LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAC	All-African Convention
ANC	African National Congress
APO	African People's Organisation
AUETSA	Association of University English Teachers of South Africa
BC	Black Consciousness
COSAW	Congress of South African Writers
DC	Drawn in Colour
DSA	Down Second Avenue
IDASA	Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa
NELM	National English Literature Museum
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
OP	The Ochre People
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
SAA	Syndicate of African Artists
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
TF	Tell Freedom
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDUSA	Union of Democratic University Staff Associations
UNISA	University of South Africa
WESSA	White English-speaking South African

CONTENTS

Introduction

> Postmodern critical intelligence can complete the legitimation of its oppositional ideology only if it becomes part of the public sphere by placing itself within the context of other oppositional forces and theorizes the counterhegemonic in light [*sic*] of their local struggles.
>
> Paul A Bové

The present study has two intersecting foci: the establishment of an appropriate critical procedure and the deployment of this procedure (or set of procedures) within a specific field of writing in South Africa: black autobiography of the 1950s and early 1960s, with specific reference to Peter Abrahams's Tell Freedom (1954), Ezekiel[1] Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue (1959), and Noni Jabavu's Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts (1960) and The Ochre People (1963). The former two writers, in particular Mphahlele, have received critical attention both locally and internationally, though this has not been the case with Noni Jabavu.

While I have taken "black" to signify a complex ontology based on the experience of racial oppression and a resultant personal and political disempowerment, there is a variety of interconnected determinants that need to be examined when dealing with a broadly categorised "black" writing, including class[2] and culture[3]. A related concern is the extent to which a bourgeois literary product may function as a reliable narrative of an oppressed people's past and its effectiveness in the process of self-definition and the building of a postcolonial culture.

The centrality of autobiography in the field of black South African writing is widely acknowledged. It has been a persistent, "always important" genre, largely because of the systemic inequalities and politicisation of ordinary lives under apartheid (Driver 1988:171).[4] This system was institutionalised during the 1950s, a period during which the counter-discourse of non-racialism flourished, finding its apogee in the Freedom Charter of 1954 (Wade 1994:198). I take as my starting point the proposition that black South African literature forms "an important component of a developed counterhegemonic culture" (Trump 1990:163).[5] Autobiography is central to this literature. In narratives where the "I" (re)defines itself in the process of re-membering its times, it simultaneously reflects, refracts and reconstructs as it denies the official version of the South African "narrative". By encoding the heterogeneous context that penetrates and produces it, the text produces a hybrid self that subverts hegemonic notions of racial and cultural purity.

The following extract from Bloke Modisane's autobiography, Blame Me on History, dramatically encodes the terms of this narrative: the crude racial categorisation, the disempowerment and ghettoisation of the "other", a "savage" within a "kraal", convenient constructs that maintain the myth of difference upon which colonialism/apartheid was founded. Modisane's desire and derogation parallels that expressed by other hybrid selves in autobiographical writing of the time (which will be examined during the course of this critique):

> I wanted more than the excitement of the senses; the doors into the art galleries, the theatres, the world of ballet, opera, classical music, were shut in my nose because I am black, and because of this fact I am, therefore, not considered capable of appreciating them; it was decided I am not sufficiently civilised to benefit emotionally and intellectually from the halls of culture; in any case, it was an alien culture, and I was encouraged instead to develop and cultivate an appreciation for my own culture of the shield and the assegai, of ancestral gods,

> drums, mud huts and half-naked women with breasts as hard as green mangoes; but these were the things for which I was declared a savage and not worthy of the "benefits" of Western culture.
>
> (1986:178)

It is suggested that autobiographical narrative that encodes this kind of self has the capacity to inform the envisioning of a new nationhood.[6]

The procedure for the theorisation[7] of this literature will be determined largely by the imperatives of the autobiographical text itself within the South African context. Paul A Bové is cited because his analysis of and struggle against received forms of reading, as well as his appropriation of the oppositional elements of postmodernism,[8] seem particularly apposite to the critical task in South Africa. The development of an appropriate critical procedure demands, on the one hand, a sensitivity to the "local" aspects of people's struggles, and, on the other, an imaginative deployment of the insights of postmodernism.

This study is located within a period of radical historical transition, both local and global, in which existing paradigms are shifting.[9] Among these is the "colonial" paradigm, which, in the local context, is subject to ongoing definition as powers reposition themselves. Because this critique is situated in a period which is, from a constitutional point of view at least, post-apartheid, the term "postcolonial" will be employed; postcoloniality may, however, be seen more broadly as the condition of the world, one which has profound consequences for identity, both personal and national. In South Africa's interim phase, its interregnum, ideologies collide and converge; the "old" gives way to an as yet indeterminate "new" in a temporal space where the past irrupts into a present that

struggles towards a future freed of its terrible legacy. Here, not only time, but also identity is discontinuous and disjunctive.

The present critique examines the re-definition of the self and of the nation in a postcolonial context. It is argued that black autobiographical writing of the 1950s and early 1960s sets up a "self" that counters the colonial "other", an "I" that displaces the colonist's "you". In the process of re-collection and re-membering, alternative forms of identity are constructed. Accordingly, autobiography functions as a narrative mode that informs the process of decolonisation and emergent nationhood[10] by countering ideologies of racial difference and inferiority.

The question of nationalism/nationhood may be approached in the light of Benedict Anderson's insights:

> In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love.
>
> (Anderson 1983:141)

There is a connection between decolonisation, nationalism, and the building of a new national culture and identity, since "[t]o fight for national culture is first and foremost to fight for the liberation of the nation" (Fanon quoted in Schipper 1989:63). However, identity, whether individual or national, is never stable. Indeed, given a culturally heterogeneous context such as South Africa, the memory of the autobiographer is, like "the national memory ... always the site of the hybridity of histories and the displacement of narratives" (Bhabha 1990:319).[11] For this reason, a term such as *métissage* offers a

kind of *clef* in exploring the relationship between writing and the re(construction) of identity in South Africa.

