used above, it is meant to recall its antonym, in other words, to discuss the incoherence, inconsistency, confusion in *A Q P*, or what others called more readily dementia or madness – and why not mystery- and which will be termed here exile, or psychological exile. Indeed, Head's auto fiction reads like a dream –or nightmare- with no way out. It is overloaded with symbols which the reader is not always apt to interpret as mentioned earlier. At times, one feels Elizabeth cannot wake up from this dream, that she sinks deep in a sea of turmoil, and that she touches the abyss without ever emerging to the surface.

> There was a pressure turned on her, so powerful Elizabeth collapsed flat on her back. She just lay there nearly choked to

> death. It was like a wild, insistent chant in her ears: ‘Die, die, die’. But a current was turned on, choking her. ……She fell into a deep, exhausted sleep, only to awaken the following morning to a greater terror still. Someone had turned on a record inside her head…..’Dog, Filth, the Africans will eat you to death.
>
> (Head, 1974:45)

The tension expressed in the above passage accompanied with a feeling of impotence pervade the whole novel. It is a question of power – the others’- or lack of power –hers- that is echoed all along the story. Who have the power and how do *they* use it? In the example just given, the writer introduces a serious problem which is the cause of the pressure she undergoes as a hybrid or a mulatto. In most of her works, she raises the question of racial discrimination against ethnic minorities, like the Basarwa (see glossary) in Botswana. *Maru,* for instance, is an excellent illustration of this type of discrimination which recalls, ironically, some details of the Apartheid system. She identifies with this minority because she is coloured and is unmistakably reminded of her lack of ‘purity’ in Botswana. She could understand that in South Africa there was no escape from a rigid classification of races, but she could not admit it in Botswana. Another demonstration of power through discrimination was then displayed in this country whose people were categorized just as in South Africa. Elizabeth thought that “*someone just asserted something and directed it at a victim, regardless of whether it made sense or not: ‘You are inferior. You are filth’. Their power of assertion was so tremendous the whole flow and interchange of life stopped before it.*”(1974:47) She recalls a story recounted by her friend about a Boer who had kicked a Black. The latter, instead of reacting, just laughed and said “ *ha ha baas*” simply because he was made to believe he was inferior. The Whites’ notions of superiority are trusted as foundations for both ideologies and policies developed by the occident, Said explains. “ *The hold these instruments have on the mind is increased by the institutions built around them*”, and this is how and

why, when the occident writes about "the other" they do it with the "*unquestioning certainty of absolute truth backed by absolute force*."(Said in Sered,(1996,http:www.english.emory.edu/bahri/orientalism.html). So when absolute force says the Blacks are inferior, the latter can only believe they are inferior. The analogy made between the Afrikaner in South Africa and the African in Botswana is significant for it implies that discrimination is as violent when it comes from Whites than when it comes from Blacks. Here again, Head points to the detainers of power, whether Whites or Blacks, and how much destructive they can be when they hold it.

As may be noticed, Head undergoes a variety of pressures, internal and external, which she cumulates and which she tries each time to tell about in her work either through open statements, reflections or dreams. They all build up to a climax which justifies her later nervous collapse. One of the pressures that will be insisted on is tribalism; how she lived it, how she resisted to it, how she fought against it. In her writings for example, the White/Black dichotomy which prevails in non-white and even white South African fiction, shifts to a black-on-black discrimination. Thus, while the author introduces an important theme which is tribalism and which she considers as the major defect in a society, one which chokes its members and hampers progress, she also unveils a repressed part of her identity and recounts her triple exile. In a letter from Serowe, she describes a tribal society as follows:

> It's very repressed. It hasn't a flexibleness to allow for a flow of ideas, activity. People on the whole are quite, quite flat and only here and there you'll get a spark. Thought is *en masse* and you struggle to pick out SOMETHING in the blur.
>
> (in Vigne,1991:27)

It is in this very confined, stagnating atmosphere that Head had to live for many years. When she arrived to Botswana, she had the status of a refugee and remained with it for a very long time. She was refused citizenship and had to report at the police camp for thirteen years before she was at last accepted as a Botswana citizen. Head had answered an appeal for teachers in the hope to find in Botswana the freedom she did not have in South Africa. Unfortunately, she was not welcomed in this country which she had chosen among others and even less in the remote village where she settled. Motabeng, in *A Q P*, is " *a great big village of mud huts*" , an arid village where rain dried before even reaching the ground as Head says(1974:20). She was struck by the totally new environment she had to live in . Place and people were so different from those in South Africa, and she, like any refugee, had to adapt to them; the only problem was that she was a woman and a Coloured.

The idea that she was an out–and- out outsider was reinforced in Botswana where she was rejected because of her origins. In her novels, Head repeatedly draws attention to the Batswana's violent prejudices which echo dramatically those of the white South Africans. Again, she recalls examples of racism likely to be recognized in South Africa. For example, in *Maru,* Margaret the school teacher who belongs to the Masarwa, the lowest social cast in Botswana, is not accepted because it is firmly believed that the San are racially inferior. What a black character says in the story about them immediately reminds us of a racist White South African's saying in Mphahlele's *D S A,* namely that the whites 'did the thinking for them':

> I don't know what we can do with people who
> can't think for themselves, but always need others
> to feed them. Mind you, they seem quite contented
> with their low, animal lives"
>
> (1972:44)

At the beginning, and as her numerous letters show, Head suffered enormously from the villagers' hostility. She lived with the conviction that she was going to be killed in "*this quiet-seeming village*"(1991:9), a village where she says "*nothing ever happens*" and where "*there are only people and animals and starvation, fear, frustration and dog-eat-dog.*" (1991:9). Her first letter to Randolph Vigne, an editor, reads as a cry for help:

> I am just writing to you because there's a dim chance that I'll be alive or see this year to an end here.Such tremendous pressure has built up against me in this little village and I shall get no help from the police if my life is in danger..
>
> (Head,1991:9)

Further, in the same letter, she adds: " *Now that I feel my life so threatened I do want to stay alive and I shan't if I don't get out of here.*"(1991:10).This was not the first time Head warned against the danger awaiting her. For her, it was imminent and the fact of living with the specter of death looming in the horizon had a very negative impact on her psyche as she suffered just after that from a nervous breakdown, a state of insanity she herself foresaw, had things to continue the way they started. Continually complaining about harassment, Head told about her experience as one of the most bitter, the most cruel and the most lonely one could ever live. Approaching the question of gender through the incidents she lived, she recounts how as a woman teacher, she had to fight to be acknowledged and respected in a society where educated women were not well considered. From the first days of her arrival, she was made aware that a woman in the village was not welcome. The situation worsened when after her nervous collapse she lost her job. Under the pretext that she had had an unbecoming behavior as a teacher, the principal asked Elizabeth to present a certificate of sanity to be able to continue teaching in his school.

The feeling of rejection was compounded with that of humiliation. She was deeply hurt and convinced that "*they really disliked her and preferred to have nothing to do with her.*"(Head, 1974:67).

Actually, this incident in *A Q P* tells about the first signs of mental disorder that Head started to reveal. A comforting character in the story, Eugene, the principal of Motabeng Secondary School, is the man who offers help and security to Elizabeth during her crisis. He is the one who will initiate her in the field of agriculture, a project she is going to invest in, not materially but with efforts and work amid a group of Africans as well as Europeans and Americans. The friendly atmosphere she discovers proves to be a therapy for her. She meets new persons, very simple persons, just as she likes them, and exchanges with them ideas and skills on how to plant, how to harvest, how to grow crops… It was like resuscitating – or perhaps being just born. It may be assumed that Head's great interest in agriculture and farming, a recurrent theme in her novels, is symbolic of a need for roots. The fact that her stories are generally set in rural environments rather than cities makes us think that this woman, who is a *déracinée*, an *apatride*, may be trying to find a land where to take root. The process looks like a 'transplantation' in agrarian terms; in other words, a plant has been removed or transferred from one place to another with the aim of giving it life again. Medically speaking, the word transplantation sends back to the same definition: as explained in the *Larousse Medical* ,(1981:1039) it is used in surgery and means the transfer of an organ or tissue from one part of the body to another or from one person to another, the objective being to cure and save a life. The operation can prove successful just as it can fail since the rejection of an organ is very probable. Analogically, exiles go through exactly the same process. They are going to recreate and reconstruct an identity, a home, in a land that is not their own without yet being sure to succeed. However, for Elizabeth who is

an exile living with the indelible feeling of loss and up rootedness, the discovery and recovery of land is indeed significant. What made the enterprise even more fruitful was the voluntary and enthusiastic mood she noticed in each of the participants who gave the best of themselves. She felt very comfortable in that environment. She was no longer alone while she had always lived in isolation, a danger Eugene warned against, "*Too much isolation isn't a good thing for anyone*."(1974:56). He was quite conscious of the pressure refugees underwent as most of them had had nervous breakdowns. She felt closer to him when he confided that he also suffered as an exile and that he could understand her very well: "*I suffer, too, because I haven't a country and know what it's like. A lot of refugees have nervous breakdowns*".(Ibid.,p.52). Eugene and Elizabeth were both aware of the problem without talking much about it. In fact, they could not talk about it because the refugee's state of mind does not give way to expression. It is a problem only psychology can explain and perhaps solve. Khoury, cited earlier, tells us about his understanding of Palestinian refugees' silence: "*I began to understand how people speak, how they imagine, how they remember. When one has undergone a major trauma, one cannot speak about it*."(2009). So if one has to assist these people, one should do it without expecting them to say much about their situation, at least not instantly. For her part, Elizabeth had the chance to meet Eugene and what a relief this man procured to her so humane and comprehensible he was!

> There wasn't anyone near her in the solitary, unfolding drama of torture in Motabeng village. The man's instinctive sympathy and offer of Help was the nearest any human being had Approached her isolation, and she could see That he was working on the simple theory that South Africans usually suffered from some

> mental aberration, so she only nodded her head in agreement to his offer of assistance.
>
> (1974:58)

If Eugene offered his help and alleviated her isolation, if he integrated her and her son in his milieu, the villagers of Motabeng, on the contrary, excluded her from theirs. They could not accept the fact that Elizabeth like Head came with a child but without a husband. Head had had a son with a man whom she had loved and married. She believed in him, in his interest in Buddhism, in what she thought was high, refined spirituality, but she soon realized that the man deceived her, and that was another affective blow in her life, another link to break. So she decided to take her son and leave him. For some time, she had also lived with her family-in -law with whom she could not cohabit. Without uttering a word, she left the place, displaying her autonomy and rebellion in a society where women were known to obey and follow their husbands. In the small village where she had come to dwell, this 'family' picture without a 'master' was even less conceivable. For in this village, people belonged to the same big family. They were all relatives and this is what Elizabeth understood from their greetings. The latter never ended; each time a name was evoked, it recalled another name which could be the sister's, the cousin's, the daughter-in-law's, the uncle's uncle etc…..Elizabeth was much surprised at this. She was alone. She had just a son and no other relative. She was doubly touched by this sad reality especially when indifference was added to it: "*People don't care here whether foreigners get along with them or not. They are deeply absorbed in each other*."(1974:56).

She really was an "out-and- out outsider" even in the language which she did not know. She had to speak English to be understood and this was another form of

alienation which complicated things for her in this village where everything was different, so different and hostile that the threat of madness was concretized.

3.5 AWARE OF HER MADNESS ?

Was it her mind or her soul that Head lost? Or was it both? To the reader who consented to accompany Head in her journey into the soul and explore it, the risk proved worthy. For in the parallel world where one is driven, ghosts and mythical figures seem to interpret best her torments, desires, emotions and thoughts. These living and dead souls betray her personality and unveil her hidden side, or what psychoanalysis calls the 'repressed meaning' (that is hoped to be uncovered). It is through an Elizabeth who is both the subject and the object of the story, i.e. the one who acts and undergoes at the same time, who is conscious and unconscious of what happens to her, who is 'mad' and is aware of her madness, that the question thickens and disturbs the reader.

How could it be ever possible to be conscious of one's madness? In order to elucidate the question and in spite of the difficulty to enter what first appears as a mad book –or a mad's book- one is very tempted to embark on Head's adventure. For it appears that the reader succeeds, after some efforts, in decoding - if not all, at least a small part of - the enigma Head. She is an enigma because of the mystery that envelops her personality. And it is mystery because madness remains an impenetrable territory notwithstanding scientific and psychoanalytic researches and interpretations undertaken in such a field.

As a matter of fact, Head was diagnosed as a paranoiac and schizophrenic person while she presented only a few symptoms of schizophrenia (from schizè= split in two, and phrên=mind) and none of paranoia (Greek word meaning reasoning aside, delirium) if one refers to the definitions of these two

psychopathies. In his book *The prodigious victories of Modern Psychology*, Daco draws the profile of the schizophrenic as a " '*mental stranger' with whom it is practically impossible to get touch. He is 'cut' off the real world, showing no reaction and being absolutely indifferent. S/he lives an internal dream, and an external circumstance rarely brings him/her back to reality.*"(Daco:1977:274). (See notes). Daco explains as well that the schizophrenic subject totally imprisons her/himself in his world just like an autistic[46] , and that this world is one of hallucinations which s/he believes in. A schizophrenic, it is stated, also discusses with an invisible partner, sometimes violently. Daco ends by saying that certain schizophrenic persons are intellectually very exalted and sometimes produce extraordinary artistic works whose characteristics are highly symbolic. As for the paranoiac personality, it is characterized by an overestimation of the self, a feeling of superiority and pride, authority and an absence of self criticism.

Taking these symptoms into consideration , it can be said that Elizabeth responds to just one of them (namely her discussion with Sello who was invisible to the other characters who visited her), while she was the complete opposite of a paranoiac since she had a contempt for whoever felt superior. Head made it clear when writing: " *The word 'important' could make her (Elizabeth) hair rise up…"; "She had seen too many people despised for self-importance,and it was something drilled into her: be the same as others in heart; just be a person."* (Head,1974:26). As said above, Elizabeth showed a sign of schizophrenia when conversing with Sello. Head recounts how one night, the former felt someone had entered the room where she slept and sat down on the chair just after she had blown out the light. It had recurred for several nights before she finally saw him: "*The form of a man totally filled the large horizon in front of her. He was sitting sideways. He had an almighty air of calm and assurance about him.*" (1974:22)

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[46] Autistic : a total withdrawalwithin oneself (as defined by Daco).

At last she spoke with him though she was not quite sure whether the whole thing was normal or not. She had never seen any ghost in her life, nor had she believed in any multidimensional world. The latter had always been “flat and straight with things she could see and feel.”(Ibid).

> She was not sure if she were awake or asleep, and often after that the dividing line between dream and perceptions and waking reality was to become confused.(Ibid)

The conversations with Sello were enlightening and absorbing then they became a usual activity. The monk was so present and seemed so real – “*he was so vividly alive*!”- (Head, 1974:23) that she happened to pour a cup of tea for him , after what, she realized that she was not quite ‘normal’: “*Agh, I must be mad! That’s just an intangible form*.”(Ibid). Head continues describing the situation saying that Elizabeth “*had been shaken up into accepting an entirely unnatural situation and adapting it to the flow of her life*”(Ibid). It should be noted here that the two statements:“*I must be mad*” and “*adapting it to the flow of*….”, stand in contradiction with the description of the schizophrenic who is, as stated earlier, retired within oneself and has no contact with the outside world. As for Elizabeth, she did not sever the links she had with her surroundings even if limited to very few friends. Nor was she autistic since she was always communicating with her son and taking care of him. Better, she was a lucid mother who worried about the great confrontations that threatened the stability of their life (as a family, the only one she ever had). She thought about her son’s probable loss unless he learned how to take care of himself: “ *Journeys into the soul are not for women with children, not all that dark heaving turmoil*.”(Head, 1974:50). Besides, Elizabeth could share her anxiety with Tom, a good friend of her and her son, who came often home to see her. Tom could even be considered as a witness not of Sello’s apparition but of his presence, for he had had once the

'impression' to hear someone answering his question while he was conversing with Elizabeth, as this passage shows:

> Tom started and looked about the room with wide alert eyes: 'Did you hear something?' he said quickly. 'I distinctly heard someone say "Yes, that's right" ': and he kept very still, his Eyes roving curiously around the room. Elizabeth kept very quiet, too, incapable of explaining the mad state of affairs in her house.

(Head,1974:24)

Actually, it was not an impression but a 'reality' only Elizabeth knew; in psychoanalysis this is termed hallucinations. The reader is very likely to believe Elizabeth as h/she also is a witness of what she lives. Thus, the question that keeps gnawing at who thinks in a rational, scientific manner and even at who thinks life would be too flat without those spicy elements stirring it, is about the mad's awareness of his madness. How did Elizabeth know that she was not in her normal state while a schizophrenic is not conscious of his psychic troubles. For this is even her own query; in a pathetic way, she tries to explain that she had always been sane and that what happened to her, especially her relation with Sello, this "other self", was not explicable even to herself. Arguing that indeed she did not think people who "*conduct telepathic relationships with other people are normal anyway*"(Head,1974:56-57), she acknowledged that she never thought this would happen to her. Then, as if invoking the reader's empathy, she swears she had been sane all along her life. Head (Elizabeth) is therefore aware of what befalls her. Furthermore, she memorizes the details of her madness and records them in a very clear way. She describes her madness using the word madness itself, but she always seems to resist it because she is aware of it. Besides, her depiction of madness is what makes her work certainly difficult, but it is also what endows it with a very high intellectual quality.

The latter point is interesting as it responds to another symptom of schizophrenia which is the intellectual exaltation mentioned previously. *A Q P* is an 'exclusive' book in the sense that it breaks with the canons of African literature (and western traditional literature as well) with its introduction of techniques not often met in African fiction and which, if evaluated according to Europeans standards, would range in modern and post-modern literature. It is a writing that demands more than one approach to achieve understanding and perhaps a thorough study. One of them is the psychoanalytic approach as it can provide clues for the comprehension and analysis of dreams for example. It is important though to mention that the aim of this study is not to get on a psychoanalysis of the story and even less that of the author, as this would be too pretentious. It is rather an attempt at satisfying our curiosity as to Head's 'madness' that leads us to Freud's interpretations.

Although psychoanalysis admits its own limitations in therapeutic practices as well as in critical approaches to literature, one can still resort to it chiefly in the field of dreams and symbolism, which proved rather successful in detecting the origins of certain troubles and which, in literature, also offered some indications for the interpretation and comprehension of certain texts. As Shoshana Felman suggests, a connection between psychoanalysis and literature is necessary, with literature providing a practice ground for the analyst. In other words, the analyst would be the clinician and the text, the patient, in which case psychoanalysis would be the active practice performed upon the passive text:

> While literature is considered as a body of language –to be interpreted- psychoanalysis is considered as a body of knowledge, whose competence is called upon to interpret. Psycho-analysis, in other words, occupies the place of a

subject, literature that of an object.

(Felman, 1982:5)

Interestingly, she also points out to a third element that intervenes in the course of this performance and that is the analyst's/critic's own realization of certain things about himself/herself while questioning the patient/text. This means that the object of scrutiny is not just Head but also the analyst or the reader who finds her/himself involved or caught up in this interaction: "*with respect to the text, the literary critic occupies thus at once the place of the psychoanalyst (in the relation of interpretation) and the place of the patient (in the relation of transference*)."(Felman 1985:7-8). Felman's suggestion is interesting and true especially when dealing with narratives that invite and entail a relationship with the reader, which may sometimes help understanding something about one's own unconscious, as is the case with Head's *A Q P*. Questions that would never have occurred before to the reader, emerge .They turn to speculation throughout the process of reading and even after closing the book, whence the appeal to psychoanalysis to lighten the reader's burden. According to Osaki, in *A Q P* there are more questions than answers and "*one is not sure whether the dreams in the text are a faithful record of the author's descent into insanity, or whether the author is experimenting a narrative technique that encourages the reader to be a producer rather than a passive consumer of meaning*."(2002). So whether psychoanalysis gives access to the unconscious of the writer and whether it helps the reader grasp and interpret what would have been otherwise unattainable is what we are going to see.

A Q P is a story full of symbols appearing through Elizabeth's hallucinations, in her waking dreams and nightmares. The latter are crowded with people she knows and others who are strangers to her. Some are lovely, the others are hateful and terrifying like Dan and Medusa who torment her and 'drive her mad'. They 'appear' to her in the village where she throws the anchor with the

hope to bring some stability to her life. Unfortunately, she loses control of her mind and life because of the harm they do to her. She incriminates them, especially Medusa who scares her because she is "*so real to [her] that [she] lives in terror of her all [her] days*.(Head,1974:58). She is incessantly persecuted by them and is convinced they want to kill her, spiritually and physically. Freud explains that dreams derive from 'repression', which means that there are unconscious operations in the mind that cannot be represented and so they surface in the form of dreams and other symptoms. In a critical analysis of his theories, Green and Lebihan clarify the latter's definition of repression as " *the action that produces the unconscious by rendering experiences, thoughts, desires and memories irretrievable.*"(1996:147). They further detail the notion of repression as "*traumas that are extremely painful and damaging*".(ibid.,p.149) Coming back to the dream, they explain it as going first through a process they call 'dream work' which is what the repressed undergoes before it surfaces in the remembered dream. In other words, it is the "*transformation of the repressed, forbidden or taboo thoughts or desires, into the manifest."(*Green and Lebihan,1996:149).