Two questions now emerge. The first concerns the extent to which "the counterhegemonic" is to be identified with what seems to be the dominant liberatory narrative in contemporary South Africa: that of Charterist non-racialism. The second, related one, concerns the role of the critic. If this role is defined as one that participates in the process of cultural and national reconstruction, it is necessary for the critic's genealogy, her cultural, social and ideological conditioning, to be foregrounded. The white critic will need to balance international with local critical and cultural concerns in tracing the relationship between the construction of identity in autobiographical writing and the struggle against hegemonic notions of identity (these concerns will be addressed in Chapters One and Two). Western theory is a jet-setting traveller; its baggage must be unpacked at each destination, and appropriate items selected if it is to function usefully.

It is useful to read South African postcoloniality against the background of the concept, "colonialism of a special type".[12] While the race and class oppositions set up by the "dual nation" model are contradicted by many of the features not only of contemporary South African society, but also of earlier periods such as the 1950s,[13] this model illuminates the relationship of critical activity (which remains almost exclusively white) to literary production, particularly that of black people. It throws into relief the uniquely problematical position of "the critical institution" (Eagleton 1984:7), the academy, the university department of English, whose research output, the articles and attitudes it generates, tends to function hegemonically in the reception of literary culture. The role

of the intellectual, and the workings of hegemony are central to this concept.[14] (Antonio Gramsci's analyses of these topics are particularly useful, and will be discussed more fully in Chapter One).

The reception of black writing continues to be influenced by those whose professional status is - largely - an effect of a system of racial discrimination. Fifteen years ago, for example, Sarah Christie, Geoffrey Hutchings and Don MacLennan exhorted black South African autobiographers to follow the example of Achebe and Ngugi who have "had little difficulty in mastering the novel form" (1980:123). The prescriptive valorisation of the "superior" form of the novel, a "finished aesthetic object" (Christie *et al* 1980:122) is symptomatic of a colonial education system that "denies the colonized useful knowledge about themselves and their world" and teaches them that "they have no history" (Mzamane 1990a:369).

The "governing race" sees itself, according to postcolonial theorist Frantz Fanon, primarily as coming "from elsewhere", as "unlike the original inhabitants, 'the others'" (1971:31). This illuminates the historic relationship between whites and blacks contained in the notion of colonialism of a special type; for the purposes of the present thesis, it highlights the hegemony of forms of critical activity that originate "from elsewhere", a hegemony that "others" the literary products of "original inhabitants". Such terms are used with circumspection, however, since it is a basic premiss of the present thesis that rigid distinctions between "here" and "elsewhere", "self" and "other", "settler" and "original inhabitants" are invalid in the South African postcolonial context. This is demonstrated in various acts of troubled and self-doubting criticism that have emanated from within the

critical institution itself over a period of two decades, from Mike Kirkwood to Kelwyn Sole.

The first significant critical salvo fired against colonialism by a white critic was, significantly, in 1976, when Kirkwood took issue with neo-colonial cultural hegemony within the South African literary establishment. His article, "The Colonizer: A Critique of South African Culture Theory", inscribes the intervention of Marxist colonial critique in local discourse. The schoolchildren of Soweto were at the time engaged in an uprising against the culture of the regime which expressed itself in a grotesque form of colonisation, whereby pupils were coerced into learning the language of those they perceived to be their oppressors. Michael Vaughan was to add his dissenting Marxist voice to that of Kirkwood in 1984, when he berated the critical institution for maintaining a distance between itself and the grass-roots struggles being waged outside its walls[15]; he went on to accuse it of serving the dubious function of providing a refuge from the exigencies of the latter (Vaughan 1984:36). The critical strategies deployed by critics such as Kirkwood and Vaughan disturbed the dominant aesthetic in the institutional arena which, until the 1970s, isolated the text from its socio-historical context. Criticism was beginning to consider its broader social responsibilities, as voices spoke from within hegemony in opposition to it, rupturing the institution's *cordon sanitaire*.[16] The nexus of text/critic expanded to include the "world".

The displacement of colonial aesthetics (new criticism, practical criticism) by Marxist, feminist and poststructuralist strategies has not necessarily heralded a new dawn. For,

while poststructuralist concerns have problematised[17] the critical institution, these may yet have the effect of prolonging colonial torpor. Michael Chapman's comments concerning J M Coetzee's "poststructuralist allegories" are appropriate here: poststructuralism may have the effect of confirming

> the suspicions of many black writers that literary pursuit in white South Africa has rather more to do with the gratifications of libidinal language than the fulfilments of fighting political injustice.
>
> (Chapman 1988a:338)

These "suspicions" have been shared by concerned writers, as Chapman shows (1988a:328). Indeed, they probably concern writers and critics of all races who fear that the potential of poststructuralism to disrupt hegemonic discourse may be negated if it is merely recuperated by the critical institution, with its tendency to sever itself from the public sphere, thus evading the crises that confront it (Eagleton 1984:7).

Local criticism is, however, in a healthy state of crisis as the self-doubt and self-examination of recent articles ("Sole and the the Symptoms of a Nervous Breakdown" (Lewis Nkosi 1994); "Fear and Loathing in the Academy" (Sole 1994b)) suggest. On the one hand, criticism reflects and refracts the larger struggle that has characterised postcolonial South African history from the time that opposition groups began to move from protest to challenge in a national liberation struggle (Karis & Carter 1972 & 1973). On the other, it enacts the collision between, and convergence of, a critical practice associated with a late-capitalist set of circumstances (postmodernism) and literary texts located in a pre-liberation context. The prefixes in terms such as "postmodernist" and "pre-liberation" signify the intersection of two discourses located in spatially separate though synchronic historical moments.[18] The juxtaposition of these terms suggests, furthermore, a relationship of inequality, one that the critic needs to bear in mind if

criticism is not to function as a form of expansionism in the terrain of black writing.