Who is Medusa in Head's repressed world? What does she symbolize? The author sends us to investigate Greek mythology to discover one of the most symbolic figures in literature as well. So many interpretations and representations of Medusa have been given that one may be lost at deciding which one to choose to apply to Head's text. However, the most common version reported about this fascinating mythological figure is that it is a female monster, the only one of the Gorgon (see notes) sisters who is subject to mortality without yet being human. She is famous for her charms and beautiful looks which made Poseidon (see notes) fall in love with her and rape her in Athena's temple. Provoking the wrath of the latter, she was transformed in an ugly monster who had the power to

petrify or turn any man looking at her in stone. Instead of her once extremely beautiful hair, she had serpents sliding from her skull. She was later killed by Perseus (see notes), who cut off her head which even dead, had the power to petrify men. Etymologically, Medusa means “female wisdom”, “female power” and “female mystery”, a status she lost to become later the symbol of “female rage” and danger, for she was identified as a dangerous seductive force while for feminists she was the personification of rape and the victim of men’s power. Feminists have often interpreted Medusa’s decapitation as the dictatorship of man silencing the female element (Cixous,1976:93). Medusa was at once fascinating and dangerous, attractive and scary. In literature, she is a symbol of ambiguity since she represents beauty and horror at the same time. She is also viewed by some literary critics as a representation of the Other by virtue of her different terrifying aspect just as she had a power of alienation on her victims whom she could transform, as said above, in stones. For the Greeks, Medusa represents death, the dreaded enemy, the nocturnal world or the underworld. She is as well the embodiment of the devil. The list of representations is very long and gives way to “interpretability” as Garber and Vickers say in their book *The Medusa Reader,*

> What is most compelling in the long history of the myth and its retellings is Medusa’s intrinsic double-ness: at once monster and beauty, disease and cure, poison and remedy. The woman with snaky looks who could turn the unwary into stone has come to stand for all that is obdurate and irresistible.
>
> (Garber&Vickers,2003: 84)

Medusa’s ambiguity has also been a psychoanalytic interpretation. But what Freud’s theory brings to the Medusa myth is the latter’s connection with sexuality. According to him, Medusa’s decapitation represents the male’s fear of castration. Freud’s over interpretations will not be cited here, but what will be

retained is that he closely associates Medusa's head, for example, with phallic symbols which are very present in *A Q P*. The effect the sight of the decapitated head has on the observer is devastating just as the sight of the naked body of the antagonist Dan in the story is on Elizabeth. Head's description of the latter in the company of Medusa and other girls is at times so repelling that " *she had the sensation of living right inside a stinking toilet; she was so broken, so shattered, she hadn't even the energy to raise one hand*."(Head,1974:14). The situation was so appalling that she felt she had reached the abyss: " *How had she fallen in there? How had she fallen so low? It was a state below animal, below living and so dark and forlorn no loneliness and misery could be its equivalent.*"(Ibid).

'The castration complex' which is said to be extremely dangerous because of the emotions and fear that it generates in the males' minds (especially from boyhood) seems to operate on Head rather mentally. It can be viewed as the metaphor of a mutilated life with the terrible consequences we know as madness or mental disturbances. The subject is very anxious and can be violent. As psychoanalysts explain, their anxiety may be conscious or unconscious. The accumulation of these fears later develops into a feeling of inferiority and frustration in which case, sexuality itself becomes synonymous of castration. As far as Head is concerned, it may be suggested that this idea of castration and frustration must have nourished in Head's mind a desire for revenge, or simply a reaction provoked by her husband's infidelity. Again, it will be referred to the repressed feelings surfacing in dreams. Dan, who haunts and hunts Elizabeth in dreams, could be a version of Harold Head, the author's husband. He represents evil and male power and stands in the story as a permanent threat and danger for Elizabeth. As he is portrayed, Dan is the most treacherous, vile person she meets, loves and hates. He is the man who completely destroys her, he and his army of women, the "seventy nice-time girls" with whom he makes love in the presence of Elizabeth (in her waking dream). His presence in *A Q P* is a real torture for

Elizabeth who is humiliated not only as a woman whose dignity is trodden but also as a Coloured who is condemned for not being a pure Black (by Dan himself).

Invading her parallel world , in other words, her dreams or her unconscious, Dan permanently reminds her that she is an "out -and -out outsider". Allied to Medusa, they form a crushing power which Elizabeth tries hard to resist, a power whose ugliest aspects Head depicts and details in this space which is writing and which is the only remedy she finds to release her psychological repression. It is a space which Sandra Gilbert calls the country of writing which "*ought to be a nowhere into which we can fly in a tarantella of rage and desire, a place beyond 'vileness and compromise' where the part of ourselves that longs to be free…can write itself, can dream, can invent new words*"(in Osaki,2002). It is therefore this space which allows her to reveal the versatile facets of the man who had duped her.

In her 'real world', Dan, as said earlier, is her husband, the man whom Head had loved and married but whose extra-sexual relations (and promiscuity) she could not forgive. She could not stay with a man whom women complained about and who, they said, was "strange" - "*then there was also a white man who was his boy-friend*"(Head,1974:19). Her departures or what she terms, 'exit permits', all held the 'never to return' clause. (Ibid). Her marriage was a traumatizing experience that she relives, painfully, in her dreams, thus offering a convincing elucidation of the latter.

One of Head's representations of power is illustrated by Dan. She compares his lack of humanism and compassion to white South Africans'. It was a relationship of hatred, so unjustifiable, so untenable, that it created a tension one was living with permanently. As the author says, it was "*a vicious struggle between two*

sets of people with different looks" (Head,1974:19), a barren space without compassion, humanity nor tenderness. "It was death. What did they gain , the power people, while they lived off other people's souls like vultures?" (Ibid).

Vultures, leopard, human beasts, Head uses many symbols to point up power with its most negative connotations. For example, when she recounts the story of the feline that frightened the farmers during the ploughing season, she is not only alluding to a deathly power but also recalling a myth: the leopard's. When Elizabeth expresses her wish to accompany Thoko to the lands during the school holidays, she is warned of the danger she runs: "*Then there is a great wild cat, like a leopard. We are afraid to rest and fall asleep under the trees.*" (Head,1974:60) The animal kills and stages a ritual of horror that accentuates the terror farmers feel because they imagine the sacrifice much more terribly that what it meant through its signs: "*When we find people dead like that, we know the wild cat is about…"* (Ibid).

The sensation the passage about the feline raises is one of terror; the wild cat's technique sounds like a serial killer's whose traces are recognized. A feeling of suspense and expectation is lingering as the menace is known to be about. Whose turn will it be next? The image of the leopard cracking open the skull is strikingly echoed later in the book when Head evokes her nervous collapse, with Dan intruding again, shattering her nerves, violating her mentally; in short, murdering her. The same deceitful behaviour the leopard used in order to eat the people's brains is borrowed by Dan to devour Elizabeth's mind:

> She hadn't seen Dan's form just then, but shortly before she awoke she had seen two large, familiar black hands move towards her head. They had opened her skull. He'd bent his mouth towards the cavity and talked right into the exposed area. His harsh grating voice was unintelligible. It just said : 'Rrrrrrrrraaaaaaaa.'

> It had shot through her body with the pain of a knife wounds…
>
> (Head,1974:177)

Such a nightmare or hallucination is recognized in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as "somatic delusions"(1982), which, in *AQP*, is manifested by Elizabeth's feeling that a hole has been opened in her head. This criterion electing Head for paranoid schizophrenia has been advanced by Evasdaughter who, in her article, "*Bessie Head's AQP Read as a Mariner's Guide to Paranoia*, warns us against reading *A Q P* as an "*uniformed fantasy about madness in Africa*," asserting that "*the development of its symbols are those of paranoid schizophrenia*."(2007:72).In her view, Elizabeth's experiences are qualifications for schizophrenia as listed in the *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria* from the manual cited above.

Insisting on the symbol of the leopard, it could be said that it is as ambiguous as Medusa in mythology. The leopard myth tells about a creature which embodies both evil and good. It can be a fierce, dangerous animal, a symbol of darkness and death just as it can be a protecting power given a divine dimension, feared and respected. Thus, the leopard which has been described up to now as representing Dan –and Dan's power- may as well incarnate an aspect of Head's persona. Ironically, the leopard is a hybrid between a lion and a panther. Very present in mythology, literature and scriptures, the leopard is also said to represent "*the spirit of imminent rebirth*"(Chou, 2007). It signals a time of rebirth after a period of suffering and death, which sends us back to Elizabeth's painful experience and how she recovered from a disease she self-healed thanks to her resistance. Although it may be objected to the use of the word resistance, it is difficult to consider Head's "survival" and recovery but as the result of a strong resistance. For madness itself is a form of resistance in a society where people are repressed, alienated and dehumanized. It functions as a shield that protects

from killing – killing the mind in this case. It is this very madness that Head, purposefully, expresses in her writings. As Felman points out, "*the madness silenced by society is given voice by literature*"(in Osaki, 2002). So, it should be insisted on the fact that for Head, resistance was a self-healing process wrought out through writing ; in other words, her psychological repression was released through her literary production.

Besides and as it is reported in *A Q P*, Elizabeth did not stay in hospital after her nervous breakdowns. As soon as she woke up, she went back home without anyone opposing her decision, an attitude that reinforces the hypothesis that she was conscious of her unconsciousness and that might question the manual of mental disorders. In effect, Evadaughter's article is a remarkable interpretation of symbols exhibiting the symptoms that characterize people who suffer from schizophrenia , yet what I find embarrassing in this analysis is the "dissecting" manner applied to Head/Elizabeth. The latter seems to be put under a laboratory examination with almost each act and gesture being interpreted as schizophrenic or paranoid just because it echoes or corresponds to one of the criteria listed in the *Desk Reference*. Putting her works in a sort of Procrustean bed , certain critics seem to be more eager to view the author first of all as a victim of psychic troubles while another great dimension of the woman should be discovered in her writings. The whole 'thing' gives again the impression of categorizing Head, of listing her as a 'species' presenting characteristics coinciding with such or such a pattern of "madness", as if she were doomed to discrimination even in an intellectual and cultural field. Nevertheless, what would have been more captivating is an attempt at considering madness in an African cultural context. How is madness perceived in Africa? What is the place 'spirits' and 'ghosts' hold in society and how are they interpreted? Perhaps then would it be possible to understand some of the patients' reactions as well as those of the persons surrounding them.

An interesting study undertaken by an American psychiatrist in Zimbabwe offers a moving account of medicine at the crossroads of two cultures. Dr Paul Linde tells us about his experience in Harare, namely about the challenges each patient presented him. His patients walked the line between the visible and invisible worlds, their culture heavily relying on witchcraft and magical rituals. He explains how his work turned almost detective and how much he became curious and was eager to unearth cases of true bewitchment. Through his patients' stories, their demons and their difficulties, he himself learnt to think like an African to be able to solve some psychiatric puzzles. It helped him best handle them using both western remedies and considering their beliefs in spirits, witchcraft and animism. Dr Linde admits that after a long career in San Francisco's psychiatric hospital, he realized he had changed a lot after his return from Harare. (2001)

Even though Head/Elizabeth did not believe in witchcraft and demons, she experienced things she did not know before she came to Botswana. She manifested symptoms that might as well be listed in an 'African Desk Reference' for ancestral reincarnation or spiritual expression. In any case, Head should rather be considered as a writer who has opened very wide the gates to trauma literature, offering the readers insight into the world of refugees and exiles, enabling them to better understand their struggle against loneliness, isolation, their feeling of insecurity and loss, their search for identity and for a sense of belonging. She is a writer who expressed profoundly the exiles' remorse and guilt which she lived as an "*immense conflict, pressure, uncertainty and insecurity"*. (Head,1990:31). What is worse is the feeling never to come to terms with this deplorable situation as she realized *"[she] had solved nothing. [She] was like everyone else – perplexed, bewildered and desperate*" (Ibid), drawing

thus a full portrait of the exile who lived in permanent confusion and stress because of her/his traumatism.

In fact, Head's novels correspond to the description of Trauma literature as exposed by Caruth. According to the latter, this genre is characterized by the "repetition compulsion" whereby traumatic experiences are repeated, re-told, through flashbacks and can through the process of writing itself lead to further violence and trauma:

> The repetition of the traumatic experience in the flashback can itself be retraumatizing; if not life-threatening, it is at least threatening to the chemical structure of the brain and can ultimately lead to deterioration.
>
> (Caruth, in Ibrahim,2004: 93)

The illustration of this idea is found in *A Q P*; whenever Elizabeth recalls some painful situations, she falls in a deeper breakdown. She is destroyed both physically and mentally. On the other hand, Tal contends that the same process of re-telling and recounting which he calls "*the large process of revision*" (1996:78) provides an opportunity to re-discovery and recovery. Indeed, Head discovers in her a capacity for love so immense that it contains the whole universe. Re-writing , although painful, was for her a healing process since she finally laid her arm as a gesture of belonging, even if in an idealistic world which she invented.

Head has therefore been able to express the unexpressed and inexpressible through not a simple "verbatim" transcription of her life but an allegorical characterization of Elizabeth who has often been faultily deemed insane. As Adler argues, Head's motives can be achieved more surely if one refrained from

considering Elizabeth's madness as being almost a case study of Head's breakdown.

> I wish to argue for those interpretations of Elizabeth's actions as both a metaphor for an ironically sane response to the social insanity of southern Africa during the Apartheid period, and even more tellingly, for t he social and political vision that Head's personal nightmare ultimately provided for her, not an absorption in the alienation of madness, but her protagonist's unity with all those oppressed by racism and sexism.
>
> (Elder in Ibrahim, 2004:10)

Whether Head was aware or not of her madness may lead us very far in our investigations, but what seems clear now is that Head has shown how insane the society she lived in was. Her troubles and torments are the reflection and product of a fractured South African society. As for Botswana, it was the place where she was the out-and-out outsider as has been said earlier. Physically, Head could locate herself neither in South Africa nor in Botswana; morally she was on the verge of madness, but one may also venture and say of wisdom; spiritually she was both Goddess and Man because she had her own conception of divinity, with Man at the center of everything. Head was a woman living in transition, at the crossroads of race and gender, of love and hate, light and darkness, sleep and awareness, a multitude of exiles making (or 'unmaking') an atypical woman. This antonymic disposition of the author made express this terrible situation whereby what is painful is necessary, what sorrowful is also called "life" and any attempt to take one without its opposite characteristic was to deny the human being his fundamental capacity for complementarity and quality for harmony; here is another equation for mankind.

3.6 A QUESTION OF MALE POWER

An atypical woman is a woman who is uncommon, not ordinary, exceptional, different, the odd one out, mainly the one that disturbs the rest of the community because difference, in this case may give something new, original, creative, may be initiating a rethinking of the woman's status, and specifically the black woman's fate. Head was such a woman even if she regarded herself as just everyone; in a sense she was an 'Other', a woman apart, and because of that, she should not be defined as a feminist. In other words, she was an Other distinguished from the feminist Others (since these are considered as Others); or shall we copy Head's expression 'out-and-out outsider' to say she was an 'Other-and -Other Other', alienating her completely from her female mates? In reality, Head was very attentive to women's hardships, but although she paid tribute to Black womanhood in some of her works, namely *The Collector of Treasures*, she denied the necessity to be a feminist, remarking:

> I am not a feminist….in the sense that I do not view women in isolation from men….I view my own activity as a writer as a kind of participation in the thought of the whole world….Writing is not a male/female occupation.. I do not have to be a feminist. The world of the intellect is impersonal, sexless.
>
> (in Eilerson,1995:238)

Indeed, ranging Head within feminism would reduce the universal scope she constantly proclaimed. It would mean identifying her with a group, a branch of society , a 'minority', the thing which she totally refuted. Voicing women does not need adherence to a group, a party or an assembly. The proof is that she talked of women's position and held her views as vociferously as any feminist activist did. Ama Ata Aidoo who also was labeled feminist has claimed that

"*simply writing about women does not make us 'feminist writers'*(in Ibrahim:2004,196)

In fact, it has become an almost natural and spontaneous attitude, not to say a reflex, to think of women's writings as inevitably treating of feminism. Their critics seem more tempted to seek defensive or offensive reactions on the part of women writers rather than find messages, reflections and thoughts that transcend the problem of gender. That women have experienced and are still undergoing all forms of oppression and repression is a fact which cannot be denied and which requires and imposes revision, recognition and correction. However, to confine women's artistic potential within a feminist framework gives the impression of choking their voices and talents.

Considering women's production mainly as 'feministic commitment' may prevent the reader from appreciating it as a work of art and, consequently, could be prejudicial to its authors. It may be objected to these remarks as being detached from reality, as not serving the cause of women who up to now are subjected to violence and threatened even by death all over the world. When one knows that in the 21st century, in the most developed countries, husbands who present a danger for their wives or companions are summoned by the law to wear some sort of 'GPS' or tracker apparatus to control their movements and avoid crime, one realizes, once more, the gravity and urgency of the problem. Things have to change, and the change can be operated effectively through writing according to Cixous. The latter defines this writing as "*precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures*". (1976:93)

In South Africa, women had to wait long before this subversive thought emerged. The transformation of cultural and social structures demanded a revolution (not yet achieved) especially in a society where the assumption of male authority over women was reinforced by both the traditional and Afrikaner structure. More than other African women's struggle, the South African's in particular has to be acknowledged, for she was subjected to both racial and gender oppression. She was discriminated against as a black and as a woman. The many forms of dispossession and injustice, the abuses of power , the racially oppressive system of Apartheid with its heavy impact on women were subjects that were not made visible until the 1990's with the emergence of a whole new generation of women voices who argued that "*gender and racial oppression go together and must be contested simultaneously.*" (Clayton,1993:30). Writers like Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Tlali, Zoe Wicomb, Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing have all testified to the most unjust and humiliating system ever established in a society. Their novels and autobiographies question what was unquestioned before, combining political issues with literary insight. They depict in a moving way a fractured society with the scars it left on its members, namely women.

Head, though not a feminist, expressed in her own manner the complex interweaving of racial and gender oppression. She had access to the world of power and to history precisely by this act of writing. In *A Q P*, the text that she writes and that writes her, she reveals men's greed and vanity in the person of Dan. This character who has been described previously, is the epitome of power in its most awful manifestations. He is the embodiment of evil and malice, the rapist and the pervert, the attractive man who uses his charm to deceive women, to abuse them, the one who obtains all he wants because he is powerful. Dan is also the man who wants to control her life and who uses both seduction and violence to achieve his aims. It is not a coincidence that Head indicates a date, 1910, as being the year when he gained "*directorship of the universe.*"(1974:25).

In the history of South Africa this is the year when the Act of Union marked the official birth of the white South Africa, and when Cecil Rhodes declared that "*the key to the real question of South Africa [was] the supremacy of the white race*."(in Lefort,1977:30). 1910 is historical for its implications of the purity of race. To what extent is this relevant to Dan and why did Head make this analogy with him ? This can be explained by the writer's allusion to racism when it is reversed, and how malevolent and harmful it is whether expressed by whites or by blacks. It is also an illustration of power be it white or black. This sends us back to Elizabeth's struggle as a mulatto in Botswana and to the record she felt someone had turned inside her head. It went on and on telling her: "*Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death*."(Head, 1974:45) It was Dan who obsessively reminded her of the 'impurity' of her hybrid body. Making her feel ugly and inferior because of the dilution of her blackness, he introduced a girl who had her hair done in the traditional style: "*I like girls like this with that kind of hair. Your hair is not properly African.*" (Ibid.,127). Hybridism, the record went on, is a contaminating disease, like leprosy. Medusa, who is Dan's ally, also threatened her saying : "*Africa is troubled waters.....You will only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages*."(Ibid.,44). The same cruelty and discrimination she had known in South Africa is reproduced in Botswana. The power to harm and break the nerves was the art of Dan.

Certainly, the personality of Dan is not representative of all men, but this character, reappearing in Head's other novels like *Maru* for example, suggests that he was not a unique sample of male's abuse and 'power'. Different from *A Q P* for being often qualified as a fairy tale (therefore more accessible to readers), *Maru* as well abounds with symbols. The symbol of power for instance, is incarnated by two men who are almost replicas of Sello and Dan. The notion of good and evil is again the focus of the story and the central character,

Margaret, just like Elizabeth is split in two, swinging between two male forces, undergoing them, but finally liberating herself from both.

The structure of *A Q P* is significant too. It is divided in two chapters, entitled "Sello" and (or versus) "Dan" which can be interpreted as good versus evil, life versus death, light versus darkness, day versus night. While giving the impression to introduce a sort of duel between the two men , this dual structure rather constitutes a wholeness produced by two selves. In other words, Elizabeth's quest reveals through the two males (ghosts) who visit and at times inhabit her, either a depiction of her own self being torn between good and evil, or a hidden complicity of two apparently different men plotting against her. From the beginning she 'accepts' to be accompanied by these two men in her journey into the self: "*The three of them had shared the strange journey into hell and kept close emotional tabs on each other. There seemed to be a mutual agreement in the beginning that an examination of inner hells was meant to end all hells forever*."(Head, 1974:12). Each one knew there was an inner hell to be examined. Each one needed an exorcism to be operated. The question that remains is why has Head chosen male characters/ghosts to undertake this journey? It can be assumed that in this society where both men and women were repressed, the latter were those who endured discrimination most. For in this journey, it is Elizabeth who is the object of subjugation, "*The pivot of the examination was Elizabeth. Both men flung unpleasant details at her in sustained ferocity*."(Ibid) Tucker offers another explanation of Head's accompaniment by two men in her mental journey. According to her, as a "receiver of horrors", Elizabeth has been the *text* for Sello's and Dan's hells. "*In order to examine her own hell, she must find a text to inscribe it so that she can see rather than be consumed by herself as Other.*" (Tucker, 1988:170). Once again, the text imposes itself as the most effective resort for women to liberate themselves from oppression, to shift from a passive subject to an active one, to transform silences in voices.

Evoking the metaphor of silence it is noteworthy to mention the historical anthology of women's writings that appeared in 1990 under the title *Breaking the Silence* by Lockett. Relying on the poetic genre in particular, this major work presents the role of women as testimony and historical documentation. It is an invaluable contribution to all women's experiences and their continuing efforts to broach the boundaries of gender. It may be deceitful to quote just an extract from a long poem, but the following verses taken from "*The Silence of Women*" by Liz Rosenberg are suggestive of an outburst after a long enduring time of muteness and suffering:

Oh lifetime of silence!
Words scattered like a sibyl 's leaves.
Voices thrown into a baritone storm –
Whose shrilling is a soulful wind

Blown through an instrument
That cannot beat time
But must make music
Anyway it can.

(Buddha- rat.squarespace.com/poetry…/the-silence-of-women.html)

When women's words call for women's voices, they produce a beautiful, intense , penetrating music. When the percussion is African, it assumes an even more alluring tone. It is shrilling, vibrating, crying but in dignity. It can also be ferocious, the ferocity of men, powerful men, like those Head describes in her autofiction. But women's ferocity would be in their will to recover self-respect, first as human beings then as women. In *A Q P*, Head does not play a very nice melody. It could have been blues with its 'blue notes'(see notes) but these are too wrong, painfully distorted. While Mphahlele's *D S A's* structure echoes jazz

music with features rendering a certain harmony in spite of what was described as a stagnant, unbearable atmosphere, Head's auto fiction lacks musicality, and the only record the reader remembers is the one Dan turned on and on to threaten and kill Elizabeth. Perhaps the only poetic, or aesthetic touch felt by the reader is Elizabeth's aspiration and hope - the word dream cannot be used given the meanings we know in *A Q P* - for a gesture of belonging to a world where the notion of race would disappear to let the way to a world of love and peace. Utopian? Certainly, but how much crucial for the survival of humanity.