As suggested, criticism that emerges in a moment of historical transition is characterised by uncertainties and ambiguities. Interstices may arise among formations that have, historically, been overdetermined by the category of race. This enables the white South African literary critic to take up the challenge of theorising the counterhegemonic: the development of a "detailed, scholarly comprehension of [her] own location within the field of discourse and cultural practice" (Bové 1986a:7). I hope, in Chapter One, to attempt this act of "comprehension" by analysing the field of critical discourse over the past 40 years, particularly where this has concerned the criticism of black writing.

The position of the critic may be one of engagement rather than contemplation if critical discourse is embedded in the surrounding matrix of social discourse. Here, there are no strict separations between East and West, North and South, First and Third worlds. These dichotomies (themselves the constructs of colonialism) collapse into one another, as each "world" is seen to be constructed by its "other". The consequence of colonialism is the intersection of cultures, which precipitates a process of redefinition of both the colonising self and the colonised other, both of whom are locked together in a world defined by the continuing effects of the historical event of colonialism.

In a postcolonial context, Western cultural practices tend to be hegemonic, as critical discourse demonstrates. The "postmodern" is increasingly

> applied to cultures and texts outside Europe, assimilating post-colonial works whose political orientations and experimental formations have been deliberately designed to counteract such European assimilation....
>
> (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989:173)

Paradoxically, postmodernism - itself symptomatic of a moment of crisis in Western cultural authority - reinforces this very authority by acting to "make the rest of the world a peripheral term in Europe's self-questioning" (Ashcroft *et al* 1989:173). If (to appropriate the latter trope) black South African writing is to be more than a "peripheral term" in the self-questioning of a white critic, the postcolonial text will have to resist hegemonisation and assimilation. This it may do if the text's oppositional voices are mobilised in an act of critical intervention against forms of domination associated with hegemonic practices. These practices are a feature not only of postmodernism, however, but also of Marxism. Wole Soyinka derides the assimilationist effects of the "Leftocracy" and rejects the universalising practices of the "bourgeois intellectualism" of Africa's "mentor culture" (1984:34). Texts that do not conform to the pattern of Marxist dogma (such as those of Jabavu), are the target of critical abuse - or, worse, simply ignored.

And yet, too hasty a dismissal of Western critical models is inadvisable. Soyinka's challenge to the critic to decide whether her society is "International Academia .... Or Ipetumodu" (1984:29) may be a facile one: today, Ipetumodu may, to a very real extent, be said to constitute the meaning of International Academia if it is accepted that the critic inhabits not only an actual geographical location, but also a world of discourse. In this world, the boundaries between one world and another are merely putative:

> Discursive formations are not hermetically sealed, they overlap and intersperse in ways that may fruitfully and reflexively be utilized. It is, after all, at the point of intersection with other discourses that any discourse becomes determined.
> (Ashcroft *et al*, 1989:168)

As suggested, Western cultural practices should neither be appropriated uncritically nor rejected outright. For example, Paul Bové's notion of the "postmodern as antihegemonic" (1986a:23) offers the contemporary South African critic a starting point. Where a residual colonialism persists in an interregnum, it is proposed that a counterhegemonic position should precede the antihegemonic one proposed by postmoderism. This will entail an analysis of the relationship between the concept, the "counterhegemonic", and a literary culture that envisions and may inform identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Such an analysis draws on the insights of critics whose positions are, in a manner of speaking, contiguous with those of the oppressed. Homi K Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak[19] are read alongside and against Mphahlele and Njabulo Ndebele whose criticism (which has its own inter- and intra-contradictoriness) collectively constitutes a critique of contemporary theories. Race, which overdetermines South African culture and society, is central to the process of analysing the ontology, epistemology, as well as analytical procedures of writers and critics, in short, the relationship between consciousness and the materiality of lives.[20] The relationship between ways of being, seeing and speaking as well as the discursive construction and re-construction of the historical subject are central concerns of the present critique which examines the discursive process of dis-memberment and re-membering in black autobiographical writing of the era of apartheid entrenchment.

In re-naming (and thus reclaiming) himself/herself "I", the subject answers back (Spivak 1985:131) to various forms of colonial authority - including postmodernism, or feminisms that function "as part of a dominating order or symbolic system against which self-

assertion needs to be voiced" (Driver 1991a:7). The predicament of the objectified, silenced, erased "other" is tellingly expressed as follows:

> You who understand the dehumanisation of forced removal-relocation-re-education-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality your voice [*sic*] - you know. And often cannot *say* it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.
>
> (Minh-ha quoted in Driver 1991a:7)

The speaking subject may best be heard if the autobiographical text is re-constellated, if it is "wrench[ed] out of its proper context and put ... within alien arguments" (Spivak 1987:241).[21] I hope to demonstrate, in the chapters that follow, that criticism may thus function, non-hegemonically, to originate or mediate what Spivak terms new "mind-sets" or ideological formations (1987:245-6).

The present study is delimited by two interlinking categories: white criticism, and black writing. The position of the white critic *vis à vis* the black text may, accordingly, best be approached from the point of view that each inhabits a field of discourse produced by a reality "out there" which is at once separate(d) and shared, and that shapes the identity of each. Following Spivak, Marianne de Jong proposes that the categories white critic and black text "should be read as effects of processes of exclusion or discursive appropriation rather than as identity" (De Jong 1989:370), thus positing a subjectivity that is not autonomous but produced.[22] Rather than being a static entity, however, the subject is capable of agency, at once positioning and positioned by discourse.