Head closes the first chapter of *A Q P* with a prayer. She invokes God – though she did not believe in Him- "*never to contribute to create dead worlds, only new worlds*."(1974:100) The second chapter also ends with a note of love and peace which can be fulfilled only if men believe in men, in their ordinariness; "… *when a people wanted to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man*."(Ibid.,p. 206) Her concluding argument is a reiteration of her contempt and disdain for all that was or implied power, be it God. Aware of the corrosive attacks she would incur, she defended herself arguing that it was not God she meant but men's perception of God as a hidden power, creating and commanding everything and detaining alone all the powers. For her, "*no one was the be-all and end-all of creation, no one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life*."(Ibid.,p.35). She rather believed and argued that " *people, in their souls, were forces, energies, stars, planets, universe and all kinds of swirling magic and mystery…"*(Ibid).

A Q P is pregnant with expressions and symbols of power, including men's and Gods'. It is as well a text that requires some sort of power to be read and understood. Is it because it is written by a woman that it presents so many overtones? In other words, is it a feminine feature to leave their books open to debate and reflection, some would say uneasiness? For if the reader recognizes in

Head's story a final message of love, a lot of other questions remain still unanswered. Cixious writes: "*A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there is no closure, it does not stop, and it is this that very often makes the feminine text difficult to read.*" (1989:53) Some other feminist critics emphasize Cixious's argument and think that, in general, male writers seem more interested in closure while female writers respond with open-endings; they also assume that "*feminine logic in writing is associational, male logic-sequential-goal oriented*" and that "*male objectivity is challenged by female subjectivity*."(Willingham,1999:201) Linearity is furthermore stressed as being almost absent from women's writings. There are of course exceptions, but these identifications seem to fit Head's writing which is difficult, open-ended, made of flash-backs and in-and -out passages from dream to reality, madness to awareness …

3.7 CONCLUSION

Not feminist but feminine, Head shares with women textuality and one essential thing which is : motherhood. Perhaps is it feminism's political biases that made her stand aloof ? Nevertheless, feminists are the ones who argued that it is the possession of power that determines who is oppressed, another way of saying: It is 'a question of male power.' To this submerging power equated with evil and darkness, Head opposed goodness and light extorted from the very hell she experienced as a non-white in South Africa, as a refugee in Botswana and as a woman in a patriarchal society. These pressures were the cause of her nervous collapses and probably what made her completely change her vision of the world. In a sense her utopian vision was a triumph over many forms of power, colonial, racial, patriarchal. But could it have been a victory against loneliness which was Head's tragedy, when even God whose presence one needs and whose name one invokes in the most difficult moments, was not trusted? For this woman, the

road seems to have been narrow and short in spite of the universal embrace she dreamed of. Unlike Brink, she could not take or just missed the many forks in the road that would have perhaps offered her a place where she would have 'belonged'.

CHAPTER FOUR

André Brink's *A Fork in the Road*

Cultural Exile

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CHAPTER FOUR

André Brink's *A Fork in the Road*

Cultural Exile

4.1 Introduction

Making choices in life is assuming responsibilities. Never have great decisions been easy to take especially when they have to be recorded in history. Brink's resolution to walk on a path that was not traced for him, his bifurcations, his refusal to be blind to a reality and truth that imposed themselves on him and on a whole society, cost him two opposite attributes: "rebel" and "traitor". But this was not his only deviation. In a foreword to his memoir , *A Fork in the Road,* the author gives his own interpretations of what "choice" means, rectifying the conventional understanding that "*every choice one makes implies the elimination of others.*" (Brink, 2009:1). According to him, the choices not made continue to exist, just as the paths not taken continue to be travelled. If a painter has chosen to paint in red, or blue, or pink, a multitude of colours are still there, waiting another time to be used, he argues. Choices cannot be eliminated: they rather coexist. For Brink, this is what defines the texture of a life and to a great extent that of his work. The many forks in the road he encourages the reader to take "*what the hell*" (Brink,2009:3) , also make of him a 'wanderer' conscious of his choice as well as a 'heretic' who has yet taken an 'oath' to break the silence, for "*silence gives consent*", as the saying goes. Indeed, Brink was one of the very few people who distanced themselves from their white, theocratic and racist community. What set him apart or exiled him from the Afrikaners, was his

courage to say no to a system he nonetheless grew within, a system that fed him with values and principles he later vomited. So, if heresy means to disapprove an order that enslaves, dehumanizes and treads the dignity of men, women and children, then Brink deemed it a duty to claim it.

4.2 REBEL OR TRAITOR ?

As if to justify his heresy, or perhaps simply clarifying the meaning of this somewhat perilous word (knowing what -in the past and still in the present- awaited whoever proclaimed his/her opposition to an established order), Brink quotes Zerder-Chardovoire in the first pages of his memoir:

> Heresy comes from the Greek word meaning *choice*:
> For heresy to exist, there should be an ideology, a
> faith, to which a community adheres, and inside this
> community there must also be people who distance
> themselves, no longer accepting the received truths,
> in order to choose for themselves.
>
> (in Brink, 2009:3)

This is exactly the situation in which Brink was trapped and to which he reacted. His heresy or his choice can be seen as an act of rebellion, for to be a rebel is to refuse allegiance to an established government or to resist authority. Etymologically, the word rebel means to take up arms against authority. It is the definition found in dictionaries, but the implications and interpretations of the word can also be political and cultural. Taking up arms is warring i.e. adopting a countering position, saying no, with all the risks that such an attitude entails. As Rebelle writes in his essay on social rebellion, " *…because he opposes or transgresses, the rebel exposes himself to a confrontation with the representatives of the defied order.*"[47](2006). To define more clearly the position

[47] « … ;parcequ'il s'oppose ou transgresse, le rebelle s'expose à une confrontation avec les représentants de l'ordre défié ».

of Brink in such a context, it would be interesting to go back to Rebelle's explanations of how and where the rebel situates himself in this battlefield. First of all, the latter is convinced that "*to rebel is just, to disobey is a duty, to act is necessary*"[48](2006, http://www.xaviercrettiez.typepad.fr). These are the three key words that characterize the rebel's state of mind. He is convinced to be on the right way, and he is in the posture of a militant who is consequently going to act in order to defend that in which he believes. So as to achieve what may be called a mission, he needs to evolve in a group where he is going to construct his refusal and shift from an internal revolt to a social one. It is this approach that will help him transform his discontent into action. The risks can be serious depending on the nature of his rebellion and on the authority he resists. So, as far as Brink is concerned, he did not inscribe himself in a group at first, but the group of intellectuals he met in France was incentive and decisive for his rebellion. Later, he was himself a founding member of the famous cultural movement of contest in South Africa, the very criticized "Sestigers" (see notes), considered as traitors (instead of rebels) by the Afrikaan government and Nationalist Afrikaners. His basic principles as well were those of justice, disobedience in the sense of choice, and action through literature. He denied and denounced Apartheid, his fathers' ideology and conviction, with the risk of retaliation from the government; but this was nothing compared to the loss of his own father who never accepted his choice, his bifurcation. As he tells us, it was an important fork in the road, and he took it.

Brink recounts in his memoir how, having grown in a rural dorp (see glossary) in the Afrikaan conventional way, i.e. in the shadow of the Dutch reformed Church, he was taught that the white race was superior to the black one and how he had to believe in this without question. Son of a magistrate convinced of the Afrikaner supremacy, grandson of a soldier fighting the British in the Boer

[48] « Se rebeller est juste, désobéir est un devoir, agir est nécessaire ».

War (see notes), Brink was destined to be a pure product of the Afrikaans Volk (see glossary) if he had not taken other forks in the road. At an early stage in his life, he even considered following his parents' fondest wish to become a minister and "*take the cloth"*(2009:9), but a shift in his mind and life led him somewhere else. He could no longer bear "*the arid Calvinist services in those whitewashed interiors*"(2009:60), nor could he remove from his mind the growing and swelling idea that such authority on which everything depended, represented for him nothing but "*raw fear, and awe*". Actually, the very notion of rebellion emanated from the image of power that such an authority rendered. Only much later, it dawned on him:

> that it is the very *presence* of authority,
> the *fact* of power that evokes rebellion and
> makes it possible. Without the threat of power
> the heretic – the one who chooses- cannot exist.
>
> (Brink, 2009:61)

He was only fourteen when he decided not to go to Church on Sundays simply because, he 'remembers', he did not feel like going there. Not because he was fully aware of what he did but because the ritual had no longer any sense for him. Later, he realized that "*something in [him] was being prepared for more dangerous and more significant future choices*."(2009:62). Indeed, the future choices were to be very risky, for the rebel he was, soon became a *"traitor to the tribe."(*Hope, 2010, http://www.guardian.co) and this 'treason' had its origins in France where he travelled for the first time in 1959/1960, and again in 1968 during the students' upheavals, only to discover a world completely different from his.

In Paris, he met people of different races, nationalities and religions gathering around the same table, discussing literature, arts and politics. He was so

impressed and astonished to sit in front of black men, intelligent and highly educated, exchanging views with them while in South Africa this was inconceivable.

> For the first time in my life I sat down
> to share a meal with black people. It was
> a cultural shock so great that during the first
> evening I was barely able to eat.
>
> (Brink, 2009:143)

How could it be possible for him to throw away all the arguments and justifications given by the church to oppress the blacks and legitimize a system based on discrimination? Year after year, at home, at school he was brainwashed by accounts representing the blacks as brutal, murdering 'creatures'. As a child, he was told to be prudent, for a black man could hide under his bed and wait for the night to kill him. He grew with this frightening, haunting image of the blacks, "*the expression of [his] mind's insecurity during all [his] childhood*"[49](in Chaudey,2010, http://www.lavie.fr). So, to his mind, the "kaffirs" , the "heathens" (see glossary) could not be civilized. All the Afrikaners were brought up with these prejudices from childhood to adulthood. Aeschliman, a revolted white South African, confirms this bigotry saying that the duty of the South African government was "*to color [his] mind white, to impose on [him] a way of thinking, a way of seeing reality that would accept the blacks as backward*"(1986:35). Worse, he was to be taught that "*the horrors done by [him], a white, were actually 'for their benefit' and sealed with the blessings of God Almighty Himself.* "(Ibid).

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[49] « l'expression de l'insécurité de mon esprit pendant toute mon enfance. »

Growing with this ‘holy’ conviction was devastating for the young Brink who had then to confront another vision of reality. It was upsetting but at the same time provoking a sudden awareness accompanied by a feeling of guilt that gained Brink the adult: “*How could anyone, I often wonder, how could I, not see what was happening in the country, what was going to happen?*”(2009:41) Interviewed by Delaroche, Brink evokes again with regret the ‘fact’ that had to be accepted and that was never questioned, i.e. separateness. The permanent tension that resulted from it had become an accepted life-style in both communities (2010,http://www.lexpress.fr). Tension was so familiar, so present that “*perhaps*” it “ *[became] normal after a while.*”(Brink,2009:41). To illustrate this separateness, ‘aparthood’ or ‘apart-hate’ as it is ironically called in South Africa, Brink often recounts – in his memoirs and in his interviews - an anecdote about the friendship of a white and a black little boys going to the same preschool in the new South Africa. The two boys were inseparable and completely unaware of their whiteness or blackness until one day the black boy’s father comes to pick up his son from school. When the white kid saw the latter, he gaped at him in surprise. The day after, waiting with excitement for his friend, he cried as soon as he met him: “*You never told me that your daddy was black.*” (2009:41). For Brink and for anyone who hears of it, this incident is full of teachings and implications. On the one hand, it is a lesson on humanity and love because the very notion of colour and difference did not exist in the boys’ minds. They looked at each other as friends with the ‘colour’ of brotherhood, and that was a sign of hope and change in the new South Africa. On the other hand, the sad message lying beneath the anecdote is that mentalities are very slow to change. For if the innocent, pure, little white boy recognized the blackness of his father’s friend, this supposes that he has fatally inherited a three-centuries’ prejudice which is not easy to obliterate even though he were unaware of it. However, it is preferable to be optimistic and think that in the mind of the boy,

perhaps, the colour bar existed only in the adults' world since he could 'see' the blackness of the father and not that of the son.

Thus, the "*awakening to black and white*" (Brink, 2009:41) took place in France. There, the shock occurred, and Brink was so grateful to this country which had stirred his 'senses', for he did not just see but also tasted the flavor of democracy, fraternity and equity for which the French had fought long before, and during his sojourns there. As he recounts in his memoir, his passion for France, started with a 'love affair' with Jeanne d'Arc when he was not yet fourteen. He, who wrote enormously on women, introduced her in one of her novels, *On the Contrary* (1993), as a "*homage to one of the most meaningful women in my life*"(2009:129). Following her through her journey from Orleans to Paris, to Rouen, in admiration of her bravery, Brink the Afrikaans teenager, was all the more impressed by the woman and martyr, when she was later burned by the English who were "*the traditional enemies of [his]people.*"(2009:130). From then, he writes, "*the intimate bond between us was sealed forever.*"(Ibid).

A whole chapter titled "*France*" is devoted to his bond with this country where he "*really belonged*" (2009:132). It is interesting to note here that Brink's feeling of belonging alludes much more to a 'cultural space' than to a geographical or physical one. The France he loved and where he was reborn (as he very often speaks of rebirth), his second 'home' after South Africa, was that of Baudelaire, Verlaine, Zola, Sagan, Gide and many more, all of whom appealed to him intellectually, culturally, emotionally and offered him a space where to dwell. But above all, it was that of Camus "*who had been [his] Bible*"(Brink,2009:132), and the "*phare*"(2009:132) of his life; Camus whom he did not merely admire but loved, Camus whose ideas profoundly influenced him and impelled him to change and rebel. For in his novel, *L'homme révolté*,(1951) the writer insists on the necessity of revolt to be taken not just as a motto, but as "*man's essential*

dimension" since "*it reveals that which must be defended in man*"[50](1951:30) In fact, the theme of rebellion has often inspired artists and writers because it conveys man's aspirations to live in dignity, peace and love even if the means used to reach such ideals are often violent and contrary to the very values and principles defended. In Camus' *"Les justes*", (a play translated by Brink in Afrikaans under the title *Die Terroriste* in 1970), Kaliayev, the poet and militant, volunteers to throw a bomb on the Duke and mark his involvement in the cause of justice. He wants to take part in the revolution against the tyranny and despotism that reigned in Russia. He tells Dora the reason why he does it: "*Do you know why I asked to throw the bomb*? *To die for the idea, is the only way to be at the level of the idea. It is the justification*"[51](1950-1977:38) For him, the *idea* is a revolution for life, happiness and love. He is ready to sacrifice his own life to offer a chance to live to the others, "*Revolution, of course! But a revolution for life, to give a chance to life, do you understand*?"(1977:36) "*Do you understand*?" is the question that backs the poet's argumentation, as if to convince his interlocutor (but also the reader) of the legitimacy of the act i.e. murder. To Dora's remark that in spite of any justification one is going to kill, Kalianev again answers: "*Oh no it isn't the same thing! We kill to build a world where nobody will ever kill. We accept to be criminals so that the earth will be full of innocents*"[52](1977:37) Dying so that the others do not die, killing so that the others would not be killed is quite a dangerous reasoning even though the argument, in the fervor of the instant, is pure, noble, legitimate, and vociferously echoes 'the duty of violence'! It is dangerous and tragic because the price of life is always equated with death.

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[50] « …la révolte est profondément positive puisqu'elle révèle ce qui,en l'homme est toujours à défendre……La révolte est l'une des dimensions essentielles de l'homme .»

[51] « Comprends-tu pourquoi j'ai demandé à lancer la bombe ? Mourir pour l'idée, c'est la seule façon d'être à la hauteur de l'idée. C'est la justification. »

[52] « Oh non ce n'est pas la même chose. Et puis nous tuons pour bâtir un monde où plus jamais personne ne tuera ! Nous acceptons d'être criminels pour que la terre se couvre enfin d'innocents. »

In *A F R,* Brink quotes some passages he had written in a diary while he was in Paris, a technique that embeds testimonies and memories within memoirs, and which endows his present memoir with even more vividness and strength. Much like letters retracing the life history of an author, these writings are autobiographical data that complete the writer's account of himself. Mphahlele's biographer, Noel Chabani Manganyi asserts that the letters – in Brink's case, the diary – are "*data with a voice of its own*" (1984:2) that will confirm and enrich other images in the memoir. As a witness and a participant to the students' uprisings on May, 1968, he expresses his thoughts – in fact his own anger - at that moment of "*sound and fury*"(2009:280). In his opinion, violence, vandalism or chaos cannot be agreed on, but what is more deplorable is what leads to such a situation and what has not been done to stop the escalation. In a kind of justification of violence he says: "*What I do find horrifying is that a situation should have developed in which other-wise serious-minded and responsible young men should be driven to a point where they see violence as the only effective means of protest at their disposal*."(Brink,2009:280) Then Brink goes beyond justification to legitimization of violence supporting the argument according to which a society in which there is no revolution is a *"petrified" and "fossilized"* one (2009:280). Recalling the South African poet Van Wyk Louw's words, he thinks that "*the real danger in any society resides in an entire generation coming and going without protest*."(2009:280). Brink definitely declares his position as to the alternative of violence in a world where non-violence leads to more repression. Violence "*may sometimes be necessary*" (2009:281), one has "*to grab with force*", "*it becomes necessary to assume the audacity and responsibility of violence in order to come a little bit closer to peace*" (2009:281) these and other similar expressions are actually declarations that reveal the revolutionary spirit of Brink who seems to be convinced of the necessity to offend so as to defend,

> In a world where Hitler's camps, the atrocities of the Congo, the horror of Hungary, the massacre of Vietnam, the extermination in Nigeria have become commonplace, there is not much room for hope or patience. To do nothing, or to offer only passive or non-violent resistance, merely allows evil to proliferate around you.
>
> (Brink,2009:281)

Whether Brink was ready to risk his life for the others is not the appropriate question. It should be rather asked whether Brink was prepared to the worst for the sake of living better in South Africa, *better* implying *with* the Blacks, in a just and peaceful society. He who claimed and repeated that Camus was his spiritual guide could have had Kalianev's profile. Like him, he threw a 'bomb' on the regime, a book that provoked a big explosion amid the Afrikaan community. In 1974, the Afrikaan establishment was hit by the sensational news that Brink's *Kennis van die aand*, later translated into English as *Looking on Darkness*, had been banned. It was indeed a revolutionary and compelling novel which can be seen as his first major cry of rebellion. The book is a fusion of profound historical reconstruction and metaphoric statement of sexual and emotional scenes, which provoked a burning debate among the Afrikaners, audience, writers and critics. Most of them hated Brink for his 'perversion' which added notoriety to his 'treason'. Possibly the most eclectic South African writer at the time, he hit the conservative Afrikaan literary tradition with themes and techniques imported from abroad, mainly from France.

Looking on Darkness tells the story of Joseph Malan, a coloured man and a descendant of slaves who succeeds as an actor after winning a grant to study in London. Back home, he launches a cultural assault against apartheid. The novel's 'sin' is about a passionate love affair Joseph develops with a white (British)

woman illustrating thus the impossibility of love across the colour line. The main character is victim of creepy maneuvers led by the Security Police against his theatre group. The novel ends tragically, (but not so convincingly) with Joseph murdering his lover, whereupon the Security Police half kill him in indescribably brutal fashion. He is sentenced to death, and the narrative is written from the death cell on sheets of paper which Joseph daily flushes down the toilet, to escape the scrutiny of his gaolers. It should be observed here and again that the reader of South African literature is pursued not to say haunted by the appalling image of prisons described by different writers. It is a space which, however detestable, turns out to be 'familiar' to its 'occupiers' and through them to the reader who becomes not only a spectator but also a witness of human degradation and destruction. Ironically, prisons in South Africa (particularly) are more familiar than the detainees' homes since they spend more time in them than in their own houses. To get rid of this unbearably familiar place, those who have the chance to write, record anything and everything. Before even preserving a memory, they strive to preserve their mental health. As stated earlier (chapter 1), writing whenever and on whatever it is possible to write, is therefore the only means of survival for the prisoners. In his article "*Toilet Paper Writing*" , Lakhdar-Barka , argues that for the prisoner, "*the urgency of the toilet paper remains the only means to materialize a painful present and to project it in history. Writing becomes a help- reflex, a duty".*[53](1988:10)

Talking about 'toilet- paper', the thing proved to be not just practical but crucial in prison. It was a device and a symbol of deliverance since it offered the writer a space to release his pains and, tragi-comically, to record history. Testimonies from everywhere aver the usefulness of the 'recorder'; for example,

[53] « Dés lors on comprendra l'urgence du papier hygiénique qui reste le seul moyen de matérialiser un douloureux présent, et de le projeter dans l'histoire. Ecrire devient un réflexe de secours, un devoir ».

Ngugi Wa Thiongo, the famous Kenyan writer, recounts in *Detained, A Writer's Prison Diary,* that

> the same good old toilet-paper - which had been useful to Kwame Nkrumah in James Fort Prison, to Dennis Brutus on Robben Island, to Abdilatif Abdallah in G.Block, Komiti, and to countless other persons with similar urges – has enabled me to defy the intended detention of my mind.
>
> (Ngugi,1981:6)

The target is the mind, for if this is attained, then death is concretized. But if it is not, and even if the body is disabled, the menace of other steve Bikos investing the place will remain.

Looking on Darkness sets the pattern for Brink's later novels in several important respects. Very few writers had engaged with issues of race and politics in such crudeness and audacity as Brink did. But what was worse for his countrymen whose enmity he had earned, was the fact of writing in their own language: Afrikaans. *Looking on Darkness* was the first Afrikaan novel to be banned under the country's 1963 censorship legislation reserved for Communist publications, and 'morally and politically perverse' writing in English. The measure was dissuasive and repressive, but it could not detain Brink in the prison of silence. In fact, he translated his novel into English and became, henceforth, an international novelist.