I hope to demonstrate, following Gramsci, that the critical consciousness of the intellectual is not a mere fiction, nor is it inevitably complicit with State hegemony. It has, indeed, been during "moments of crisis in command" (Gramsci 1959:124) that criticism

has functioned to counter hegemony (Kirkwood in the mid-1970s, Chapman in the mid-1980s). White criticism is, therefore, as much a response to moments of crisis as are black autobiographies written in the wake of 1948, when race was "inscribed in the institutional and organisational structures at every level of the political and economic system" (Wolpe 1988:63), and legal political action drastically circumscribed.[23]

The writing of autobiography at such a moment has a variety of purposes and functions, including the following: it tells black people "who they are, and where they come from, and what they should be doing about [their oppression]" (Mphahlele 1981b:44); it "documents" black people's "physical and human settings in stark, grim detail" (Mphahlele 1987:54) . However, it would be inappropriate to the present task to read these autobiographies as transparent historical documents or anthropological source-books, texts that "non-Africans", desiring to discover some putative "truth about black Africa", might mine (Christie *et al* 1980:122).[24]

The textual strategies of autobiographies written in a postcolonial context require a form of "affirmative deconstruction" (Spivak 1987:207), particularly where narrative may inform the process of national reconstruction. What has been claimed for African American autobiographers is at once germane, though also inadequate:

> One of the most important forums blacks have used to state their positions, to leave a record of their resistance, to inspire future generations, and to *promote their national development* has been the autobiography .... The central theme which runs through these autobiographies is the demand for the recognition of black manhood.
>
> (Blassingame 1973/74:2, my emphasis)

In a post-apartheid South African context, the use of the pronoun "their" may be too narrow, since it has the ring of racial exclusivity. Clearly, the recognition of black

personhood plays a central role in the the writing of Abrahams, Mphahlele and Jabavu in that it acts as a "counterweight" to what is perceived as "the white historian's caricature of black life" (Blassingame 1973/74:7). Accordingly, what John McCormick claims with regard to Frank Chikane's No Life of My Own - it is "not only the story of the author's life, but becomes a vehicle for the many other hitherto unwritten stories [of other black South Africans]" (1989:20) - is true in general for black South African autobiography. A distinction needs to be drawn, however, between a narrow national(ist) "history" and the inclusive, hybrid multi-stories of counterhegemonic narratives.

Since literature is, as Simon During points out, an important cultural practice in the process of definition and legitimation of individuals as members of a nation state (1990:138), claims to identity and histor(ies) in autobiographical narratives need to be acknowledged, as do the anti-imperialist nationalisms of marginalised peoples. A failure to do so may amount to nothing less than a strategy of political quietism in a larger enterprise that universalises - and authorises - postmodernist insights. To reiterate, the latter need to be applied in a manner appropriate to the claims of counterhegemonic literature in a postcolonial context.

It is instructive to recall, at this juncture, the predicament of the colonial subject in J M Coetzee's novel, Foe: Friday has his tongue cut out by his slave-masters to make him "more tractable". Reduced to a state of bestial muteness, "the dumb slave" can neither complain, resist, nor tell others his story of enslavement. To Susan Barton, who desires, as his biographer, to give Friday voice, his muteness signifies mutilation, emasculation and political impotence:

> I confess I wondered ... whether the lost tongue might stand not only for itself but for a more atrocious mutilation; whether by dumb slave I was to understand a slave unmanned. (1986:119)

The position of the white critic may be analogous to that of the character Susan Barton, who declares:

> The story of Friday's tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday's tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. (1986:118)

The critic needs to find a means of empowering Friday, of enabling the mute, submerged strands in the discourse of autobiography to speak, and so to avoid "speaking" (for) Friday. First, however, the critic herself must find a voice or "voices" by reconstellating white and black criticism within the context of black autobiographical writing. For speak the "Euro-settler" critic[25] must, if Friday is to "speak" at all in the present study.

The relationship between the "I" who narrates her struggle and the critic who situates this narrative as well as her own within the context of local struggles and postmodern crises, is an interactional one. The binaric logic of oppositions such as "black/white" and "settler/native" is undermined by tropes of natural seepage, of convergences, crossings and contaminations. Accordingly, critic, narrator and protagonist may be perceived as elements that comprise a mixed and marvellous South African tale, one in which each element is a "tributary" in a flowing "river of South-Africanness".[26]

Conceptualising criticism in these terms offers an exit from the "power/knowledge" nexus to which the white critic might be consigned by the terms of a postmodern epistemological hegemony. These issues will be explored in Chapter One. Problems relating to authority raised here will be pursued in more detail in Chapter Two, with

particular reference to narratives that counter Humanist and postmodernist conceptions of the "I", and set up hybrid selves in defiance of identities constructed by and within ideologies of racial purity and inferiority.

In the last three chapters, the focus will fall on the autobiographical writings of Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Noni Jabavu. Chapter Three examines the construction of a "hybrid I" in the first South African autobiography written by a black ("coloured") person, Tell Freedom. Here, Fanon's notion that "the Negro is not" (1986:231) is read in tandem with Bhabha's concept of liminal colonial identity. The concept of *métissage* is introduced to elaborate on this identity. It is suggested that the self constructed in Abrahams's text contradicts the strictly defined identities set up at the time by racial legislation. These concerns are elaborated in Chapter Four, which examines selected autobiographical writings of Mphahlele. Down Second Avenue is dealt with extensively, with particular reference to the emergence of the ambivalent self in the unique postcolonial circumstances of South Africa in the 1950s. Issues relating to the dislocation of hegemonic (Western) notions of identity receive further treatment in this chapter, as does the socio-cultural significance of a textual self that counters apartheid categories - one that Mphahlele identifies as emerging at the point where "Europe" and "Africa" meet. The final chapter examines the unique contribution made by woman autobiographer, Noni Jabavu, to the redefinition of identity during the era of the institutionalisation of apartheid. The position of the textual self is defined as "in-between", as, once again, the racial and cultural assumptions of colonial/apartheid identity are contradicted. A thread that runs through the critique thus outlined is the suggestion that the corrosive impact of these autobiographical writings on ideologies of racism is as

powerful as their potential to inform the process of individual as well as national reconstruction.