France in 1968, was for Brink a new illustration of the revolution. He was so concerned by the event that at times he could be mistaken for a French. His identification with the French people, students or activists was a commitment he had started to transfer to his own country. It is amazing to read such involvement

in a cause that was after all French, but in which Brink certainly found a universal dimension: justice. In a passage reporting the students' uprisings, Brink completely merges with the French, so deeply that he uses the 'we' narrator in what had ultimately become his own combat:

> After a long night in the streets- a few of *us* were in a small restaurant in the rue des Ecoles when yet another street fight broke out and the patron helped *us* to get through the black alley; but then there was no way of getting *home* and *we* had to join the mass of demonstrators and fight against the government's decision………….
>
> (Brink, 2009:291)

Brink, the rebel, realized in Paris, at a time that coincided with the Sharpeville massacre, that he would be a traitor if he remained silent in front of the horrors perpetrated in his country. His trip to France was a turning point in his life, and May 1968 the confirmation of his change and commitment as a writer:

> All I know for sure is that, in the process, I have irrevocably become a 'political person'. From now on it would be hypocritical to imagine that politics can remain a separate, clearly demarcated territory within my overall experience. It is everywhere, it permeates everything. It cannot ever again be set apart.
>
> (Brink, 2009:297)

With this state of mind and unambiguous resolution, Brink prepared himself to return to South Africa. He could not bear the idea that if similar events would take place in South Africa, he would be so far and would miss the most important rendez vous with history.

4.3 BRINK'S EXILES AND SPACES.

In spite of his attachment to France, and of the fact that he felt much at ease in that environment which he had already visited in the volumes of books he had read, Brink still used the word "stranger" when referring to himself, his wife and the foreign friends he met in that country. In reality, this estrangement occurred at very particular moments when a feeling of humanism and togetherness was being engendered by the meeting of intellectuals, scholars and artists coming from all parts of the world. These were the instants when all of them felt naturally as strangers in a land that was not theirs, a land that offered asylum for some, tourism or academic ground for others, but which they had to leave sooner or later. As Brink confides, all these strangers developed a sense of communion and formed a sort of community under the name of humanity. Blacks and Whites were all "*strangers in a strange land*" , "*struggling against le cafard*", and "*eager to face the new challenges*" (Brink,2009:143).

In his essay "*Doing Paris with Breyten*" , Nkosi reports the same facts experienced by Brink in exile. Nkosi's first encounter with Paris was during his boyhood in South Africa. The earliest books he borrowed introduced him to "*the literary embodiment of European history*"(1983:81) which allowed him to travel to France without even imagining that he would do it in some distant future. When he finally touched the ground of Paris, he found out a city which impassioned artists who sometimes came for a few days but remained for years.
As he testifies, Paris is the capital of all exiles, where exiles meet and live with other exiles and where everybody being exiled never meets somebody who is not. Therefore the place becomes the home for the homeless, which makes people live their lives as normal human beings since the sign of their 'strangeness' is no longer singled out. Everybody's alienation becomes the specific condition of 'normality'. So, when 'exile' becomes the norm, differences flash out and exclusion fades away.

Yet, like many exiles, Brink experienced homesickness and solitude although he recognized that he had always been a solitary person since he was a child. As he confides in his interview, during his trips he felt even more solitary in spite of meetings and experiences. He always cherished the moment when he took refuge in his room, alone. He felt comfort in this absence from the world which, for him, is nothing but "*the celebration of the vastness of life , the impression of comprehending it better. If one is alone, one can fill time with so many thoughts and imaginings and embark on so remarkable adventures.*"[54](2010, http://www.lexpress.fr). In a way, it was this distance which solitude created between him and the others that made him perceive things –the things of life- differently and perhaps earlier than he himself realized. The theme of solitude examined in the first chapter of this thesis applies as well to Brink. The withdrawal of the writer, this necessary confinement, this feeling of otherness seems to be the common feature of writers. With Brink, it was even more complex given the position he held as a dissident Afrikaan writer. So, what was his place in South Africa ? As an Afrikaner who has turned his back to his own community, where does he belong?

Thinking in terms of space, geographical or physical , the title of his memoir, taken literally, already draws the map of Brink's 'location' (if the word location is ever allowed to be used here). As imagined, the picture is that of a road with many bifurcations which he is ready to take. Brink is therefore a traveler, a nomad who does not settle in the same place, which he tells us in his book. With him, the reader visits numerous towns and countries , from Africa, to Europe to America. His stopovers in space and time are so frequent and so rich, so full of experiences, both joyful and sad, so full of teachings, that one is eager to follow

[54] « La manifestation de l'ampleur de la vie, l'impression de mieux la comprendre. Si on est seul, on peut remplir ce temps avec tellement de pensées, d'imagination et embarquer dans des aventures remarquables. »

him if only by curiosity. He is a wanderer, an errant adventurer, and as such he is instable and displaced. If the highway ,i.e. South Africa is still in construction (or destruction) then he has to look for byways and subways. In the process, much time and energy are worn out. Yet, Brink is courageous and patient, for he tries many forks in the road, each leading to other tracks, but at the end converging towards the same destination, indicating the same place, defining the same landscape: that of freedom and justice. The space alluded to is cultural, social and political. It is Brink's 'home', where he 'belongs', and this 'home', he wants to build it in South Africa transforming thus the space into place, concretizing it. What appears like an ambiguity between space and place is clarified by Carter in, *Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location'* as follows:

> It is not spaces which ground identifications but places. How then does space become place? By being named; as the flows of power and negotiation of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture; and also, of course, by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population. Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed."
>
> (Carter, 1993:XII)

What could the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population be in the context of Apartheid if not their aspirations to a better life, their dreams of a free and democratic society? Only when these are attained will there be a place for everyone in South Africa. This notion of space/place is also confirmed and developed by Darian-Smith and Nuttall who see that it is through the cultural process of imagining, seeing, historicizing and remembering, that space is transformed into place, and geographical territory into a culturally defined landscape (1996).

How a space is invested is what makes of it a place. This idea calls to mind an interesting interpretation of the notion of space/place put forward by the

anthropologist and Africanist Marc Augé, author of *Non-Lieux.Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (1992). According to him, place or "lieu" has first of all an anthropological signification. It is a closed place, with definite frontiers, where a social organization and cultural values are set. Thus, human groups symbolize the territories which they invest and where they settle. It is their lifestyle, traditions, religion, history and memory, which is prescribed then transcribed into a space. So it is this symbolization of space which is called place. In opposition to 'place' , Augé also acquaints us with what he calls 'non-places' or "non-lieux" which he defines as spaces which are no longer places because they do not symbolize identity. He gives as concrete examples, large spaces like the airport where people only pass or the highway where they only circulate. (Augé in Monsacré,1993:32-33-34). Such a definition is particularly appealing if one considers again the title of Brink's memoir, for it immediately establishes a link between the 'highway' and the 'road'. In other words, one is tempted to construe the 'road' as a 'non-place', and deduce that Brink, having bifurcated, was in quest of a 'place', that to which Augé assigns a symbol and an identity. But this reasoning can be problematic if we consider that the 'road' referred to, does have a symbol and an identity which is Apartheid. This hypothesis may be too farfetched but it is plausible; moreover, it launches the debate on how identity is constructed in a multi-cultural society, or to put it accurately, in a racist, classist, patriarchal society. The question that follows then is, is South Africa a 'place' or a 'non-place'? For the Afrikaners, it certainly was a place, but for the non-whites it was not. For, as Breytenbach asserts, "*Apartheid is the state and condition of being apart. It is the no man's land between peoples.....It is the space of the white man's being. It is the distance needed to convince himself of his denial of the other's humanity. It ends up denying all humanity of any kind both to the other and to himself*"(in La Guma,1972:138-139).

Is it possible to talk about identity in a no man's land or to locate a non-white in a white man's space? A human logic would not accept it, but the reality of South Africa, in other words the logic of Apartheid, with its confusing paradoxes does since Blacks and Coloureds are attributed "locations", like *Second Avenue* or *District Six* or *Sophia Town* which are difficult to define as 'places' or 'non-places'. They can be considered as places in the sense that their inhabitants developed a sense of community and solidarity as people held apart, thus sharing the same life and sensibilities, even an identity: the Blacks or the Coloureds as opposed to the Whites. Obviously, the fact of categorization that obeys the rules and principles of Apartheid remains, but from it, a collective feeling is generated, perhaps the one that is most preciously conserved. In a chapter entitled "*The Location*" (in *D S A)* Mphahlele gives the first impressions he had of *Second Avenue* when he arrived from the countryside: "*Avenues and streets were new to us. Now why would people go and build houses in a straight line? Why would people want to be cut off from one another by putting fences?..........And yet although people did not seem to be interested in one another, they spoke with a subtle unity of voice. They still behaved as a community*."(Mphahlele, 1959:34) Mphahlele's expression of estrangement and astonishment as to the structure of the location is very suggestive. It reflects anxiety and a sense of loss in yet an 'organized' area. It seems that this spatial structure is insidiously de-structuring the minds in the sense that a certain 'order' or organization is imposed on them, made for them, which is totally alienating. The location with its straight lines, its fences, its rigidity, its coldness is unfamiliar to Africans. It is a space more than a place because the African culture and tradition hardly subsist in it. In fact, the location immediately calls to mind a refugees camp with the 'exiles' label as an identity. The sense of order in the distribution of space in town does not correspond to the traditional distribution of space in the African village. It is therefore disturbing as it necessarily requires a different conception of human relationships that "fences" break. And yet, what the space did not provide i.e. a

homely atmosphere, was reinvented in another space, that of the “voice”, a unity found again, that recreated the feeling of belonging to a group: the community. Brink will endure this feeling of unease from being ‘out of place’ once abroad.

It would have been useless to discuss the subject of identity if Brink had not himself questioned the cultural, educational and political issues of his country. Brink is deeply attached to his Afrikaan origins and language. By his own admission , he remains, in essence, an Afrikaner, and to him, writing in English is not a translation . Brink maintains that he produces the novels in both languages more or less simultaneously, starting out in Afrikaans, but completing the first "final" draft in English. By doing so, it appears that Brink attempts to re-appropriate a linguistic space of which censorship dispossessed him. He wanted to recover a sense of being because as he says, “*after being knocked by censorship, I felt like a ‘non-person’. The only way to get out of the blind alley was to start writing in English.*”[55](Brink in Delaroche &Fournier,2010, http://www.lexpress.fr)

He uses English as an extension of Afrikaans restoring thus two spaces at a time. The shift from Afrikaans to English and vice-versa became such a natural flow, as if the two were the same language. While he started writing English for practical reasons, to avoid banning, this language contributed to his celebrity.

How language is conceived by Brink is quite relevant to the notion of space/place discussed above. He, in fact, speaks seven languages. Although his predisposition for learning such languages is admirable, it should not be surprising knowing how frequently he traveled and how much curious he was to discover lands and people. According to him, each language has a particularity

[55] « Après avoir été frappé par la censure, je me sentais comme une sorte de ‘non-personne’.La seule façon de sortir de l’impasse était de commencer à écrire en anglais. »(my translation)

that cannot be expressed elsewhere, and it is this very specific, strange and wonderful thing that is hidden in the core of language that he wishes to approach. For him, learning a new language is meeting a new space, a people, a society.[56](in Delaroche & Fournier,op.cit.). In other words, language is what defines or identifies a space. Now if one is not allowed to express himself in his own language, it means that he has lost his space, and consequently his identity. Brink was therefore doubly 'exiled', for he not only suffered from "*the spiritual agony of a writer whose works are kept away from the people for whom he has written in the first place*"(Brink,1983:36), but also from being forbidden to write in Afrikaans. However, he never ceased to use his native language because he wanted to show the world that Afrikaans was not just the language of oppression or Apartheid but also the language of resistance. The world had to be informed that Afrikaans was much greater than the governing minority that took it to produce a political power.

Brink's passion for Afrikaans also comes from the history of this language and from what can be viewed as the irony of fate. It is a language pregnant with memories from all over the world because it was first of all the language of indigenous peoples and imported slaves from Indonesia, Malaysia, Malabar, Madagascar, Mozambique, Angola, who attempted to speak Dutch, which was the colonial language, and transformed it into something new, "*a local fabrication*"(Brink,2009:182). Afrikaans was for a century and a half the language of the under-class, largely of half-breeds, "*speaking a patois derided as Kitchen Dutc*h" (Ibid). It was identified with the oppressed and the deprived. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the language was appropriated by a group of white men who used it as a political device to fight against the domination of English and Dutch at the Cape. After coming to power, Afrikaans

[56] « C'est une façon de me dire chaque fois que je vais dans un pays, qu'il me faut auparavant apprendre la langue pour me préparer à la rencontre d'un nouvel espace, d'un peuple, d'une société. »

also served as the language of power, later the language of Apartheid. How ironic and "*how fitting, how emblematic, that in this context the very name 'Afrikaner' should have forged in opposition to the ruling class, as a sign of the heretic*."(2009:181) For Brink, "*Afrikaans is the symbol of the plurality of the worlds within it*"[57](in Delaroche &Ferniot, op.cit.).

Another space that offered Brink full expression and an extreme pleasure was theatre. One of the most productive and enthusiastic periods of his life, were the 1970's , during which he was involved in this literary genre. Writing, translating plays, working with actors on the stage, he developed a passion for what he described as a "*thing of beauty coming to life in front of [our] eyes, drawing all of us into the act of creation itself*"(Brink,2009:88). This creative energy, with its intensity, was unique to the theatre, and it was from this place where the art of word and gesture transmitted powerful messages of resistance against the ravages of the apartheid system. On the other hand, it was a space where a quest of identity was carried out even though, as Carré says in her article, "*the quest of the self and the attempt to reconstruct an identity guides the theater, but this quest knows in advance that its purpose is only fictitious , for identity does not allow the subject to possess himself/herself entirely; it is only a moving process that breaks all certitude and delimitation*."[58](2009, http://agon.ens-lyon.fr).

Nevertheless, it was not this assumption that dissuaded Brink from pursuing his enriching experience in the field of theatre. What hampered his quest as well as his discovery was censorship. As he explains, the theatre was vulnerable; the mere complaint from one member of the audience could lead to cancellation.

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[57] « Elle est le symbole de la pluralité des mondes qui se trouvent en elle, à l'intérieur de cette langue qui s'appelle l'afrikaans »

[58] « La quête de soi et la tentative de reconstruire une identité guide le théâtre…..Mais cette quête sait d'avance que son but n'est que fictif, car l'identité ne permet jamais de se cerner entièrement soi-même, de se posséder ; elle n'est qu'un processus mouvant, brisant toute certitude et toute délimitation »

Knowing that his plays had no chance to be widely read, he was regrettably compelled to suspend their writing for about twenty years. He preferred to direct his energy towards novels where there was always a possibility to find "*some space…in which to maneuver… if one played it skillfully and before it could* be *banned*."(Brink,2009:86). If only a few copies were published and circulated, the mission was partly achieved.

How considerable was the influence of theater on Brink is a question to which *Looking on Darkness* can provide many answers. Indeed, the writer's thirst for playwriting shows even in his novel which abounds not to say is inhabited with references to drama. In fact, *Looking on Darkness* resembles a tragedy likely to be performed and bearing the stamp of Shakespeare. Beginning with the title which is borrowed from one of Shakespeare's sonnets cited in the annex of the book, Brink creates numerous effects that send the reader back to *Romeo and Juliet* or *Othello*. The theme of death invites tragedy and draws parallels between the novel and these plays. For example, while Othello kills Desdemona because there is a Iago who incites to crime, Joseph kills Jessica because there is a society that refuses their love. In both stories, the fatal outcome is death : the murder of a woman by a man.

Other theatrical elements that pervade the novel are the structure of the book which is divided into seven chapters. As Joseph-Vilain observes in her article « Le théâtre dans *Looking on Darkness* d'André Brink : le roman d'un acteur » (2004, http://erea.revues.org) a close look at these chapters in addition to Shakespeare's sonnets can be read as a piece of drama, with as chapter 1, the prologue, announcing the inexorable tragedy, "*I'm not writing this for them but only for myself, here, now, in the days or weeks before I'm taken by the deep, dark lady, death*" (Brink,1993:8). Chapters II, III, IV, V et VI would be the five acts of the tragedy. Chapter VII would be the epilogue,

whereby the hero draws a sort of recapitulation of what his life has been and what it is going to be before departing. At the end , Shakespeare's sonnets that figure in the annex could be an afterpiece that clarifies certain aspects of the play.

To add to the intensity of the play within the novel, Brink chooses as a hero an actor and scenario-writer who is going himself to make adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. But what is more interesting in the context of theatre as a quest of identity and as a place, is Joseph's own revelations. All along the novel, he describes himself as a « restless » person who is unable to find his place. After his stay in London where he was a stranger, he comes back to a South Africa which he could not recognize. *District Six*, the Coloureds' 'location' had been removed so that Whites settle in their 'place'. His feeling of exclusion and displacement disappeared only in the theatre where he found refuge. The theater was an illusion perhaps more real than reality, "*And from within the theatre, my only reliable reality, I could begin to redefine my world*" (Brink,1993:199).

It became a 'place', a sort of home, in other words an identity for Joseph who had nevertheless chosen theatre for the continual movement it provides: "*What I'd chosen was the theatre, here tonight and gone tomorrow…. possibility rather than certainty, hope rather than consummation ; and wandering rather than any chance of arriving at a destination"* (Brink,1993:167). These words loudly echo Brink's 'forks in the road', Brink who wandered in the world taking not one destination but many, opting for change, in quest of the new, the exhilarating , rather than the safe , dull and narrow in his country. Brink like Joseph were 'displaced' men perhaps unconsciously in quest of a place. At the end of the novel Joseph finds his ultimate place in suffering and death like all tragic heroes. He knows it; he feels it; it was "*not a hereafter, but a hereness*"(Brink,1993:392) At last, he is going to settle among those he belongs to, his family, his mother, all

dead: "*My place is with her and the others. I'm not alone tonight, they are all with me, the long dark row. I am not the victim of my history. What happens, has been chosen by myself. I do not undergo it, I create it. I abandon myself to them.*"(Brink,1999:393).

The macabre is sometimes more healing than the living reality. Feeling as a 'non-person' in a 'non-place' is more tragic than being dead and buried. A cemetery, for example, is the last and most certain place,(unless one is Hindu or has formulated the wish to be reduced to ashes), where identities are graved on stones harder than memories. It is a place where dead bodies whose souls in peace or tormented still deserve respect, if only because man realizes at that precise moment when he is bending solemnly over a tomb, how little he is and often how stupid. How absurdly absurd his life can be in a world of lies and hypocrisy, of meanness and cruelty, and how painful and frustrating it is when evil keeps triumphing and defying heart and reason.

For the reader, the road is long and tortuous. It is full of road signs indicating 'homes' and 'places' where Brink can be spotted. Sometimes it is Paris, sometimes South Africa, other times the impression one is left with, is that of a man who, in spite of his attempts at finding his 'place' in this world, rather finds the world as his place. Perhaps is this due to the universal and human dimension that seems to be a feature of South African writers in their various colours and shades. Mphahlele, Head, Brink genuinely incarnate the 'rainbow nation' at the same time as they belong to the same race: the writers'.

In fact, Brink does not suffer from a crisis of identity but rather from what he calls " *the dilemma of being white*"(2009:192) in South Africa. He tried to explore and confront the white –and- black reality from the outside, i.e. when he was in Paris. There, his political consciousness started to be shaped. He admits,

however, that he did not wish to get involved in what happened in South Africa, that he was not yet ready for it. This is why he "*lived an in-between existence between Paris and Paris*"(2009:193) As a writer, he felt that he "*could not identify sufficiently with the country, to write about it*" and that the fact of keeping on turning like a sunflower to Paris meant that *"[he] did not belong.*"(2009:194). Such an avowal reveals Brink's hesitation and shows the difficulty one meets to construct one's identity in South Africa.

Thus Brink undergoes many exiles and paradoxes at the same time. Geographically, he feels as a stranger in France while culturally it is the place where he belongs. As for South Africa, it is his mother country but he denied her, not by ingratitude but because she had herself deprived her infants of any sense of humanity; this sense is what he wished to preserve and write about in his books. However, writing about human relationships in the shade of Apartheid, especially in Afrikaans language, resulted in censorship, another form of exile imposed on him since, as said earlier, he turned to English to be able to publish some of his works.

A decade elapsed during which Brink evaluated the situation or as he said simply tried to understand something about this "extraordinarily difficult country"(2009:192). After many out and in journeys, he decided to return to South Africa without yet excluding the eventuality of taking other forks in the road as long as the latter remained a "no man's land". He had come back to South Africa where he met a group of Afrikaan intellectuals who influenced him considerably. All of them had broken out of the Afrikaan laager (see glossary) and had supported opposition actively. As Brink tells us, the thing that he enjoyed most and that motivated him particularly was the fact that these persons interacted easily and naturally with Blacks who had become their friends: "*They provoked [his] mind into thinking through matters that [his] stay in Paris had*

introduced but not developed far enough. Through them, for the first time in [his] life, [he] made real friends with some black people."(2009:193) He was extremely grateful to them and to a certain 'H' – a woman whose name is not revealed in his memoir - who helped him shape and structure his political conscience. From then on, his view on the role of the writer and on writing, namely in South Africa, altered. He had become what he once thought he was not and would never be : a political writer, "*By temperament I was never a political writer*", but "*from that time on I could not write anything that was not political*". So how much politics pervaded the works of a white writer in South Africa is worth examining and comparing with black writings.

4.4 WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Mphahlele, Head, Nkosi, Gordimer, Sachs,Breytenbach and many other South African writers, both whites and non-whites expressed their views on the difficulty of writing in a country like theirs. In chapter 2, it has been referred to the fact that in their majority the blacks had produced autobiographical novels or auto fiction and that it was their position in society that imposed on them this form of writing. In a society where tension is the norm, reality can be mistaken for fiction, or when, in Gordimer's words, "the unnatural seems natural" the horrible and the banal are one and the same. It is therefore this image of the 'believed-unbelievable' that is faithfully rendered in their works. Seldom is the story sensational in the sense that something takes place and attracts the –white- reader's attention, or keeps him/her on the alert. 'Action' is not a characteristic of black writing. The story is rather of the everlasting type, with an effect of repetition that 'annoys' the –white- reader and produces the feeling that "nothing happens" as the critics put it. But this impression that "nothing happens" is not a flaw in black writing ; it is rather a mode of writing intended to show that in South Africa and for the blacks mainly, there is no "*development of actions*" but

"*the representation of conditions.*"(Gordimer,1991:269). Their living conditions are the material for writing, and in this case it is their story.