Notes

1. Down Second Avenue was published under this name. However, since the author is generally known as Es'kia, I shall refer to him as such throughout my critique. An exception is Chapter Four, where, in my discussion of Down Second Avenue, I refer to the protagonist by the names the author uses in the narrative, including Ezekiel and Eseki.

2. As early as 1983 Kelwyn Sole argued that the question of class complicates the category "black" and the notion of a "black experience". See "Culture, Politics and the Black Writer: A Critical Look at Prevailing Assumptions", English in Africa 10(1): 37-84. The bourgeois class that generally produces black writing uses strategies that may conflict with those of the broad mass of people.

3. In keeping with the insights and practices of postcolonial theory, race, class and culture will be read "in tension" with one another. See Homi K Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), p.107.

4. The term apartheid is problematic. Coined by General Smuts in 1917, "apartheid" was used as a rallying cry in 1948, subsequently rephrased as "separate development", "multinationalism", "self-determination", "democratic federalism", and, more recently, a de Klerkian "new South Africa". See Ann McClintock & Rob Nixon, "No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's 'Le Dernier Mot du Racisme'", in "Race," Writing, and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), pp.339-353. "Apartheid" as a term needs to be historicised and located in "the discourses of South African racism"; it is merely one in a succession of racist lexicons in South Africa (pp.339-340).

5. See Fredric Jameson's analysis of the dialogical relationship between hegemonic and marginal literary forms, and the rewriting of the former by the latter in The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (London: Methuen, 1981), esp. pp.85-86.

6. The notion of South African nationhood is a myth, which has as its purpose the mobilising of people to partipate in the process of nation-building. I have appropriated the term to denote a vision of a post-apartheid society, an inclusive nationhood that rejects ideologies of racial essence and separation. This usage does not elide the differences inherent in a heterogeneous society. See Kelwyn Sole, "Writing: Questions of Organisation and Democracy", The Ghostly Dance: Writing in a New South Africa, IDASA Occasional Papers, Part 2, No 37, pp.4-8. In addressing the issue of "writing and the new national culture", Sole argues that the "desire for a unity of purpose" in order finally to eradicate apartheid may result in certain categories such as blacks, or the oppressed, being "too organically and seamlessly conceived" (p.4).

7. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr, "Talkin' That Talk", in "Race," Writing, and Difference, pp.402-409. According to Gates, theorisation involves the careful reading of a literary tradition and the formulation of useful critical principles on the basis of what the critic observes within that textual tradition.

8. The term is problematic, and its meaning is individually constructed by each critic who uses it. See Linda Hutcheon, The Politics of Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1991), p.11. Among the concerns of postmodernism as it relates to the present study are the problem of representation, the role of criticism in local struggles for liberation, and the constitution of the historical moment in which such criticism is located. These problems are outlined by Paul Bové and others in Postmodernism and Politics, ed. and introd. Jonathan Arac (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986). In White Mythologies: Writing History and the West (London: Routledge, 1990), Robert Young pertinently defines postmodernism as "European culture's awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world" (p.19).

9. See Terence Hawkes, Preface, Ashcroft *et al*, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.vii-viii. Hawkes states that we are living in a period of "rapid and radical social change" when the "assumptions and presuppositions that support the literary disciplines in their conventional form" have been eroded (p.vii). This erosion corresponds with the more general "loss of faith" identified by historian Paul Johnson in A History of the Modern World: From 1917 to the 1980s (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984). Johnson argues that a "loss of faith in the state as an agency of benevolence" currently prevails, and "'the age of politics', like the 'age of religion' before it, [is] now drawing to a close" (pp.729-30).

10. For a discussion of the relationship between literature and nation-building, see Mineke Schipper, Beyond the Boundaries: African Literature and Literary Theory (London: W H Allen, 1989). As Schipper observes, a national literature must be representative. It should include a broad variety of works and also relate to the corpus of world literature (pp.54-55).

11. See Nation and Narration, ed. and introd. Homi K Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990) in which various essays illustrate the point that "the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality" (Introduction, p.1). In one of these essays, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", pp. 291-322, Bhabha re-reads Fanon's essay "On National Culture", warning "against the intellectual appropriation of the culture of the people (whatever they may be) within a representationalist discourse that may be fixed and reified in the annals of History" (p.319).

12. According to this concept (coined by "liberal writer" Leo Marquard and reformulated some twenty years later by the African National Congress), an "internal colonialism" exists where "white South Africa" (identified with an advanced capitalist state) oppresses and exploits "Non-White South Africa". Harold Wolpe, Race, Class and the Apartheid State (London: James Currey, 1988), pp.29-30.

13. Research into the consequences of the bantustan policy and reform shows that race, class and culture are not distinct. See Dirk Kotzé, "Revisiting Colonialism of a Special Type", unpublished conference paper, Conference of the Political Science Association of South Africa, Port Alfred, 1989. See also Charles van Onselen's analysis of "cultural osmosis" in "Race and Class in the South African Countryside: Cultural Osmosis and

Social Relations in the Sharecropping Economy of the South-western Transvaal", American Historical Review 95(1): 99-123.

14. In 1985 Michael Chapman described the workings of hegemony within the critical institution. See "Literary Studies in South Africa: Contexts of Value and Belief", The English Academy Review 3: 145-162:

> The available critical discourses, reflecting as they do the special interests of fairly homogenous academic groupings, have been widely adopted in liberal educational practice, as fully articulated and approved. Understandably, they have done little to foster sympathetic interest or appreciation in works outside of the British and American mainstreams. In fact, in South Africa, the result of Leavisian imitation has often been a rhetoric of contempt directed at forms of indigenous literary experience and expression (p.148).

While it is clearly the case that "the rhetoric of contempt" has diminished considerably in recent years as indigenous literature has been given increasing attention, the point that needs to be stressed is the power of special interest academic groupings in the reception and dissemination of local writing.