And you will ask: why doesn't his poetry
Speak of dreams and leaves
And the great volcanoes of his native land?

Come and see the blood in the streets
Come and see
The blood in the streets
Come and see the blood
In the streets!

(Neruda in Brink,2009:372)

In defense of the lack of aesthetics and stylistics in their literature, black South African authors argued that the urgency of their situation required that they denounce and analyse rather than romanticize. Many of them justified the lack of creation and creativity as something quite understandable in a society where people were still fighting for the primary sources of existence and for something called human dignity, whence the debate on the role of the writer in South Africa. Is art for art's sake acceptable in a country in turmoil? "*What is poetry which does not save nations or people*?"(Milosz in Mariani,1991:267). What audience is expected by the writer? A quiet, peaceful one or, on the contrary, men and women whose everyday life is a struggle for survival? These questions which have been dealt with previously, are asked in this chapter to white writers whose fight against Apartheid cannot be denied and whose 'gesture' was time and again stirring Brink's mind. Before he himself took the irrevocable decision to side with the Blacks against Apartheid, he had been inspired by men who had put their lives at stake for the idea. He could understand that Blacks sacrifice anything for the cause, for their freedom and lives, but the whites were paying the same price for the "others"(Brink, 2009:191) while they could go on living

comfortably; “*In a country like South Africa, they had everything going for them. **They were white***.”(Ibid., p.192).

Indeed, it could be affirmed that white writers, however involved in the cause against Apartheid, were not subjected to the same pressures as the non-whites were. In “Letter to *Frontline*”, Bishop Desmond Tutu, attests to this fact saying that “*however much they want to identify with blacks it is an existential fact… that they have not really been victims of this baneful oppression and exploitation.*”(1982:4). The proof is that they were prolific writers who could ‘create’ three to five hundred-pages books almost regularly. Although they were threatened by censorship, imprisonment and other forms of dissuasion meant to generate a feeling of claustrophobia and paralysis, they continued to ‘dream’ and write and produce great works for which they received awards. It may be argued that such prizes were after all conferred thanks to or because of Apartheid as Johnson remarks in his article:

> the fact is that the desire to reward the anti-apartheid cause led to a certain inflation of careers and reputations. If you look at the Nobel prizes won by Gordimer, Chief Albert Luthuli, Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk, you're bound to say that all those prizes were won essentially because of apartheid:JMCoetzee is the only South African whose Nobel had nothing to do with that. With the ending of that heroic period there is inevitably a revaluation.
>
> (2009, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk)

This remains a fact, but what cannot be denied is that their writings were much more abundant than the non-whites’ in the field of fiction or ‘creation’. However, fiction does not mean mere ‘escapism’, for it would be unfair and wrong to judge white writings as romances or narratives bearing no interest in the combat against injustice. On the contrary, the most reputed writers among the whites were those

who denounced Apartheid and were overtly committed to the blacks' cause. As reported by Kellas, "*not one pro-apartheid writer emerged - fascism, it would seem, seldom produces great writers, but opposition to apartheid on the other hand produced giants: playwright Athol Fugard, Nobel prize-winning novelist and essayist Nadine Gordimer, Booker Prize winner J.M Cotzee and Breyten Breytenbach*" (1995) It is obvious then that the whites' writings even though fictitious are politically impregnated, propped, pervaded or marred, depending on how the relation of politics to literature is viewed and by whom. Actually, it is impossible for writers in South Africa to occult politics simply because it is the history of a society of which they are part and to which they are 'indebted'.

'Indebtedness' should not be translated as gratefulness but as responsibility. The writer has a role to play and a responsibility to assume in society. This theme has long been debated and has given rise to controversies. That a role has to be played by the writer is undeniable and that responsibility ensues is unquestionable. But the point on which there is a disagreement is to whom and for what the writer is responsible. There are those who consider that the latter is first of all an artist, a creator, and as such should be primarily faithful to art without allowing other parameters to spoil or devaluate his work. For, as Marquez says: "*The writer's duty –his revolutionary duty if you like- is to write well."*(1983:53). On the other hand, there are those who think that a literature that does not serve its nation, that is not answerable, is useless and sterile, namely in countries ruled by dictators and in need of revolution.

Quoting Barthes[59], Gordimer insists on the "essential gesture" of the writer which, in South Africa, is more political than cultural. Reaffirming the significance of the writer's task through his creative act, she recalls the fact that

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[59] Roland Barthes said the writer's work is his "essential gesture as a social being » Penguin, 1988:288

“*the creative act is not pure*”, cannot be pure, for “*history evidences it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it*”. She also thinks that “*the writer writes to be read and comes to realize that he is answerable*”. As a consequence, he is “*held responsible*” for what he produces. She pushes further her interpretation of the “essential gesture”, as being an act of creation carrying “*a congenital responsibility*”(Gordimer, 1988:285-286). What Gordimer wants to say is that one does not write out of a vacuum or spontaneously, even if at a certain moment in his life, maybe the first time he discovered this aptitude or gift in him, he did. But even that gesture which seems a priori innocent is not so, for writers carry in their genes that which will make them responsible for what they write. From the moment they decide or begin to write, they know what and why they write and therefore are not ‘innocent’ (act is not pure); writers address an audience and must expect a reaction from them. For all these reasons they are responsible not to say committed to what they write. Gordimer explains the verbal phrase “*held responsible*” as a situation whereby writers are, whether they want it or not, responsible for what they write, a situation which they cannot avoid. In other words, it is the others that lay on them such a responsibility, a sort of condemnation they cannot break away from.

In “*The Essential Gesture*”, Gordimer’s key question is about the writers' loyalty and where it lies, to their society or to their art? What is the moral responsibility they hold ? The implication here is that the South African writer - indeed any white in South Africa - has *"seen too much to be innocent*." (in Gordimer, 1991:262). Accordingly, there is no alternative for the artist but commitment to the struggle against oppression. “*Any South African writer…..who does not take as his subject matter the obscene and offensive state of the nation is somehow collaborating in that state's continued existence.*” (Boyd,1988, http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/11/22specials boyd.html).

In another article written in the 1980's during what Gordimer calls "the interregnum", (another in-between position) , the latter reiterates her thought about the writer's responsibility and states her own conviction as a white writer living in a racialist country. In her life, there are what she considers as two absolutes: the first one, is that racism, more than a dehumanizing process, is a religious blasphemy for any individual and no effort could be spared until it is wiped out from the earth. The second 'absolute' being more than just a duty, is a kind of crusade that should never split the lines of convergence towards coherence and unity of the soul i.e. the trends of "inwardness" and "outwardness" that make the human being reach serenity and pretend to the peace of heart.(1991:271).

Although she believes that the coexistence of these two absolutes is not easy in South Africa especially for a white writer, she is yet determined to find a way to reconcile the "*morality of life*" and "*the morality of art*"(Gordimer,1991:271). Her evermore resolution, that which she summons the white writers to take, is "*to make the decision whether to remain responsible to the dying white order or to declare himself positively as answerable to the order struggling to be born"*(1991: 272) , a decision that echoes Brink's.

The "courageous"[60] attitude of Gordimer makes of her as well an exile in her own country, for she takes the risk to be silenced in one way or another. She delineates herself as "*a white; a dissident white; a white writer*"(1991:267). She is conscious of belonging to a "segment" of the population of South Africa and resolutely wishes to be set free from classification and categorization. To achieve this, she engages in the struggle for liberation beside the blacks. It is an attitude that she always maintained whatever the cost. Like Brink and evidently other white writers, she is in search of a 'place' that she has already foreseen and

[60] Gordimer criticizes this word attributed to white writers who denounced Apartheid.

‘zoomed’. She knows she has to prepare herself to a new South Africa where both Whites and Blacks will have to make great efforts to *look* at each other differently. They will have to learn to listen and talk to each other. South Africa will be a place where the ‘natural’ will seem ‘unnatural’ for the Whites (and not the contrary), like for example sitting in the same café, going to the same cinema, taking the same transport. A place of harmony in an ideal world? Why not, if one just remembers that South Africa was first of all the Blacks’ land and that usurpation cannot last forever? Unfortunately, no one is allowed to dream nowadays, and if by chance a dream starts, it is interrupted, cruelly broken, perhaps in the middle or near the end only to swell the frustration, this ugly thing which has been inoculated to men wherever they are.

If Gordimer has been brought into focus, it is first because she is a representative figure of white literature in South Africa, a Nobel-prize winner and a woman whose words have echoed all over the world for their power and beauty. She is one of the rare writers who have successfully reconciled revolution and art, and better than a politician, she prognosticated with an incomparable lucidity the post-apartheid South Africa with its complexities and likely solutions. Early, she asserted that the South African revolution had started and that, as mentioned above, one should prepare oneself to a post-apartheid era. When she uses the word “Revolution”, she does not think in terms of Marxist ideology, nor in terms of “proletariat dictatorship”, not even in terms of “capitalist” system as herself is well aware that her ceaseless struggle for justice applies to all walks of life. The following interview reveals her untimely understanding of the political dynamics of her country’s history:

> A revolution doesn't happen overnight. …
> And if you look at the pattern, our revolution is
> happening; our revolution started a long time ago,
> at least at the sixties, if not the fifties, and we go

> from phase to phase inexorably.
>
> (Gordimer, 1982: 268-271)

For example, in her most famous novel, *The Late Bourgeois World* (1983), she argues for the inseparability of the political destinies of both black and white South Africans in a post-revolutionary era. Once more, she reinforces the idea that the writers in their different and complex ways, show that history, is at the center of the imaginative literary enterprise. In an interview, she explains that her works of fiction are fed with ideas that become themes and that she cannot conceive a novel without resorting to such ideas drawn from the society where she lives:

> I can't imagine how there could be a novel of high ambition without ideas; to me, ideas become themes. They are the thematic and the transcendent aspect of any imaginative work, novels and poems alike...So I think that ideas are of supreme importance.
>
> (in Salmagundi, 1984: 27)

Likewise, Brink thinks that a book that fails to explore significant patterns in his society, is doomed to die. It is society that provides him with the material for writing, and it is this same society that he addresses and whose feed-back is essential for the success of his work. All writers who have been touched by censorship complain about the rupture between them and those for whom they write because the act of writing itself presupposes a reader. According to Brink, the process of communication between the two is vital and determines the effect literature has in society and vice-versa. To put it otherwise, one may ask the inevitable question: does literature have a social function? Marxist theories contend that any valid theory of critical analysis of art must take into account the fact that communication has a social and historical dimension, and that "*art can be subjected to a scientific study only when it is considered as one of the vital functions of society in its inalienable connection with all the other spheres of the*

life of society and in its historical conventions."(Basin, 1979:48) This viewpoint is not far from Brink's or Gordimer's or Breytenbach's, all of whom are white liberals (with communist tendencies). All share the thought that socio-political problems should be presented in terms of their effect on individual character and of the individual's response to them, not just from an ideological standpoint. In other words, a writer does not need to take a partisan line to fight against apartheid for instance. Without intending it, writers find themselves involved in politics because society forces it on them, because as already said, they are part of this society and therefore share a responsibility as 'social beings' and mainly as writers. Brink confirms Gordimer's thesis of the writer's essential gesture asserting that whether one likes it or not, in the particular situation of South Africa, "*in* ***this*** *country, we have assumed , through what we have written, a responsibility not only to our métier but also , by implication, to every individual who reacts to our words.*"(Brink, 1983:45).

In fact, and by their own admission, politics was neither their objective nor their predilection and even less their nature. Gordimer insisted that she was "*not a politically-minded person by nature*" (in Vinson, 1972:501). Brink declares the same thing in his memoir: "*By temperament I was never a political writer*"(2009:203). He explains how he turned to be a "political writer" and what "political writer" means to him. He admits that he could not write anything that was not political and that politics did permeate his works, but the public and social dimension of the human condition is what interested him most. He was not a "political writer" in the sense that is usually understood; he wrote "about" politics. As he says: " *What fascinated me then, as it fascinates me now, is the concept of story. And it is hard altogether to exclude a political dimension from the telling of any story*. (Brink,2009:203).

Indeed, the concept of story has a considerable importance for Brink, and he never misses a chance to say it in his own stories. A story is what keeps people and culture living. It is as Athol Fugard says the only safe place in the world, the place and memory that cannot be intruded, that can survive to colonialism, to violence, to poverty. A story is the repository of a people's life, dreams, and aspirations. It is also a sleeping truth that might be buried for a while but that awakens sooner or later. This is why it must be told. Society must listen to it, to them, because they are many, and because throughout ages and even if they have been altered through many reported versions, their true, indelible message will last forever. Brink recounts in *A F R* his trip to Sarajevo where a conference was held on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the importance of telling stories. Among the persons he met there, there was one whom he would always associate to the memory of Sarajevo for the very emphatic testimony he brought concerning the traumatic effects of war on his compatriots. The devastation of one's very notion of humanity was worse than physical suffering and this he felt not just the need but the duty to tell it. There were too many stories and he felt *"[he] was bursting with stories [he had]to tell*" but the tragedy lied in the fact that there was nobody to listen to them. For Brink, it was the most terrible thing he had to grapple with: "*the notion of a society, a nation with too many stories – and no one to tell them to. And it brought with it a wholly different perspective on the real atrocity of war.*"(Brink, 2009:388).

Was it by chance or was it fatality that placed Brink at the heart of great historical events? In both cases, the impetus for writing certainly came from his meeting with decisive moments in history. As a writer-spectator and writer-witness, he turned into - or had to turn into – a writer-actor, playing his own role in and towards society. The role that was 'forced' on him supposed an implication in the political matters of South Africa. He had the moral obligation to go beyond interpretation to action. How then was that achieved by Brink? In

his opinion, the writer's task is to "offend", a word largely discussed in his essay "*Literature and Offence*". Brink's notion of offense is first of all explained as provocative not only stylistically or aesthetically but also thematically. The literary discourse should bear the characteristic of offense. Starting from an etymological definition of the word , i.e. 'to strike against', he explains that when there is offense, there is resistance , and it is this element of resistance that is produced to counter the offense that should establish the communication between writer and reader. Communication should produce this effect. More clearly, the object of aesthetics must not be passive; it has to provoke in the other a reaction followed by resistance. As he states it, "*all significant art is offensive*"(1983:119). The shock that literature is expected to produce on the reader is in fact the shock that the writers have themselves undergone. Thus, he means that the authors' response of offense to their world, and the readers' response of offense to art are both responses to some form of violence inflicted to them. In fact, Brink affirms that "*his novels have been written out of a sense of horror at the condition of apartheid; and he intends them to provoke a similar sense of horror in his readers.*"(in Jolly,1996:20).

As a South African dissident, his fiction expresses a particular kind of political commitment, a position he claimed in the speech he gave on accepting the Martin Luther King Memorial Prize for *A Dry White Season*(1979). "*In A Dry White Season*", he said, " *I have tried to accept that responsibility one owes to one's society and one's time*." (1983:204). In many interviews and in his memoir, he claims that his novels are based on actual incidents. May 1968, the Sharpeville massacre, the death in detention of Mapetla Mohapi, the murder by the security police of an imam, Abdullah Haroun, the killing of Steve Biko, the accumulating weight of all of this was becoming a burden to Brink. As he remarks, "*unless I found a way of writing about it, the situation in the country*

would threaten to submerge and paralyse me."(2009:243). Real incidents produced novels like *Looking on Darkness* and *A Dry White Season* which were the repository of his life in fiction form: "*There really was no incident 'invented'."* (2009:244).

This is how and why he became irrevocably a political writer. Tragic events both in France and South Africa made him aware of a reality that cannot be set apart from politics. From then on, he thought it would be hypocritical to imagine that politics could remain a separate, demarcated territory within his overall experience.(2009:297). Like Gordimer, he succeeded in reconciling art and politics preserving aesthetics in the literary discourse and letting politics permeate his stories simply because there was no way out of a political system that directed and conditioned the lives of individuals and masses in South Africa.

Writing was therefore a necessity and an imperative for Brink. Through the voice of the arts which is the most powerful and the most resounding of all, Brink recorded the story of a nation, thus achieving his mission and releasing his conscience from guilt, the well known syndrome of any writer who remains silent in the face of injustice. In this sense, the epilogue of *A Dry White Season* is very significant:

> Perhaps all one can really hope for, all I am entitled to, is no more than this: to write it down. To report what I know. So that it will not be possible for any man ever to say again*:* I Knew nothing about it.
>
> (Brink, 1979:316)

Brink's contribution to history and his 'involvement' in politics continues until today. At the age of seventy four and after his editors pushed him to write his

life-story, he endeavoured the very hard task to write his memoir which is also that of South Africa.

4.5 A MEMOIR : FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT.

Brink, the prolific novelist, whose stories were not all 'invented' as he said, found it yet extremely difficult to write his memoir [61]. In his fiction, a part of him could live situations he had not experienced before or never experienced at all. The truth and exactitude of events were not stated but suggested. Therefore he had the possibility to create stories turning around a real historical event, analyzing it, denouncing it under the mask of fiction. The advantage (though often turning to disadvantage because of censorship) was to 'creatively diagnose', 'aesthetically criticize' or 'artistically condemn'.

Fiction was for Brink a way to create circumstances, live them and think through them. In sum, he was free to imagine what was or could be, what did not happen and never will happen. He could 'lie' while in his memoir , he had to respect the clause of truth and report only what he effectively lived and witnessed. He had to remain faithful not only to his memories but also to the memory of a society.

Autobiography or memoir, *A F R* stands on the brink of the genre and its offspring. As stated earlier, the autobiography is difficult to define because of its elasticity. A wide range of 'personal writings' are classified as autobiographical because the frontiers are not clearly and definitely set between them. Only approximate and unreliable descriptions of autobiography have been given up to now, so many in fact, that even critics are lost in their arduous analyses of accounts that vacillate between autobiography and memoir, journal and

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[61] « This book was for me the most difficult to write…..", "It took me three years to write it". This is what he stated in his interview(l'Express :2010)

epistolary novel, autobiographical novel, chronicles, travel writings and auto fiction. Furthermore, these writings are sometimes expressed in verse and in prose, but the element that they commonly (but not in all cases as seen with Head) share is the 'I' narrator. However, this 'I' is not perceived in the same way. The 'I' of Mphahlele for example is not that of Brink. The former is collective whereas the latter is individual. Mphahlele recounted his life at the same time as he spoke in the name of a collectivity. As for Brink's life-story, it is clearly distinguishable from the others'. It could even be said that it is exceptional. His childhood could resemble other Afrikaan children in their upbringing, and education within a definite system , but the notion of the individual which was absent in the blacks' world -Mphahlele complained about not being considered as an individual- was very present in his. Although one might say that no individuality is left to washed brains yet the whites were not viewed as a group or a mass but as autonomous members of a society, as individuals.

An evidence of Brink's individuality is his precocious reactions to the world he lived in. Without being fully aware of Apartheid in the ideological or political sense, he did not remain passive to the atrocity surrounding him while his family and friends were totally indifferent. In his memoir, he remembers the day when a black man, completely covered with blood came near his house while he was playing tennis against its back wall. The man was in pain. He had been battered by his 'baas'. The image was shocking, but more shocking was his father's coldness: he "*barely glanced at the battered man and walked into the house.*"(Brink, 2009:19). Brink could not understand "*I gazed after him, unable to understand*" (Ibid); when he asked for his help, his father just answered that it was Saturday, that he was tired and that he was going to take a shower. This episode of his life could never be erased from his mind. It hurt him. Its memory

never stopped pursuing him and from that day, "*something shifted. The center no longer held.*" (Brink,2009:20)

And 'Things' started to 'fall apart'. The mind started to disintegrate, slowly paving the way to Brink's shift and departure. Another proof of Brink's early responses to abnormal attitudes was the day he discovered the real meaning of racism illustrated once more by his father. As Brink recalls, racism was not preached overtly at home, but it was omnipresent. He remembers his father's attitude when he was told that Marion Anderson, his most admired singer, was black. He never listened to her again, and when it came on the radio, he would turn it off or leave the house.(2009:47)

Such memories are recorded in so vivid a way. How the writer succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of past episodes and experiences as if they were present, reveals the talent of the novelist perhaps more than the autobiographer. It seems that Brink has been able to remain faithful to both the autobiographical contract of truth and to the natural gift of the artist. *A F R* is a work of art for the aesthetic quality of the narration and for its ability to involve the reader emotionally and maintain his curiosity till the end of a book that counts four hundred and thirty eight pages.

In *A F R*, Brink does not focus on his person. He does not place himself at the center of the story. He rather recounts stories he witnessed and others in which he took part. Events are described and commented, politically or philosophically depending on what kind of reflection they require. The book is bursting with names of celebrities of the artistic and political worlds; writers, poets, painters, singers, ambassadors, presidents, ministers all of whom he met, discussed and shared a meal with. Women, so many he loved or admired; his wives, 'each of whom brought a particularity to his life'. All these persons were met in different places. Names of countries, towns and places he cherishes thicken the book

without burdening it. Finally, Brink is a man whose life is very rich with experiences, sad and joyful, and it is not surprising that his editors asked him to write his memoir.

As it may have been noticed, the word memoir has been used throughout this chapter to refer to *A F R*. The question that could be asked is why memoir and not autobiography? First of all, the word memoir has been kept out of respect for its presentation on the cover of the book as a memoir. Second, the latter is likely to be classified as such if one refers to the distinction made between autobiography and memoir in Peyre's "*The Difficult Art of Autobiography*". Although *A F R* does not fill all the criteria advanced by Peyre for what the memoir is, it still can be considered as a memoir for its emphasis on events and people more than on his own person.[62] In a chapter entitled "*Autobiography and its Close Cousins*"[63], Sebastien Hubier confirms this difference saying: "*while autobiography is centered on the very existence of the one who writes it, the memoirs are devoted to the historical turmoil which the writer has witnessed or taken part to – or to the privileged relationships he may have had with the great of this world who have somewhat determined the said turmoil".* (Hubier:2005:53) So, the autobiographer relies for his writing on what he has been while the 'memorialist' on what he has done or seen. Hubier explains that the main difference lies in how the writer perceives himself. In the first case, he feels as an exceptional person while in the second, he dreams of resuming the great historical moments through the account of his own life. Brink then fits very well in this second case as he actually was a witness and sometimes an actor, in

[62] See chapter 1, " *The Difficult Art of Autobiography".*
[63] Sebastien Hubier, Littératures intimes :les expressions du moi de l'autobiographie à l'autofiction,**l'autobiographie et ses cousins proches.** « …tandis que l'autobiographie est centrée sur l'existence même de celui qui l'écrit, les mémoires sont consacrés aux bouleversements historiques auxquels l'écrivain a assisté, ou pris part – ou encore aux relations privilégiées qu'il a pu entretenir avec les grands de ce monde qui ont, peu ou prou,déterminé les dits bouleversements. »

the history of his country. He also had the privilege to meet great men like Mandela who, he writes with much pride, told him: "*When I was in prison, you changed the way I saw the world*", (2009:418) hence paying a great homage to the written word. Other words were said and written by great poets like Senghor who invited him to Senegal and Aimé Césaire who changed the course of his life. Meeting such personalities was for Brink "*a personal appointment with history*".(2009:412) . Césaire's great and long poem "*Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*" played a special role in Brink's life. It " *helped [him] realize the need to return to the land of his own birth*".(2009:414).

4.6 RETURN TO SOUTH AFRICA

What was most painful for writers like Head and Nkosi was their departure from South Africa with a 'no-return' ticket. It was like killing the soul and keeping the body wander to whatever destination. For what do exiles take with them when leaving if not the wish and dream to come back 'home'? Sooner or later, the return is planned in their minds. It is their objective, the completion of an absence whether short or long. 'Home', the birthplace, the father land, the motherland, the place whose air is unique, whose smells are particular, the place that shapes the human being, that gives a name and an identity; the memory, the spirit and the body; all this is 'home'. Curiously or naturally, the farther exiles are, the more 'home' bears significance to them. Proverbs, poems, songs and hymns have reiterated in the most beautiful and moving manner the love of the country in all languages. People die for it , they 'cry the beloved country'[64]; corpses are exhumed to be buried again in one's country. What is then more supreme, more natural than this love and this country? If the natural element within human beings is taken out of them, then they are doomed to die. Death is

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[64] Expression borrowed from Alan Paton's *Cry The Beloved Country* (1948).

not just physical, it is psychological, moral and spiritual. Without the prospect of return lingering in the horizon, exiles hardly survive the pain of isolation and absence. Asylum cannot be a home even if it offers shelter, security and freedom. During the war – any war- refugees throughout the world certainly find refuge from bombs and fire, but the blaze and rage in their hearts cannot be wiped out. It is a perpetual trauma. Men's violence to men will forever leave wounds and stigma. Everybody knows it, is aware of its gravity, nevertheless, day after day dementia seems to defeat reason. Peace is but a tiny, worn piece in a patchwork of hate and nonsense.

In *A F R*, Brink does not fail to mention Palestine which was the symbol of resistance since 1947. His declaration , courageous as he has himself always been, would certainly disturb pro-Israel critics and readers. Besides, it is worth echoing Gresh's remark that not one of the numerous comments and criticisms of Brink's memoir has even mentioned the important passage on Palestine.(2010, http://blog.mondediplo.net). In a way, Brink achieves the notion of "literary offence" discussed earlier, but at the same time he remains faithful to the oath of truth he made. Against the sordidness of the world, he vowed to use the ***words*** through which, he says, one reaches awareness and humanity. "*And as long as we have the word, we can reach out to others in a chain of voices that will never be silenced. That is our one, small, lasting guarantee in the world, and against the world*."(Brink,2009:431). Thus, Brink records for history and as a memory duty what he saw in Palestine during his trip. The experience bitterly awoke in him the sad memories of his own country. The passage is long, but it deserves to be quoted entirely if only for the sake of Palestine whose blood and tears have not yet dried. (See notes). Brink evokes the wisdom and humanity of Edward Said with whom he had talked about Palestine, but never could imagine what was taking place there until he "saw", in other words he was a witness, which explains his repetition of the verb to see, as if to tell the reader this is not just a

report, not a hearsay, but an ocular testimony. It is true that cruelty is daily transmitted through the screen, but its effect does not last. It is so much and so often relayed by a number of T.V chains, presented by placid journalists who often smile when they should frown, that spectators no longer 'see' nor measure the monstrosity of the events. Death has become so common, so banal that it might be confounded with life. As Bastos writes in "*Fragments from a Paraguayan Autobiography*", "*I write to try and prevent the fear of death from becoming , on this planet threatened with extinction, a fear of life itself* ."(in Gauhar,ed.1987:213).

The scintillating ring in the chain of voices that will never be silenced even after death[65] is Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet and militant, whose words are the most widely translated among contemporary Arabic writers. The exilic condition of Darwish engendered a series of invaluable poems, -autobiographical as well- that not only express the trauma of colonialism and exile but also give voice to the voiceless. He was a traveler, a wanderer, in quest of a place where to return, but only words offered shelter:

> We travel like other people, but we return to nowhere. As if travelling
> Is the way of the clouds…
>
> We have a country of words. Speak speak so I can put my road on the
> stone of a stone.
>
> We have a country of words. Speak speak so we may know the end of
> this travel."
>
> (Darwish in Howe,2003,http://www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9973.html)

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[65] Breyten Breytenbach has written a poem '*Voice-Over'* (2009) as an homage to Mahmoud Darwish. The poem is a continuing dialogue between the two poets. (Extract of the poem recorded on C.D).(See notes)

Only words are left for the writer to return to. They are his home , his place, his refuge. In *Why Did You Leave The Horse Alone?* the poet shows that absence destroys homes . For a home to be a home, it must be inhabited. Palestinians have been removed from their homes, their houses emptied, bulldozed or bombarded, so where is home? "*– Why did you leave the horse alone*?/ *– To keep the house company, my son / Houses die when their inhabitants are gone* …". (Darwish:2006).

How many shanty towns were 'built' and destroyed, their inhabitants removed from their locations, forever 'moving' to nowhere in South Africa? Yet, to this no man's land, Brink returned just as Mphahlele did after twenty years of exile. Perhaps Head would have also managed to obtain a return ticket if she had not died. If exile is a sort of damnation, return is its final outcome, its last remedy. How many experiences have proved it? Even in this world of globalization - which is full of paradoxes in fact- where people of different races, cultures and religions are melting and where they should feel at ease wherever they go, the need for 'home' is felt more and more. 'Home' in the sense of people's specificities, those which distinguish them from the others and help them construct their own identity. Universality does not mean being identical; it means sharing the same human values, loving each other, being tolerant, recognizing the other, accepting and respecting him. In Maalouf's opinion, the combat for the universality of values must go in pair with a combat against an impoverishing 'uniformisation' and against hegemony be it ideological, political, economic or mediatic. Universality does not suggest unanimity or the muzzling of multiple linguistic, artistic and intellectual expressions. Universality is a combat for the defense of certain practices, of certain cultural traditions, but one that must be perspicacious, demanding, selective and constantly open to the future. (1998:125).(See notes).

Universality, then, does not erase individuality and identity which are essential for the human being's existence. In Paris, Brink enjoyed enormously visiting uncle Maurice's place. There, he also met people coming from every part of the world. It was such a melting-pot, gathering in what they felt as a 'home', a cultural cross-road traversed by men and women from different origins, beliefs and colours, forming one body, belonging to the same place: universality and humanity.

Convinced of these values and fighting for them, Brink decided at last to go back to South Africa, to his multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial country. He hesitated a long time before taking this decision, this new fork in the road. Towards the end of his memoir and after narrating his adventurous and exciting experiences, after telling about the peaceful and tumultuous episodes of his life, the author paves the way to homecoming. But even homecoming is not a simple thing especially when there is a doubt about the rightness of the choice. In a chapter entitled '*Home Sweet Home'*, Brink discloses and justifies the reason why he returned to South Africa. He realized that as a person, he was irreversibly related to a society even if the latter was hostile and destructive. He wanted to know where he came from and to understand this society that had shaped him. This could not be achieved far from the country. "*There was suddenly something hollow in being where I was 10,000 kilometers away from the place that had shaped me*"(2009:302). Although, he admitted, he was not a 'freedom fighter', he could still do something with a pen and a broken typewriter. He preferred using these "*to sitting on such a distant sideline*"(2009:302).

Thus Brink went through a period of doubt and questioning before taking his "final and inescapable decision":

> My place, for better or almost certainly for

> worse, I now knew, was back in South Africa. I would not slink back in despair, but assume the burden, above all the responsibility, of a choice made lucidly. *To be there*. Even – and perhaps most especially – if *being there* might mean living on a sinking ship.
>
> (Brink,2009:305)

Several times, Brink used the verb 'want' to express his desire to come back home. It was worthy taking risks; besides, Brink's 'original' choice has always been jeopardy. Nowadays, the author is venturing in the new South Africa, vehemently indicting the new government whom he accuses to betray the very principles and values they fought for. He looks with alarm at what is happening in South Africa. After the euphoria of a democratic country, followed the disillusionment and despair of the people both black and white. According to him, the ANC turned for the worse because of its lack of integrity, its weakness and its rottenness. The government has become suspect and has destroyed the party's historical image. Brink insists on unmasking and blowing the whistle on the shifts that have occurred in the new system. He evokes or more exactly accuses President Jacob Zuma, ex-president Thabo M'Beki, Nkosazana Zuma, minister of Health, and other ministers' incompetence and corruption. The malpractices allowed by the power elite are appalling and scandalous, and he is not afraid to denounce them. Many forms of derailments can be evoked such as the lack of decisive action against HIV/aids which is ravaging South Africa (the first country in the world touched by this dangerous disease); the protection of ANC officials who have misbehaved both in financial transactions but also through sexual abuse; the implication of the members in the circle of power in the deals for personal gain, and many other ills Brink condemns, saying: "*The present regime has become a disgrace to the party's history.*"(2009:424).

Violence, crime and insecurity, have become more than ever threatening in South Africa. People complain about being prisoners in their own houses. Doors and windows must be locked; private security services are engaged and paid to permanently protect them and their houses. Both Whites and Blacks are victims of robbery and murder. Brink's nephew was killed, his daughter aggressed in a restaurant, and Gordimer attacked at home, to give but a few examples. Danger is everywhere waiting for a prey, and this situation revolts Brink who thinks that although violence exists in many societies, in South Africa, it is rather particular. It is not related just to colonialism. According to him, there has always been an excess of violence in this country, an intensity, a surplus which he has not yet understood. It is a phenomenon which is deeply rooted in here. Although he read a lot about it, he admits his inability at comprehending the problem.[66] Breytenbach as well, points at the government's incompetence in this field. He thinks that violence is a cancer that destroys the South African society and that is due to a lack of political courage. With the power it detains (66 per cent of the population controlling the state) the ANC should have transformed in a revolutionary way the present country by giving priorities to the economic and security sectors. Breytenbach wonders whether "*it is because they have not been able to satisfy the people that they let them almost naturally kill themselves. Or is it the fear to look at the Africans as people tending towards violence more than others, that prevent them from admitting the extent of violence?*" (in Flamerion, 2009, http://www.evene.fr).(See notes).

What is sure is that violence reigns in South Africa, but what is more certain is that the blacks are still those who are the most exposed to it.The ISS (Institute for Security Studies) explains that the root cause of violence in South Africa has not changed much since the Apartheid era and that the current high rate of violent

[66] Brink, in Marie Chaudey, « Il n'ya pas de littérature ni de politique sans morale », 11/06/2010.

crime is just as related to economic and social marginalization as it was during the 1980s. In addition to poverty, unemployment and the easy access to small arms, the inefficient political power is at the heart of this endemic problem. In her article, Njoke points to an even more significant factor of violence which is the new power resulting from the dismantlement of Apartheid: the latter "*has created new power bases and destroyed old ones and this shift in power is a very significant factor in the violence - and one perhaps that is underestimated."* (2006, http://www.iss.co.za). She means by that that the 'crime career' has almost developed in a sort of culture "*with a system of deviance, with its own symbols and language*", very attractive to the marginalized youth. Njoke also argues that young men turn to crime as a way of life and refer to their activities as "going on duty" or "keeping up the syllabus" because crime is seen as a way to gain status and opportunity. She is convinced that crime is a social response to marginalization and that understanding marginalization is very important to understanding the patterns of violence in South Africa. An illustration of this need for affirmation observed in the youth is a young man's description of this frightening situation: "*In crime, there is a hierarchy; you grow from strength to strength until you are up there doing the business where there is a lot of money. When you are there, we respect you, and to us, you are like someone working on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange*."[67](Ibid).

Brink violently responds to violence after trying to justify the inevitable turmoil any country would go through in post-independent periods. But after a decade of excuses, he could no longer condone and accept everything under the pretext of transition. "*But one does reach a limit : where to remain silent becomes a culpable act. My time of silence is over*."(2009:426) The finger on the trigger,

[67] Reported by C.Njoki, *Training for Peace Programme*, ISS Tshwane (Pretoria) Office (2006).

Brink seems ready to shoot at whatever and whoever obstruct his way to truth. It was his position during the Apartheid years, and it is still his position now with the new government "*who substitute for the vox populi of the ballot the vox dei of the ruling party.*"(Shakespeare, 2010,http://www.guardian.co.uk).

4.7 CONCLUSION

In Brink's opinion, Mandela has left too early. His departure was premature. He regrets the period when everybody believed that radical changes would occur in a post-apartheid South Africa. Disillusionment has finally gained the majority of the people who think and say that the situation is just chaotic: "*South Africa **is** in a mess*." (2009:429). In *A F R*, the author wondered how in such a state of affairs, South Africa would be able to organize a soccer world cup in 2010 ? Yet, it did it successfully. Apart from the noisy and disturbing *vuvuzelas* (see glossary), the image of South Africa was not tarnished. On the contrary, supporters and tourists did enjoy their stay. They discovered with wonder an African developing country organizing for the first time a major event and challenging all those who bet it would be a failure. An event like this is probably marking a turning point in South Africa. Jacob Zuma whom Brink criticized in his memoir proved to be a man of dialogue. The fact of listening to all who have something to say, is a good sign. It is what gives Brink some hope for the future. Notwithstanding a disappointing, revolting and messy condition, Brink has not completely lost 'faith' in the country he returned to. And if he happens to lose it, there will still be forks in the road that he will take, 'what the hell!!!'

A F R closes on a letter to Katarina, his wife. Words of love, full of emotion and beauty reverberate as the notes of a splendid hymn composed especially to the power of the words. Words of freedom, words of gratitude, words "*to trace again some of the many highways and byways of the past. Perhaps to learn to see more*

clearly, to understand a bit more. But by no means everything."(2009:43) Extremely rich, the book ends, yet, on an unpretentious tone; a lesson of humility for the reader to ponder over.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Mpahlele the ‘wanderer’, Head the ‘outsider’, Brink the ‘rebel’ , were born and grew in South Africa, when the rainbow’s warm and beautiful colours had not yet flashed. Only white and black and some shades of brown could be discerned, offering a gloomy portrait of peoples whose majority were represented as shadows and ghosts “walking in the night”, to borrow La Guma’s metaphor. White versus black rhymed with paradise versus hell, life versus death, beauty versus ugliness; dichotomies and/or binary oppositions are numerous in South Africa, for they are symbolic of Apartheid, an ideology and a system based on separateness and discrimination, on the negation of the other with all the implications of the term ‘non’, as in ‘non-white’ (seen in the introduction). To this ‘non’, a determined, revolted ‘NO’ was shouted by men and women who refused to spend their whole life in fear, horror, and slavery. There were alternatives, choices to make and risks to take: the weapon and/or the pen. But when these two were unachievable at home, exile remained the last resort. Mphahlele, Head and Brink ‘chose’ it. It was the only outlet, the exit from a sclerosed, ailing and violent society where writers were gagged. They had to “*speak the truth to power*”(Said:1993:75) because silence meant complicity, treason or death, the writer’s death. They had to “*write what they liked*” [68], which was impossible in South Africa.

Although exile has most of the time been a painful and alienating experience, in some cases it offered oxygen and released writers from the claustrophobic atmosphere that choked them in their countries. Exile was for many, a space of freedom and regeneration; “*…exile is not all pain*” Nkosi said in *Home and*

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[68] « I write What I Like » is the title of Steve Biko’s book, a selection of his writings published after his death in Great Britain by The Boawerdean Press, 1978.

Exile. " *There are unexpected bonuses, not the least of which is the distance from the lunacies of South Africa.*"(1983:viii). He went on explaining that this distance was necessary because it offered an opportunity to "*purchase the private freedoms which are very early taken away from someone like [himself] in South Africa.*" (1983:viii). The assumption that exile is entirely negative was also contested by Said who pointed out that it is a popular but wholly mistaken belief "*that being exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin.*" (1994:48). Nevertheless, how many writers died and committed suicide in exile, and how many lived with an everlasting feeling of pain, solitude, frustration and guilt, waiting for the day they would at last return home.

As far as Mphahlele and Head are concerned, the first lines written in exile were definitely to be on the lives - different in details but quite the same in essence - of South Africans' exiles at home. As a result of censorship, a national literature which was predominantly and inevitably autobiographical flourished overseas. Writers who like them had no choice but to leave their country started analyzing their position as exiled writers first at home and then abroad. They tried to put some order in their minds and, consequently, in their lives now that they could enjoy "quietness" and "freedom"; Mphahlele explained to Manganyi, his biographer, that "*autobiography [could] clear the air*" (in Manganyi, 1983:265), and it did this for him when he desperately needed to take stock of his life. He affirmed that it helped him begin life in exile on a firmer foundation and that " *it brought coherence where chaos had raged, and prepared [him] psychologically for new challenges*." (Ibid). His argument can probably explain the proliferation of successful autobiographies like Alfred Hutchinson's *Road to Ghana*, Todd Matshikisa's *Chocolates for my Wife,* Noni Jabavu's *Drawn in Colour*, Bloke Modisane's *Blame me on History* , Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, his own *Down Second Avenue* and the list is still long .

All these books were written in exile although some parts of them were scratched in South Africa. The writers were addressing first a white readership to whom they undertook to give a better insight into the South African society, but most of all they tried to assert an identity of which they were devoid at home. Paradoxically enough, while exile allowed them to express themselves freely, it also imprisoned them in a series of frustrations. For being always considered as strangers in a foreign country, they tried hard to adjust to their new surroundings. Even in Botswana, a neighbouring country, and among black people, Head's exile was as harsh as the others'. All of them sought to construct a vision of the lost home in their writings as a way to escape the heavy weight of exile. Having more or less lost contact with their country, they appealed to memory so as to recapture the sights and smells of their environment. Inspiration came from reminiscences but it was sometimes ephemeral just as memories were evanescent. What these writers needed was their people's presence:" *A writer needs people around him. He needs live struggles of active life……I need life to write about life.*"(Ngugi,1981:8-9). In his study of black South African writing in the Twentieth Century, Shava also remarks that exile has had a negative impact on some of the writers and that writing autobiographies allowed them to overcome the difficulties they met as strangers. In exile they turned to autobiography which provided "*a more extended means of fixing the strangeness of the past, the very special schizophrenia of growing up as intellectuals, both in an African village and in an apartheid slum and, at the same time, a way of digesting and coming to terms with exile*". (Shava 1989:47) **.**

It seems that transferred into a nostalgic past, pausing at certain meaningful and marking events, the exiled writers would add dates and names as well as their own analysis of what their lives have been to exact records of incidents. Mphahlele for example did it in *Down Second Avenue*, *The Wanderers* and

Afrika my Music. The impact of exile on writing is certainly best illustrated in Mphahlele's 'autobiographies' where events and reflections often overlap to finally converge into a deep process of defining one's position as an eternal 'wanderer'.

In chapter two, Mpahlele's 'autobiographies' have been compared to a musical composition where the 'blue note' is overwhelming. His quest being achieved and his bitterness tamed, he decided to return and settle definitively in South Africa. The search for self proved to be a search for community. He realized how much he needed the community because what he could give, depended on what he could get from it. He also needed to be engaged with the struggles of his people and it was this bonding which had collapsed during exile.(1983:290). What he wanted most was to come back to South Africa to start a new life in the familiar surroundings of the country of his birth which was an opportunity for "*self-renewal, self-creation in communion with people of [his] own kind.*"(Ibid) In fact, self-renewal and self-creation can be seen in the book he produced to celebrate his return. It is worth mentioning his novel *Father Come Home* which is different from all his previous writings and which proves that autobiography was a product of exile. *Father Come Home* is neither a declared nor a disguised autobiography. It is a work of fiction whose pleasant tone gives it a special flavor which sounds like a nice and new tune. So distinct from jazz music which expresses the sorrows and instability of the exile, *Father Come Home*'s melody seems on the contrary to sing the happy return of the writer. Thus, one reads this novella without frustration; neither violence, nor fear nor hatred orchestrate this book which is an innovation in Mphahlele's writing and which seems to be a connotation of his new identity.

Yet, after twenty years of exile, Mphahlele had to confront very difficult situations. He avows that his homecoming was not a bed of roses, for however

happy, it was dulled by a cruel reminder. He was a black man living in a racist country: " *It was a rude reminder, not entirely unexpected, but one which proclaimed that I should not forget who was the slave-driver*"(1983:296). That was in 1978. Mpahlele would have to wait more than a decade before he witnessed the abolition of Apartheid. At last he was a free man in a free society for which he brought a lot culturally. An iconic writer of South Africa, he made it possible for a whole generation of writers, intellectuals, artists to reestablish literary and cultural connections between the *Staffrider* and the *Drum* writers. He was the bridge between the old and the younger generation (see notes) and this was a tremendous acquirement in South African literature.

For many South Africans, Nelson Mandela is their political star and Mphahlele his literary equivalent.(Mthombothi:2008, http://www.mediaclubsouthafrica .com). Es'kia Mphahlele was indeed a giant who "*grew as big as an elephant and dwarfed the rhinoceros*" as stated earlier.