15. See also Landeg White and Tim Couzens in the same year: "[the] criticism of literature ... has everything to do with the criticism of society". Introduction, Literature and Society in South Africa, eds Landeg White & Tim Couzens (Pinelands, Cape: Maskew Miller Longman, 1984), pp.1-23, p.1.

16. See Dirk Klopper, "Ideology and the Study of White South African English Poetry", in Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Literary Culture, ed. Martin Trump (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1990), pp.256-294. Klopper provides a useful overview of the challenge offered to hegemonic criticism by Kirkwood, Isabel Hofmeyr, Nick Visser, Michael Vaughan, Mbulelo Mzamane, Stephen Gray, Jeremy Cronin and Michael Chapman. The dominance of traditional criticism was, essentially, a colonial one.

17. This term is of central importance to the task of theorising. Referring to Paulo Freire (Jesuit theorist-activist of "the oppressed"), Denis Goulet defines problematise as follows:

> Paulo Freire's central message is that one can know only to the extent that one "problematizes" the natural, cultural and historical reality in which s/he is immersed. Problematizing is the antithesis of the technocrat's "problem-solving" stance. In the latter approach, an expert takes some distance from reality, analyses it into component parts, devises means for resolving difficulties in the most efficient way, and then dictates a strategy or policy.... But to "problematize" in [Freire's] sense is to associate an entire populace to the task of codifying total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces ... [and thus] become transforming agents of their social reality. Only thus do people become subjects, instead of objects, of their own history.

Introduction, Education: The Practice of Freedom, ed. and trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (London: Writers & Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1974), pp.vii-xiv, p.ix.

18. This apparently contradictory circumstance is the consequence of legislation such as the Land and Group Areas Acts that resulted in the physical separation of South African

peoples. However, because of the needs of the economy, this separation, or apartheid, was never final or fixed.

19. See Marianne de Jong, "Moving into Other Worlds but not into Action - Gayatri Spivak's Deconstructivist Marxist Feminist Readings", Journal of Literary Studies 5(3/4): 361-378. De Jong argues that the discourse of a critic such as Spivak must be properly located. She accuses Spivak of evading the implications of her complex discursive position: "*also* USA, *also* academic and sophisticated, *also* at variance with workerist movements or severely repressed societies" (p.372).

20. See Louis Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses", in Lenin and Philosophy, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), pp.170-177. My understanding of consciousness has, however, been modified by Antonio Gramsci's more "voluntarist" conception of the subject as not being confined to structural limitations.

21. According to Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), Spivak appropriates the notion of constellation that features in the work of both Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. The notion of "constellation" functions to disrupt the discourse of identity and totality:

> In this kind of microanalysis, the individual phenomenon is grasped in all of its overdetermined complexity as a kind of cryptic code or riddling rebus to be deciphered, a drastically abbreviated image of social processes which the discerning eye will persuade it to yield up (p.329)

22. In "Moving into Other Worlds but not into Action - Gayatri Spivak's Deconstructivist Marxist Feminist Readings", de Jong foregrounds her own race and class position, by speaking as "a South African and, furthermore, as a white academic" located "in a semi-First World country situated in the Third World ... that country which has provided the world with its most poignant example of domination by differentiation, i.e. *apartheid*" (p.362), a country that is "in the fourth year of a state of emergency" (p.377). De Jong's procedure provides a starting point for the critic wishing to situate her discourse and explore the discursive fields that intersect within the writing subject.

23. Political action was effectively ended by the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), the Treason Trial of 1956, the Sharpeville massacre (1960) and the subsequent banning of the ANC and PAC.

24. This kind of critical discourse is inappropriate for a variety of reasons. It inscribes a polarity between "black Africa" and "non-Africans" and sets up a mimetic model which assumes a neutral observer of a world "out there", one that corresponds with the colonial self examining "the other". In polarising the colonial self and the other, this discourse also reifies "black Africa", thus contributing to the process of Africa's "othering" described by Christopher L Miller in Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Furthermore, Christie *et al*'s paternalistic celebration of Mphahlele's "African English" in Perspectives on South African Fiction (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1980), p.123) ignores the textual strategies in postcolonial writing, including questions relating to language and power, and the appropriation/abrogation of imperial culture (see Ashcroft *et al*, The Empire Writes Back, esp. pp.38-77). Similarly, the reference, "engaging otherness", as used by Christie *et al* (p.123) is devoid of the

Fanonist/Lacanian sense of alterity as employed by Homi K Bhabha in his Foreword to Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986), pp.vii-xxvi, esp. p.xvi.

25. I use the term with some irony. Dabi Nkululeko's ideologically neat category "settler woman" as defined in "The Right to Self-Determination in Research: Azanian Women", in Women in Southern Africa, ed. Christine Qunta (Johannesburg: Skotaville: 1987), pp.88-106, in particular p.101, is problematic. Its homogenising function obscures the achievements of white South African women researchers who "write about the natives". One has only to consult Cherryl Walker's Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945 (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990), which includes a remarkable collection of articles by white women researchers.

26. In a 1989 ANC in-house seminar paper, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", in Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents, eds Ingrid de Kok & Karen Press (Cape Town: Buchu, 1990), Albie Sachs introduced a counter-discourse that expressed itself, *inter alia*, as follows: "Each cultural tributary contributes towards and increases the river of South-Africanness" (p.25). While this discourse acknowledges difference, it posits a richly inclusive local culture. Moreover, it implies that a relationship with a Western cultural matrix need not disqualify anyone (including the white critic) from contributing to the flow of this river. Sachs's arguments have, however, provoked a variety of responses that question his assumptions in problematic areas such as cultural identity. See de Kok & Press, and also Exchanges: South African Writing in Transition, eds Duncan Brown & Bruno van Dyk (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1991).