If Mphahlele has been compared to an elephant for its greatness and life-length and if he had the chance to witness the great event of independence, Head was much less lucky. She died before she could see Mandela proclaimed president and before the blacks rose to power. Unlike Mphahlele, she did not return to South Africa. She remained in Botswana and was much more of an outsider in quest of love and peace not so far from a country where she had become lonely and intensely isolated.(Head,1990:13). In a letter addressed to a certain "D.B"[69], Head expresses her pain at losing her friends saying: "*of all the countries in the world, South Africa is the one country where you need friends*" (Ibid), which is very suggestive of the loneliness she lived in and of the fear of being "*left alone to face a horror too terrible to contemplate.*"(Ibid).

[69] « D.B » is very probably Dennis Brutus, the South African poet and writer who went into exile as well.

A refugee, Head experienced traumatic moments in Botswana too. The feeling of being outcast, leaving her native land with an 'exit permit' bearing no return stamp and doomed to 'take root' in a new environment, Head had to prepare for big challenges. It was a long time before she was accepted even in Botswana, an African country where she thought exile would be less harsh. However, Head's importance as a writer in Botswana grew posthumously as Botswana authorities constructed a building in Serowe (the village where she lived) to exhibit her works. Moreover, her novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* often served as a guide for agriculture in Botswana, as she widely dealt with agricultural aspects in this book.

As for her 'autobiographical writings', they are another illustration of the lack of rigour of the genre since the reader meets the same disturbed, abandoned, dreaming or just broken woman in both *A Question of Power* and *Maru.* It is indeed a fantastic trip that Bessie Head invites us to share with her through her dreams and nightmares, through her unceasing, disturbing shifts from reality to fiction and vice versa, only to discover and rediscover her 'self', to reenter and contain the past, and above all to resist a form of erasure by imposing herself as an individual, as an African and as a woman. Her numerous 'exiles' and 'prisons' often evoking the dark scenes of her life were also reflected by her letters, (another form of autobiography) through which the reader discovers not the schizophrenic, depressive, mad woman she was thought to be, but the victim of a system of categorization which divided humankind into colours and shades of colour, reminding us of the vibrating song "*Ghetto World*" which says: " *Sometimes it feels like I'm not black enough*"[70] (POC in Battersby, 2003:119).

[70] This song, recognized as South African hip- hop, is a form of post-colonial text that offers opportunities for new identities for the South African coloured community.

In her ‘autobiographies’, the theme of miscegenation is obsessively recurrent. It unveils the most delicate and most painful segment of her life and at the same time indicts a system which, in order to ‘protect’ and ‘preserve’ the white race from racial intermingling, promulgated acts like the Mixed Marriage Act (1949) and the Immorality Act (1950) to prohibit or make illegal marriages and extramarital intercourse between Whites and Blacks. Thus, Head found herself trapped in a society that rejected her and that alienated her from the earliest moments of her existence since she was born of an ‘illicit’ union in a mental hospital. Head was lifelong reminded that she was born on the 6th of July 1937 in the Pietermaritzburg Mental Hospital in South Africa, and the reason for her strange birthplace was that her mother was white and her father black. As the former was judged insane, she was admitted to the mental hospital while pregnant. Head was going to live with this unjust feeling of guilt till her death. She, who was so fond of the colours of the rainbow, would paint her life in black and white most often, because “ *a world based on complexions is an empty and unimaginative world.*” (Head in Vigne, 1991:109). A deadly pessimism pervades her works even in Botswana where she had the possibility to write freely but where racism and exile in their new forms frustrated her. Once more, it was “a question of identity” that posed problems. But all these issues were handled skillfully in her autobiographical novels even if they were set in what she called an “unimaginative world”. Like Mphahlele and Brink and any writer in the world, she wanted and had to tell stories because stories are memories and because they also offer perspectives, allow dreams and hopes. In the epilogue to *A Woman Alone*, entitled “*An African Story”*, Head foresees a revolution in South Africa. She thinks it is inevitable in a world where all people are insisting on their rights. She also hopes South Africa “ *might one day become the home of the storyteller and dreamer, who did not hurt others but only introduced new dreams that filled the heart with wonder.*”(1990:103).

A long time ago, in the vast landscape of the south of Africa, there lived a white boy who, at the age of two or three, was brought up by a Sotho (see glossary) woman. Because his mother had suffered from a long illness, his old Sotho nanny looked after him. She used to carry him on her back, and as she moved in the house, she would sing or tell him the stories of her people. As he recounts in his memoir, Brink felt secure and safe while being lulled by his black nanny. She was the first to introduce him to storytelling, the first to make him discover a world of wonder and dream out of crude historical facts. How ironical it was that a black woman in such a close contact, carnal and spiritual, should be denied existence! How could a woman whose cheek rubbed his, whose words were whispered in his ears, whose breath he could inhale and whose breast he slept on, be considered as a mere 'creature', an anonymous 'person'? "*In our family she didn't even have a name*"(Brink,2009:29) . Freedman points to the fact that *"all white South Africans are brought up in early childhood by black women*" and that after developing this knowledge of each other " *South Africa tells you that that knowledge is obscene and a crime - worse than a crime, a sin. You are told to forget what you already know. And a lot of South African writers are lacerated by this.*"(1984, http://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/19/arts) .

As a white dissident writer, Brink focused on the guilt he felt when facing situations like this. He once said that the revolution he was involved in as a writer, was a revolution in the conscience of his people. Personally, he became conscious of the ills of the South African society after he traveled to France. There he encountered whites and blacks and his vision of the country and of all the world changed. He toured the world and learnt a lot from his meetings and readings. In *A Fork in the Road* which is a memoir and a mosaic book in the sense that it is full of people and cities, of anecdotes, events both tragic and happy, full of music too, Brink tells us about himself, his family, his friends and

his enemies. He also tells the story and history of South Africa showing the role and responsibility of writers in their society.

By contrast with non-white writings and as a confirmation of what was said earlier concerning the length and style of the latter, Brink stands as a significant example of creativity in a country where he himself said one was writing in a state of siege. It seems that Brink's originality lies in this very power to write in an environment which he abhors but one which nourishes his imagination instead of drying it. What occurs as a handicap for non-white writers is rather well controlled by Brink, which helped him counter and twine round censorship. However, it would be naïve to believe that he resented Apartheid as intensely as Mphahlele, or Head or La Guma for the simple reason that he was not subjected to the same conditions of life. Even though he was at a certain time harassed by police security, he still could enjoy the necessary comfort that permits to ponder, meditate and create, which was impossible for black writers.

A prolific writer, Brink continues to produce masterpieces, the latest of which is his memoir which he admits to have written arduously. In this oeuvre the past and new South Africa are examined meticulously and sensitively. The author evokes with emotion the crucial moment when Mandela appeared on T.V . The images broadcast were immemorial. They showed a man dancing on the rhythm of an African music. A poem was read in his honour. At last the blacks were going to rehabilitate if only psychologically their dignity first as human beings and second as black South Africans. Meanwhile should one believe in a future South Africa where peace and love would reign? The news that comes from there up to now is ominous and often pessimistic. It would take so much time for the Whites to admit that the Blacks are equal to them. The latter also have to undergo the Afrikaners' aversion to this reality. The latest example is that of Eugene Terre-blanche, the official representative of the ultra right wing, who was

murdered recently (April 3, 2010) and who declared in an interview his radical opposition to the blacks' rise to power in these terms: "*I cannot let the black man free to murder me. We cannot give them the power to decide because they will decide against the white man. The differences are too big*."(1987:179). Afrikaners who have this conviction still exist in South Africa just as Blacks planning revenge do. It is difficult indeed to imagine that a democratic system would bring the solution to all the problems the country is facing. The prospects of a future induce writers, both Whites and Non-Whites to suggest some 'ways' out of the chaos. It is true that, as Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) foreshadows, the psychological aftermaths of Apartheid are well entrenched and the cure certainly lies far beyond restoring power to the black majority. However, the abolition of the segregating system is in itself a recognition, if only in principle of the Blacks' dignity, and as such will certainly initiate a new enterprise.

The study of the undeniable link between autobiography and exile in the works of Mphahlele and Head, is to my mind, the perfect illustration of the restriction and limitation – both psychological and artistic - of a system that banishes people. Feeling alienated in their own country, the writers ceaselessly tried to restore the link with it by recalling their stories in different forms. It is true that the autobiography may be considered as a good example of a "committed literature" in the sense that its authors are anxious about giving the real picture of what goes on in a particular context. Yet – and here lies the restriction- the interpretation of the past is limited to that of the writer, the aim being, as Fanon says, to discover the skin behind the mask. With the freedom that the abolition of Apartheid has provided, writers have proceeded to a past retrieval with a view of preparing a new future for a society in the making.

To come back to Brink, it should be said that his exile or exiles were different from his black contemporaries' and this is why perhaps the need to write about

himself was not felt. His memoir appears as an achievement rather than a retrieval. His exiles had multifarious implications. Dissidence, rebellion, heresy are what made of him an exile. If Mphahlele and Head took refuge in autobiographies, he opted for the novel certainly because , as stated earlier, it was easier for him to produce fiction. While the former did not get rid of 'autobiography', Brink strived to produce it. He felt much more at ease with the novel form because he had the ability, the time, to imagine and create, to indulge in stylistics, also to dream. He is white even though a white rebel. It might seem paradoxical that a 'rebel' dreams. Yet, what some see as natural, the others think is a luxury. In Camus' *Les Justes,* Annenkov tells Stepan about the poet who is going to take part in the coup. They call him the Poet, to which Stepan retorts "*it is not a name for a terrorist*."[71] And when Annenkov insists and says that poetry is revolutionary, Stepan replies "*Only the bomb is revolutionary*" [72] (Camus,1977:20-21).

The word or the bomb, the word and the bomb, the word is the bomb, the combinations are many for the rebel to choose. At one time or another the writer must do with one of these combinations but what is sure is that the word, as Brink thinks and says is what helps counter the horrors of history. In a society as South Africa, "*while we have the word, our humanity remains confirmed*."(Brink,2009:325).

It may be said that human beings, in their infinite quest for truth, love, peace and

[71] « Ce n'est pas un nom pour un terroriste ».
[72] « La bombe seule est révolutionnaire ».

freedom, fall and rise, cry and laugh, lose and win, forget and remember. But what is imperative is that they write all they remember in order not to die and not to kill the best nor the worst of their memories.

N O T E S

to the thesis chapters, poems and testimonies.

Notes to GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

Page 13: **Coloureds:** The term 'coloured' was not used until the mid-thirties of the last century. The ancestry of the people to whom this term was given goes back two centuries, where inter-racial contact and inter-racial marriages took place between the European settlers and the local Khoi people. Coloured people in South Africa have always occupied an ambiguous position in the politics of racism and oppression. They were seen as 'less than' european but 'more than' african in the racist hierarchy. Like the African majority, coloureds were subjected to all the racist policies of the National Party. (David Adams, "The Coloureds" in *Mayibuye*, Vol.6, N°3,July 1995).

Most of the Indians, among whom Hadjie Ojer Ally, a hero of the Indian cause in South Africa, and a companion of Ghandi, think that they were regarded as Coloured just like Africans since they were subjected to the same treatment as the latter.

Page 18: **Drum:** First known as "*The African Drum*" - extract from "*South African Drumbeats*", TIME Magazine, 1952 , it was the most widely read magazine in Africa. Thousands of copies of *Drum* were distributed across Africa, to countries like Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Robert Crisp, a journalist and broadcaster, was the first to launch the magazine and was supposed to depict Black South Africans as "noble savages". Copies were sent abroad to serve as an example of their success with the "Bantu". The content consisted mainly of tribal preaching and folk tales. It was only when Jim Bailey took over the magazine in 1951 that the focus shifted to urban black life.Helped by Anthony Samson who later became the editor, Bailey moved the magazine's headquarters to Johannesburg, and re-named it *Drum.*.A Black editorial board was also established which consisted of Joe Rathebe, Dan "Sport" Twala, Dr. Alfred Xuma and Andy Anderson. Drum was not intended as a political vehicle, but it later covered political issues. It gave the oppressed a voice to express themselves and served as a school to many journalists and photographers. Famous writers like Mphahlele, Matshikisa, Nkosi, Nakasa published their stories and articles in Drum and contributed to make of it an integral part of the South African media landscape. Nowadays, *Drum* is the sixth largest magazine in Africa, and is considered as part of every black South African's daily life.

Notes to CHAPTER ONE:

Page 29 : **Dib,** *Le vieux môme et la mer*, (original version) :

« Je conçois que je reviens d'un autre monde, pas celui dont mes reves m'ont en fait le tour. Je renais comme une épave, échouant sur une côte par infortune. La mer aux griffes féroces n'a pu être ma dernière sépulture. Ma mère à moi, aux gestes doux et affables me serre contre son sein sans s'abstenir de murmurer de sa joie en pleurs. **Je me disais et si c'était à refaire** ? Ma mère sans le savoir me resserre d'avantage. »

Page 31 : **Siniavski** (original version)

« Pour beaucoup l'émigration devient une maladie chronique et plus d'un y succombe. Rien que dans le cercle restreint de mes amis et connaissances, je compte trois cas de suicide et cinq accidents mortels dus à l'inexperience en terrain nouveau. Quant à ceux que gagne la folie, que ronge la dépression,qui ont perdu leur visage, je ne les compterai pas ».

Page 35: **Steve Biko** died in Pretoria on 12 September 1977 (injured in scuffle). He was a young political leader and strong advocate of black solidarity, which earned him the title of father of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). In *Biko* (1979) Donald Woods attributes to him these qualifiers: "Wisdom, humor, compassion, understanding, brilliancy of intellect, unselfishness, modesty, courage." Steve Biko was also a writer whose collection of articles have been published under the title *I Write What I Like* (1988).

Page 52: **May,** *L'autobiographie* (original version).

« ….l'autobiographie occupe par définition une place à part : elle est non seulement, comme on vient de le rappeler, le plus souvent l'œuvre de l'âge mur ou de la vieillesse, mais elle est fréquemment conçue par l'autobiographe comme son ouvrage suprême, celui qui englobe, explique et justifie tout ce qui précède, le couronnement de l'œuvre ou de la vie qui lui a donné naissance. »

Page 47: **ANC: African National Congress:** in 1912 at Bloemfontein, the South African Native National Congress was formed, later to be renamed the African Ntional Congress. Among other organizations, it was the one that represented the real aspirations of the non-white South Africans since 1945 when the "African claims" were adopted: the cry was sharply for one man one vote, equal justice in the courts, freedom of landownership and the repeal of the Pass Laws. Its leader Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa from 1994 to 1999, and many of its members militated inside and outside prisons, sharing the same dreams and ideals which he stated in the Rivonia Trial: " *I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I am prepared to live and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die*." Nelson Mandela (1965) *No Easy Walk to Freedom*. London: Heinemann, p.189.

Page 47: **Mandela, Nelson Rolihlahla** (means: pulling a branch off a tree/trouble maker): founder of the ANC, Nobel Prize winner and the first South African president to be elected in a fully representative democratic election (1994-1999).

Page 47: **NP: National Party:** in 1913, a nationalist party expressing the supremacy of the Afrikaners was constituted. In 1933, radical elements of this party formed under the leadership of Dr Malan a "purified" national party, the word "purified" having a Nazi connotation. This party came to power on the 26th of May, 1948, and it institutionalized the Apartheid system whose essential principle was segregation between Whites and Blacks, that is to say racism. Ironically, the date coincides with the Universal declaration of human rights by the United Nations (10 December, 1948).

Page 48 : **Dennis Brutus,**

I am a Rebel and Freedom is my Cause.

I am a rebel and freedom is my cause:
Many of you have fought similar struggles
Therefore you must join my cause:
My cause is a dream of freedom
And you must help make my dream reality:
For why should I not dream and hope?
Is not revolution making reality of hopes?
Let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled
That I may return with my people out of exile
To live in one democracy in peace.
Is not my dream a noble one
Worthy to stand beside freedom struggles everywhere?

A poem based on a speech by the Palestinian president Yasser Arafat.

http://www.nu.ac.za/ccs/files/dennis%20compleate poems.pdf, (03/12/20)

Page 59: **Bantustans** or what has also been called "homelands" since 1972 are areas or 'reserves' assigned to black people.

The **Bantustan Policy** is analyzed in Motsoko Pheko's *Apartheid: The Story of a Dispossessed People*(1984) as a convenient way of diverting and condemning the Africans to a perpetual political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation under Bantustan "presidents" and "prime ministers manipulated by Pretoria and loyal to the racist regime.

Page 61: **Censorship acts :t**he following are examples taken from an infinite list of acts meant to censor non-white writings in South Africa :

Official Secret Act 1956.
Defence Act 1957.
Prisons Act 1959.
Police Amendment Act 1979.
Inquest Amendment Act 1979.
Advocate General Act 1979.

Notes to CHAPTER TWO:

Page 67: **Rivonia Trial**: 11/06/1963, the police raided the underground headquarters in
Rivonia, a Johannesburg suburb, and arrested Walter Sisulu, Goran Mbeki, Raymond Mlaba, Ahmed Kathrada and others.The Rivonia Trial began in October 1963 and Mandela was taken from his cell (in Pretoria Central Prison) to join the others.They were accused of sabotage and conspiration to overthrow the government.

Page 86: **Louis Armstrong,**

What Did I Do to Be so Black and Blue

Old empty bed...springs hard as lead
Feel like ol' Ned...wished I was dead
What did I do...to be so black and blue

Even the mouse...ran from my house
They laugh at you...and scorn you too
What did I do...to be so black and blue

I'm white...inside...but, that don't help my case
'cause I...can't hide...what is in my face

How would it end...ain't got a friend
My only sin...is in my skin
What did I do...to be so black and blue

From Louis Armstrong :*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man 1923-1934.*
(11/09/2001). http://www.starzik.com

Page 96: **Afrikan'** spelt with a '*K'* sends us back to Mphahlele's autobiography's title *Afrika my Music.* It is not to be confounded with '**Afrikaan**' which is an adjective in **Afrikaans**(language). Afrika with a 'K' has been chosen by the Es'kia Institute (marked under the banner *Gather Afrikans Gather*) to reflect the reclamation and change from a Eurocentric point of reference to an Afrikan one.

Page 103 : **Electrocardiogram:** the transcription of the sound of the train which has been compared to an electrocardiogram reminds one of the apparatuses invented for the special purpose of studying style. After recording two sentences or verses for example, a diagram –kymmogram – is drawn by a "kymograph" or a "chromograph" which helps distinguish the rhythm of one sentence and compare it with another. For more details see Marcel Cressot (1947). Le style et ses techniques. France : Presses universitaires,pp.288-291.

Page 103 ***:*** **kundera** Original version :(38)

« J'ai horreur d'entendre le battement de mon cœur qui me rappelle sans cesse que le temps de ma vie est compté. C'est pourquoi j'ai toujours vu dans les barres de mesure qui jalonnent les partitions quelque chose de macabre.Mais les plus grands maitres du rythme ont su faire taire cette régularité monotone et prévisible et transformer leur musique en un petit enclos de « temps hors du temps »…idée recue : le génie du rythme se manifeste par la régularité bruyamment soulignée. Erreur.L'assommant primitivisme du rock/le battement du cœur est amplifié pour que l'homme n'oublie pas une seconde sa marche vers la mort. »

Page 109: **Chronos** : or *cronos,* (Father Time in English), in Greek mythology eats his infants for fear that they reproduce the same act he committed against his father who damned him.

Page 115: **Aristotle** : « *The pathetic Proof* ». Aristotle devotes the first part of Book II of his Rhetoric to the pathetic proof. He defines passions as the causes that incite men to change their judgments and obtain as a consequence, pain and pleasure, anger, pity fear and other emotions. Passions serve as mechanisms of

dissuasion in political texts for example.

Aristotle, Rhetorique II, 1378 [1960], *Les belles lettres*. p.60.

Page 121: **Senghor** (original version).

« ….que représente la poésie pour les anciens Grecs? C'est la création par excellence, et ce qui caractérise la danse au néolithique, c'est d'être justement le premier art : il s'agit d'ébranler les forces de l'univers à travers les apparences. C'est pourquoi à sa naissance,la danse a les mêmes qualités que la poésie :c'est un ensemble d'images symboliques,mélodieuses et rythmées. En Afrique noire on ne danse pas pour se livrer a des prouesses physiques mais pour signifier quelque chose.Quand je suis allé annoncer à ma mère que j'avais été reçu au baccalauréat, elle ne m'a pas embrassé,elle n'a rien dit ; elle s'est mise à danser. »

Notes to CHAPTER THREE.

Page 149: **Robbe-Grillet** (original version) .

« Une convention tacite s'établit entre le lecteur et l'auteur : celui-ci fera semblant de croire à ce qu'il raconte, celui-là oubliera que tout est inventé et feindra d'avoir affaire à un document, à une biographie, à une quelconque histoire vécue. »

Page 152: The terms *San*, *Khwe*, *Sho*, *Bushmen* and **Basarwa** have all been used to refer to the hunter-gatherer peoples of southern Africa. The Basarwa are one of the tribal groups not recognized in the constitution of Botswana. The term has also been used pejoratively as bantu or bushmen were .

Page 160: **Daco** (original version).

« La schyzophrénie est la perte du contact avec la réalité………..Le schyzophrène est un étranger mental avec lequel il est pratiquement impossible d'entrer en contact. Il est coupé du réel, sans réaction et absolument indifférent ; il vit un rêve intérieur et une circonstance extérieure parvient rarement à le ramener à la réalité. »

Page 165: **The Gorgons**: In Greek mythology, the **Gorgon** (plural: **Gorgons**) was a terrifying female creature. It derives from the Greek word **gorgós**, which means "dreadful." The term commonly refers to any of three sisters who had hair of living, venomous snakes, and a horrifying gaze that turned those who beheld it to stone.Traditionally, while two of the Gorgons were immortal, Stheno and Euryale, their sister Medusa was not, and was slain by the mythical hero Perseus.

Page 165*:* **Poseidon:** God of the sea, Earthquakes and horses. He was the brother of Zeus and Hades. In Greek mythology, these three gods divided creation. Zeus ruled the sky, Hades the underworld , and Poseidon was given all water, both fresh and salt.

Page 166***:*** **Perseus***:* Son of Zeus and Danaé, he is the first Greek mythic hero who defeated various archaic characters and whose exploits provided the founding myths of the twelve Olympians. He is also the hero who killed Medusa.

Page 180: **Blue Note**: the use of the blue note is the essence of the blues music. It is a note that gives a particular sonority which is characteristic of this music.

Page 241: In ***Third Generation*** (1986), Sipho Sepamla offers a vision of the black fiction produced since 1948 and situates writers like E. Mphahlele, P.Abrahams, R.Reginald within the first generation(1950's); R.Rive, S.Sepamla, M.Tlali, B.Head within the second one , and N.Ndebele, A.Dangor, M.Matshoba within the third generation.

Notes to CHAPTER FOUR:

Page 187: **Sestigers**: a group of Afrikaan writers formed during the sixties.They gained worldwide fame for their position against Apartheid and had a strong influence on the works of a generation of writers in the 1970's and 1980's. the most famous members are André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Etienne Leroux, Jan Rabie, Ingrid Jonker, Adam Small and Bartho Smith.

Page 188: **Boer Wars** (known in Afrikaans as Vryheidsoorloeë [lit. "freedom wars") were two wars fought between the United Kingdom and the two independent Boer republics, the Orange Free state and the South African Republic(Transvaal Republic). The first took place in 1880-1881; the second,1899-1902. (Ian Knight, (1996) http://www.google.com/books?isbn=1855326124)

Page 229: **Malouf**, *Les identités meurtrières* (original version).

« Parallèlement au combat pour l'universalité des valeurs, il est impératif de lutter contre l'uniformisation appauvrissante, contre l'hégémonie idéologique ou politique ou économique ou médiatique, contre l'unanimisme bêtifiant, contre tout ce qui bâillonne les multiples expressions linguistiques,artistiques, intellecctuelles. Contre tout ce qui va dans le sens d'un monde monocorde et infantilisant.Un combat pour la défense de certaines pratiques, de certaines traditions culturelles, mais un combat perspicace,exigeant,sélectif,sans frilosité, sans frayeur excessives, et constamment ouvert sur l'avenir. »

Page 227 : **Brink's Testimony,**

Extract taken from A. Brink's *A Fork in the Road.*

On several occasions before his untimely death I'd also shared the deep wisdom and gentle humanity of Edward Said. But this immersion into the terrible reality of that tragic place, the land and its people, shook me as few other experiences in my life have done. It was like a rediscovery of the evil heart of apartheid. The way in which Palestinians, among them some of the finest

people I have ever come to know, are subjected to one of the cruelest reigns of oppression in the world, and the web of hypocrisy and lies that, on the Israeli side,attemptsto obscure and distort the truth. During this visit, a particularly shocking event occurred when the small house of an old Palestinian man was flattened by the bulldozers of the Israeli army because he had dared to erect a tank on his own roof to collect the pitiful raindrops that fell on it. I *saw* the network of modern tarmac roads constructed for use by Israelis and the wretched little side roads to which Palestinians were confined; saw the olive groves – in many cases the sole means of subsistence of Palestinian farmers – uprooted and demolished by Israelis; *saw* the proliferation of new Israeli settlement deep inside Palestinian territory, established in contravention of all laws and agreements, merely to enforce Israeli presence and power in a territory not their own. I had *seen* this before, in the context of the oppression of blacks by whites in South Africa. I had heard all the pious excuses and explanations. And when I think back today,I cannot banish from my memory the terrible remains of Dachau andAuschwitz: for although Israel has never embarked on a genocide on the scale of the Holocaust, the ethnic cleansing this country is inflicting on Palestine amounts, morally, to a slow and minor-key-copy of these camps of death. I fail to understand how a people that has staggered from the terrors of the Holocaust could subsequently proceed to do unto others what had been done to them. (2009:393)

Page 228: **Breytenbach**, *Voice Over: A Nomadic Conversation with Mahmoud Darwish* (extract from the poem).

Voice Over

A Nomadic Conversation with Mahmoud Darwish

the poem is but a geeing of dice
shimmering in a dancer-dark cone
or maybe not   and words flutter
like feathers to the sand
I have no role in this writing

except beholden to the rhythm
of its budging emotions   how one sensation
anvils and bevels the other   and an inkling
of meaning betoken   and busying
a trance in the night sound of words

Breytenbach on Mahmoud Darwish:

Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian poet (1941 - 9 August 2008), was a friend. ….. Immediately after his passing, I started writing the above series as fragments of a continuing dialogue. …... I consider these fragments as ways of paying homage. Perhaps too, an attempt to draw the veil from the known face which has now gone silent…..MD had always been a prolific poet. One could interact with him forever. The present 'collage' touches upon transformed 'variations' of his work, at times plucked from different poems and then again by way of approaching a specific verse, with my own voice woven into the process. The images, and to an extent even the rhythms and the shaping, are his. I don't know Arabic and have to make do with English and French approximations. I did have the luck of hearing him read in his tongue on several occasions and the sounds and movement of that ancient vehicle always struck me. I had to step a language away in order to get closer to him in English; these versions thus grew retroactively from Afrikaans efforts, with the intention also of facilitating a conversation between the two languages. The result cannot be properly described as a true 'translation'. At times an echo or an association presented by the English possibilities opened a new way back into the Afrikaans. The journey continues and the conversation will carry on, in the attempt to look for Mahmoud Darwish among the words. **Breyten Breytenbach N**ew York, December 2008, http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/safrica/breytb1.htm

Page 232: **Breytenbach**, (original version, interview) :

« Est-ce parce qu'on ne peut pas les satisfaire qu'on laisse presque naturellement les gens s'entre-tuer ? Ou est-ce parce qu'on se dit que, si on admet l'étendue de la criminalité, on admet aussi par-là que nous, Africains, sommes plus portés sur la violence que d'autres ? »

A U T H O R S' B I B L I O G R A P H I E S

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It includes works of fiction, works of criticism, reference books, and resources on the World Wide Web. It is presented as follows:

I - Works of fiction

II - Works of criticism
- Books
- Articles

III - Reference books

IV - Webliography

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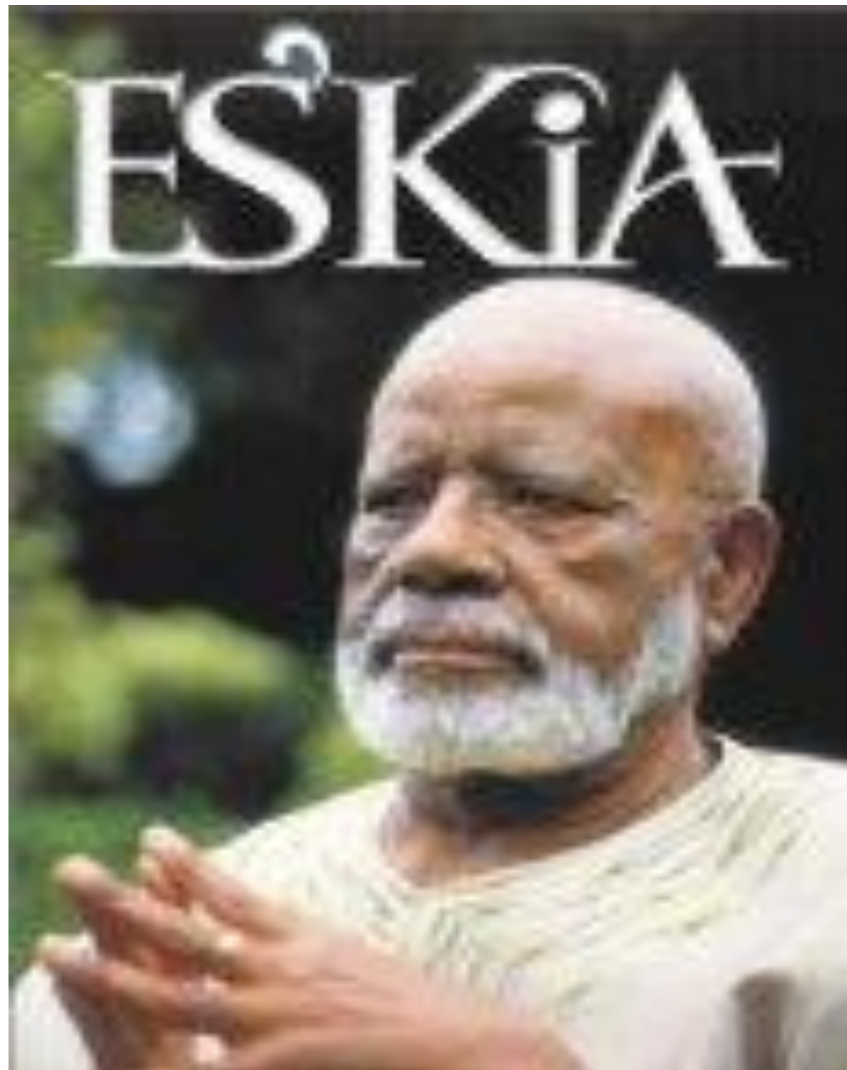
APPENDICES

They include the writers' photographs and pictures of the South African setting during and after Apartheid.



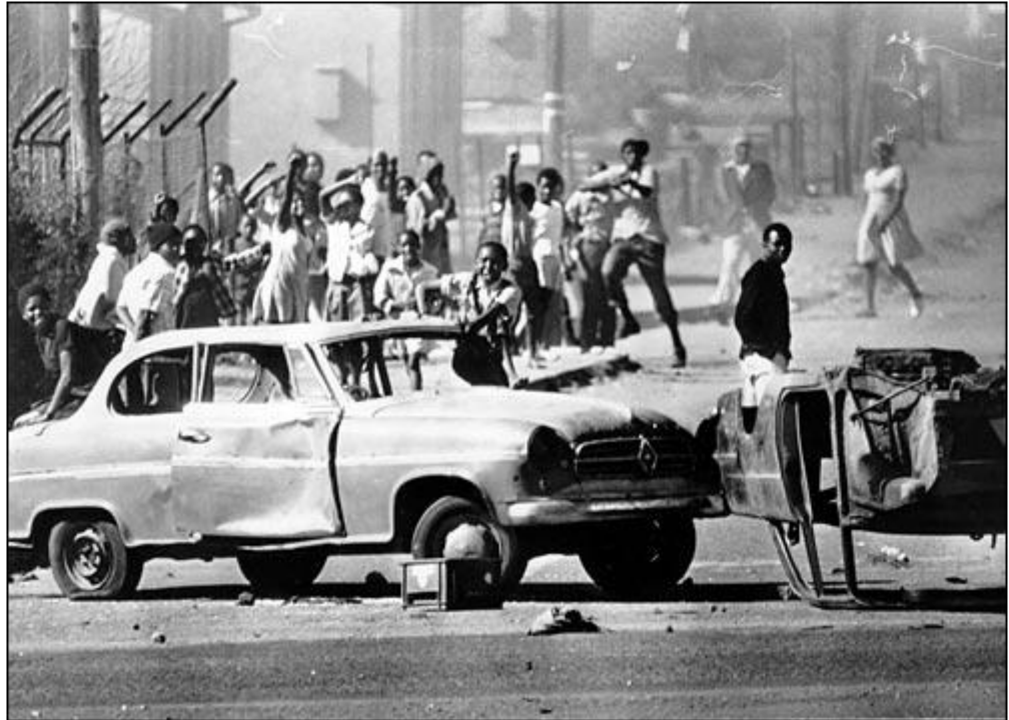
ES'KIA MPHAHLELE

BESSIE HEAD

ANDRE PHILIPUS BRINK

Sharpeville Massacre, March, 1960.

Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela in 1962



Riots, June 21, 1976.

Steve Biko.

ROBBEN ISLAND

G.P.-S.18864—1973-74—100 000 (M-S) (P) G 353

GEVONNISTE GEVANGENE
SENTENCED PRISONER

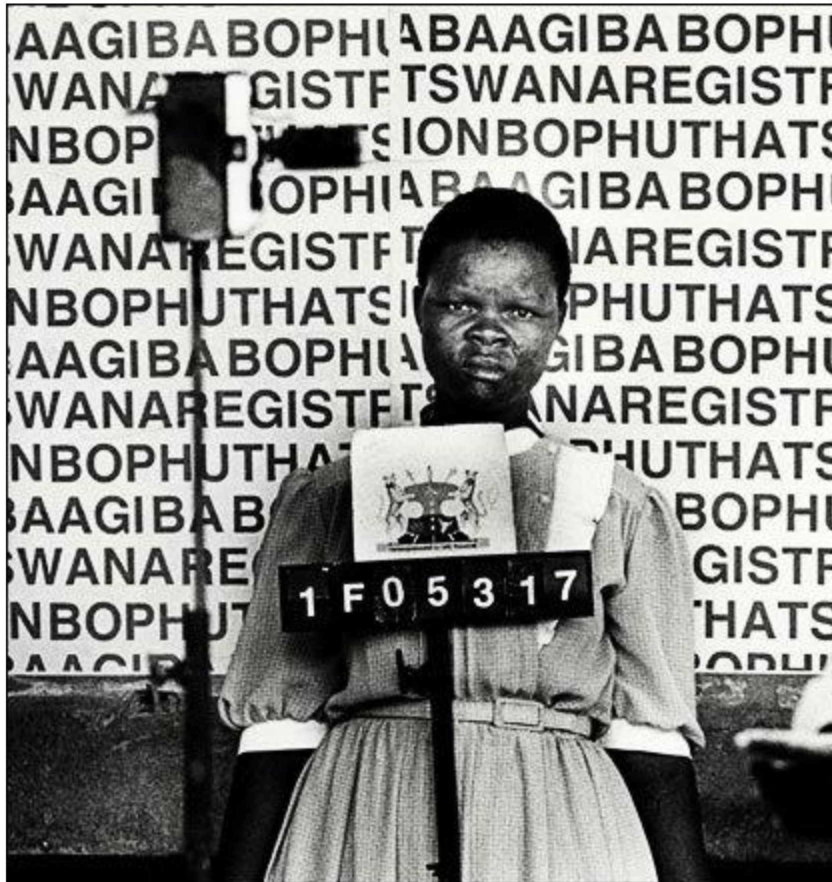
Groep / Group: B. A / /
Geloof / Religion: Hindu
OPMERKINGS / REMARKS
—THUMB IMPRESSION

No. 69/64 Raad No./Board No. 1/5341.
Naam / Name: Billy Nair.
Misdaad / Crime: Sabotasie.
Vonnis / Sentence: 20 Jaar G/S.
Datum van vonnis / Date of sentence: 28/2/64.
Datum van ontslag / Date of discharge: 27/2/84.

Prison Cards

Head’s home in Serowe, Botswana

Whites sit on a bus stop bench with blacks two weeks after the city of Johannesburg in South Africa allowed blacks to travel on 'whites-only' buses in February, 1990.



A woman is photographed in 1986 for her "Reference Book" in Boputhatswana, one of the South African independent homelands.

Classroom in a complex of old horse stables on the Orange Farm in 1990.

Nelson Mandela and W.F De Klerk awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

“In his Nobel Lecture, Nelson Mandela referred to the organic world-view expressed already in the manifesto of 1944, calling himself a mere representative of the millions of people across the globe who "recognised that an injury to one is an injury to all;" which is the essence of *ubuntu* philosophy universally applied.”

Reported by Anders Hallengren (11/09/2001) in his article, “*Nelson Mandela and the Rainbow of Culture.”*
(http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1993/mandela-article.html)

World Cup, 2010 in South Africa.

World Cup 2010, stadium, flag and vuvuzela.

South African township SOWETO, 2010.

Post Apartheid protests in South African townships.

Supporters of slain white supremacist leader Eugene Terreblanche, salute his coffin as it is driven from the church in Ventersdorp (2010)

Eugene Terreblanche

RESUME

Entre l'exil et l'autobiographie, il existe une relation que nous tenterons d'analyser à travers l'étude de trois œuvres Sud Africaines. Nous essayerons d'expliquer que la condition de l'exil est souvent génératrice d'une forme d'écriture dont 'l'élasticité' ou la 'souplesse' constitue un obstacle quant à la définition du genre autobiographique. En effet, nombreux sont les critiques littéraires qui s'accordent à dire que ce dernier est 'problématique', d'où la difficulté de le circonscrire et de lui astreindre des règles claires et définitives.

Dans cette thèse nous proposons donc d'examiner les formes d'exils expérimentées par chaque auteur ainsi que l'écriture autobiographique qui en a découlé. Il est important de préciser le fait que les auteurs choisis, a savoir Es'kia Mphahlele, Bessie Head et André Brink, appartenant tous les trois à la nation arc-en-ciel, sont noir, métis et blanc. Cette distinction de couleur, loin d'être discriminatoire, vise plutôt à lever le voile sur des réalités imposées par l'Apartheid, un système inhumain et répressif, dont l'impact laissera à jamais des stigmates dans les vies et les littératures Sud-Africaines.

Combien d'exils ces auteurs ont-ils subis et quelles littératures ont-ils produites sont des questions auxquelles nous tenterons de répondre dans les quatre chapitres de ce travail.

Chapitre I : présente une étude théorique de l'exil dans ses formes diverses, ses manifestations et ses interprétations. Il sera aussi question du lien entretenu par l'exil et l'autobiographie comme genre littéraire universel et sud africain en particulier.

Chapitre II : introduit l'œuvre de Mphahlele, *Down Second Avenue*, comme roman autobiographique. Le récit de sa vie révèle et renforce l'idée selon laquelle, l'exil dans son cas est racial, par conséquent psychologique et culturel.

Chapitre III : analyse l'auto fiction de Head ; *A Question of Power,* invite le lecteur à pénétrer dans la vie tourmentée d'une écrivaine triplement exilée puisque souffrant de discriminations raciale, tribale et sexuelle. Nous verrons comment, à travers l'autobiographie, Head comme Mphahlele, réinscrit le passé et le réactive afin de recouvrer son identité.

Chapitre IV : examine les mémoires d'André Brink, *A Fork in the Road*. Auteur Afrikaner, témoin de trois générations d'écrivains révoltés blancs et non-blancs, son œuvre autobiographique fait foi de document historique puisqu'elle est récit d'événements et d'expériences rééditant de fortes réminiscences. L'exil de Brink est d'abord culturel mais non moins pénible et aliénant que celui de Mphahlele et Head.
L'étude de la relation entre l'exil et l'autobiographie a également pour objet de démontrer qu'aux fins fonds de l'Afrique, une nation, parée des couleurs de l'arc-en-ciel, est malheureusement devenue à travers le temps le berceau de sensibilités extrêmes. Rapportés ou inventés, faits et fictions ne suffiront pas à narrer, à inscrire et peut être même à chanter avec un « je », un « il » ou un « nous », les vies d'hommes et de femmes aspirant à construire une nation.

ملخص

بين الاغتراب و السيرة الذاتية توجد علاقة سنحاول تحليلها من خلال دراسة ثلاثة مؤلفات جنوب افريقية.
نرمي في هده الدراسة إلى إبراز أن ظاهرة الاغتراب تعتمد على شكل من أشكال الكتابة التي باتت فيها المرونة احد العوائق في تحديد الجنس الأدبي الاوتوبيوغرافي. كثيرون إذن من النقاد الأدباء من يعتقد أن هدا الأخير يشكل معضلة كونه ناقدا لمعالم و قواعد أدبية جلية و ثابتة.

سنتناول ادن في هده الأطروحة أشكالا من الاغتراب المعتمدة عند كل من المؤلفين، و ما تجسده من كتابة أتوبيوغرافية. تجدر الإشارة إلى كون الكتاب الثلاثة المعتمدين في الرسالة ينتمون إلى أمة "قوس قزح"دوي البشرة السوداء و البيضاء والخليط . الإشارة إلى فارق اللون ليس أساسه التمييز العنصري و إنما كشف النقاب عن حقيقة "اللأبرتايد" النظام العبودي الخانق و القامع، الذي ترك أثارا بليغة في حياة الناس و الأدب الجنوب الإفريقي.

كم من اغتراب و أي أدب أنتجوه هؤلاء الكتاب ؟ تلك هي الأسئلة التي نحاول الإجابة عنها من خلال الفصول الأربعة لهدا البحث.

الفصل I عبارة عن دراسة نظرية حول الاغتراب و أشكاله المختلفة، مظاهره و تأويلاته. يتعلق الأمر أيضا بالعلاقة بين الاغتراب و السيرة الذاتية كجنس أدبي عام و جنوب إفريقي بوجه خاص.

الفصل II يصنف مؤلف *Down Second Avenue* للكاتب Mphahlele بمثابة رواية أوتوبيوغرافية يؤكد من خلالها الاغتراب في شكله العنصري و بالتالي أسسه الثقافية و البسيكولوجية .

الفصل III هو تحليل الرواية اللأوتوبيوغرافية للمؤلفة Head الموسوعة *AQuestion* of *Power* حيث تدعو الكاتبة القارئ إلى ولوج حياتها حيت عاشت الاغتراب بأشكاله المختلفة ، العنصري ، الفكري ، و الجنسي.
من خلال الدراسة اللأوتوبيوغرافية سوف نرى كيف عمل كل من Head و Mphahlele على استحضار الماضي قصد تفعيله في الحفاظ على الهوية.

الفصل IV يعالج مذكرات Andre Brink الموسوعة *A Fork in the Road* . يعتبر Brink من الكتاب الأفارقة ، إذ تعايش مع أجيال ثلاثة من الكتاب المتمردين البيض و غير البيض. يعد كتابه بمثابة وثيقة تاريخية شاهدة على تجارب و أحداث واقعية . ان الاغتراب عند Brink ظاهرة ثقافية بالدرجة الأولى و لكن لا تقل حدته، كما هو الشأن عند Head و Mphahlele .

إن دراسة العلاقة بين الاغتراب و الأوتوبيوغرافيا يهدف كدالك إلى تسليط الضوء على حقيقة الوضع في أعماق إفريقيا المختلطة الأجناس و الألوان والتي تقطنها أمة كقوس قزح ، أضحت مع مرور الزمن مهدا للنزاعات و الحساسية المفرطة التي لا تسعها إبداعات من ضرب الواقع و حتى من باب الخيال لتقص ، أو تسجل ولم لا، تتغنى ب "أنا" أو "هو" أو "نحن" لرسم حياة الرجال و النساء بواقع الطموح إلى تأسيس أمة.