Chapter One

WHITE WRITING BLACK: CROSS-BORDER CRITICISM

> Since the Portuguese touched the coast of Africa, west and later east, the histories of Europe and Africa have been intertwined, flowing into each other.
> Es'kia Mphahlele

> The word in language is half someone else's.
> M M Bakhtin

> What can the intellectual do toward the texts of the oppressed? Represent them and analyze them, disclosing one's own positionality for other communities in power.
> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Introduction

The broad aim of this chapter is to establish an appropriate critical method for a reading of black South African autobiography of the 1950s and early 1960s. A central aspect of this endeavour is "a historical critique of [my] position as an investigating person", a necessary aspect of "earning the right to criticize [the Other]" (Spivak 1990:62),[1] particularly in South Africa, where the critic is constrained to establish "legitimacy in an extremely exacting political environment" (Walker 1990:3). Problems relating to legitimacy were dramatically foregrounded at a 1993 conference in Nigeria, "The First Conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges Across Activism and the Academy", and in the literature that followed.[2]

The central issue confronting the white South African critic who theorises the literary productions of black South Africans continues to be that of race, and with it related problems of ontology and epistemology.[3] Edward Said has observed,"To represent Africa

is to enter the battle over Africa, inevitably connected to later resistance, decolonization, and so forth" (1993:80). As early as 1967, Es'kia Mphahlele addressed the problem of race and representing the other in his short story, "Mrs Plum": a black character questions the white woman of the title, asking why she tries to speak for her people who

> are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. Why does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and what my father want to say? They can speak when they want to.
>
> (1967b:168)

The specific problem of a white woman "representing" the people of Phokeng is formally addressed by Vasu Reddy in his analysis of Belinda Bozzoli's 1991 study, Women of Phokeng - Consciousness, Life Strategy, and Migrancy: 1900-1983, where he deals with the problem of "white academics [failing] to legitimate and acknowledge that they themselves are also absorbed into, and are part of the dialectic we label as representation" (Reddy 1993:278). Unless the critic acknowledges this, her experience of being white in South Africa may strip her of the authority to speak, and cripple her attempts at "representation, self-representation, [and] representing others" (Spivak 1990:63).[4]

This issue is part of a broader one that concerns the "Western reader of non-Western literature" (Miller 1990:1). However, the appropriateness of "categories such as 'Western' and 'African'" is currently under scrutiny, given the "hybrid, syncretic cultural formations that have developed in South Africa" (de Kock 1993b:50). This hybridity is, as I hope to demonstrate, discernible in critical discourse in South Africa, and is particularly evident in the autobiographical writing that I shall examine in the chapters that follow. There are a number of related issues at stake here, including the problem of identity, (of the critic, as well as the culture in which she is embedded), the role and responsibility of criticism,

and the relationship between literary culture and what Njabulo Ndebele describes as "the future out there" (1989:34).

My argument is located within a postcolonial space which is, as Leon de Kock points out, "not a choice of theories, but a historical determination" (1993b:57), a "condition ... [that] cannot be freely chosen in the way a theoretical inclination can be" (1993b:58). This space constitutes at different moments - and sometimes simultaneously - a meeting point, a battle zone, a negotiated position between indigenous peoples and conquering cultures, native and settler, black and white, various "groups" of South Africans. However, my "theoretical inclination" cannot be said to be "freely chosen". It has largely been influenced by my reading of the autobiographical texts that seem to anticipate and illuminate the insights of such contemporary postcolonial theorists as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Homi K Bhabha, and Françoise Lionnet. Said's notion of "intertwined histories" (1993:1) is prefigured in Mphahlele's claim, "the histories of Europe and Africa have been intertwined" (1981a:xi); so, too, Bhabha's notion of "ambivalence" that "sows confusion between opposites and stands between the oppositions at once" (1994:128), and Lionnet's "*métissage*" which connotes interconnectedness, heterogeneity and heteronymity (1989:7-9) are echoed in the writings of Mphahlele, Abrahams and Jabavu, as I hope to demonstrate. These autobiographical texts write back, not only to "empire", but also to the disjunctive time of the postcolonial, where the irruptions of past and present continuously coalesce and collapse.

'Talk Across the Wall": An Autocritique

South Africa is, as Mphahlele states, a place where walls exist between black and white,

walls that do not, however, prevent those on either side "talking across"; nor are the foundations of these walls impervious to seepage (1981a:x). My "position" within the discursive space of postcoloniality is not on one side of the wall or the other, but a borderline one (both in spatial and in temporal terms). Here, the languages of Africa are in dialogue with those of the West, a dialogue that results in continual displacement. I therefore disclaim (after Spivak), "I am not a real Marxist literary critic"; "I'm not really a deconstructionist" (1990:155). In a postcolonial context, the effects of race and culture dislocate the ludic, ahistorical aspects of deconstruction, particularly where the counter-narrative of the indigene lays claim to its own truths and re-constructs identity. Criticising contemporary Western theory for failing to recognise its own historicity, Terry Eagleton aptly observes that the "other" must "pass through identity if it is to come into its own" (1990:414). The acknowledgment of another's status as a subject is a necessary phase in a historical dialectic where the goal is explicitly political, the achievement of autonomy. The critic therefore accepts the (strategic) construction of the subject as an "authentic self" (Ndebele 1989:27) who can "enter history" (Serote 1989:16). In deploying the insights offered by poststructuralism, the critic of black literature should take note of their origin. To fail to do so is to be locked into a subordinate relationship with Western theoretical discourse.

Poststructuralism is, in the postcolonial context, as much of a predicament as it is a position.[5] Many of its insights are indispensible to the local critic.[6] However, as the "symptom ... and determining cause"[7] of postmodernism it denies the truth-claims of narrative - whether this be a *grand récit* or the personal testimony of one of the women of Phokeng ("My name is Nkotsoe. I am a girl from Mabeskraal, the nearby village ....")

upon which Belinda Bozzoli bases her study of rural women (1991:4). Poststructuralism raises fundamental problems relating not only to the truth-claims of Nkotsoe's narrative, but also to the identity claimed in the text.[8] The critic's predicament is one where the context demands recognition of Nkotsoe's identity, while it is clear that this identity is constructed in and by a text.[9]

The problem of identity extends also to the reader or critic:

> our very identity as readers, as well as the identity of those we read, might be imagined as uneasy predicaments rather than fixed or stable positions.
> (Nussbaum 1991:25)

The project of locating oneself, of analysing the discourses that constitute the cultural and historical text that produces one *as text* - or, put another way, produces one's discourse - is "in crisis".[10] This self-reflexive exercise should not, however, become a paralysing one. Tim Couzens has pointed out the pitfalls of "modern literary theory and criticism" in South Africa: "We write our literary criticism about other literary critics writing about literary criticism" (n.d.:3).

The autocritique is, like the autobiographical text itself, incomplete. Similarly, again, it foregrounds race, which is, in the South African context, conflated with privilege and therefore class. It is important to note that racial "difference" is "politico-economic rather than ethnic" (Rive 1984:92). The writing subject asserts an "I" whose identity is produced by discourse and cultural practice, which are themselves shaped by politico-economic factors. However, discourse is heterogeneous; cross-border communication and "seepage" results in a cultural and discursive *métissage* of "white" and "black", privileged and oppressed, each of which is in turn the site of cultural convergence and/or collision.

My own discourse is situated within a critical debate whose local origins go back some three decades. In 1965 Lewis Nkosi referred to "European critics who now find it such a profitable enterprise to preside over the rebirth of African art and literature" (1983:34). This discourse, which conflates colonialism with capitalism, persists into the 1990s:

> white critics, like "white supremacists", tend to the white collar work of supervision, attending to theoretical work, while we blacks are relegated to the cheap labour of producing raw textual material for the white critical industry. (Nkosi 1991/92:18)[11]

The "non-African", or "European" researcher is constructed as an exploiter of indigenous literary resources, one who assumes a custodial, supervisory role in relation to these resources.[12] A more useful trope, however, to interpret this relationship, is that of answering back in a critical dialogue that resounds across the crumbling walls of racial, class and cultural difference.

A further limitation in the interpretive model deployed by Mphahlele and Nkosi is its implicit construction of the African critic as innocent. Nkosi's use of the homogenising phrase "we blacks" (to designate an exploited labour force) invites scrutiny. Just as the question of race constrains the white critic, so the colonial legacy compels the African literary critic concretely to situate him/herself within the neo-colonial intellectual class that is the product of colonial education. S/he should explore the consequences for critical discourse of being "located mainly in the universities and earn[ing] a living as a salariat in the neo-colonial economy" (Amuta 1989:16-17). With the benefit of post-liberation hindsight that Mphahlele and (the early) Nkosi did not at the time share, it becomes increasingly clear that the question of class complicates the neat polarities of the racial model. Indeed, the anti-colonial discourse of both Mphahlele and Nkosi inscribes certain norms and values of traditional Western aesthetics.[13]

A terrain as fraught with contest as that of South African critical discourse demands autocritique, "looking at how one is speaking, knowing that one is probably not going to be able to speak in a very different way"; it involves an acknowledgment of those "things into which one is intimately mired. It speaks you. You speak it" (Spivak 1990:135). Because one of the most significant "things" into which the South African is "mired" is race, terms such as "non-African" and "European" need to be used with circumspection since they may function to reify racial difference, mirroring the discourse of apartheid and setting up new exclusions. These pitfalls may be avoided by invoking instead Said's concept of culture, the "environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals (in their private circumstances) and their works are embedded" (1983:8). The South African environment differs from the "colonial world" analysed by Fanon in that black and white worlds are not simply "cut in two" (Fanon 1971:29), nor are the "zones" (1971:30) radically opposed, since, for all the "barracks and police stations" (1971:29) along the frontier between white and black areas, crossings have occurred. This is because the process of industrialisation subverted the apartheid policy of separation,[14] eventually eroding its hegemony altogether, as it opened up overlapping and interlinking spaces. To describe South Africa (as Fanon describes the "colonial world") as "Manichaean" (Fanon 1971:31) is not entirely accurate. Cultural boundaries have not been as impervious as colonial colour bars and apartheid barriers desired; instead, cultures have been learned and unlearned through processes of mimicry, transgression and assimilation.

A model of culture predicated on fluidity and heterogeneity subverts the fixities upon which hierarchic oppositions such as domination/oppression, settler/native, coloniser/colonised rest, and therefore destabilises categories such as "white" criticism and

"black" writing. Cultures are neither monolithic nor hermetically sealed off from what is "outside" of them; they are, instead, vulnerable to the irruptions of surrounding worlds. Therefore, the critic feels compelled to address the implications of a historical legacy of cultural and linguistic dominance, with its inevitable racial dimension. This situation is (as suggested above) made even more problematic by the fact that black South African writing increasingly forms the focus of the white critic. The problems that inhere in this situation shape current criticism, as is clear from Leon de Kock's critique of Michael Chapman's study of the "multilingual, polyglot literary-cultural history of southern Africa" (de Kock 1993a:45). De Kock foregrounds the issue of race and related problems of language and "institutional and other forms of privilege", as well as the legitimacy of "white" critical activity (1993a:45). The challenge becomes that of negotiating a critical framework which acknowledges the historical effects of race at the same time as it facilitates a discursive space that subverts notions of absolute racial difference. It is suggested that this negotiation can occur within the interstices of languages and cultures. It was, arguably, as long ago as 1942 that the negotiation of such discursive spaces was initiated when Herman Charles Bosman proposed an inclusive South African culture with a "genuinely African orientation" (1981:38-39). My own critical effort, located within a historical moment of transition, may be seen as a continuation of Bosman's quest. As such, it answers back to black voices such as Mphahlele in 1960 or Nkosi in 1990, participating in and simultaneously producing a literary-cultural counter-discourse.

Overdetermined by race, this discourse is located within the historic struggle against colonialism and apartheid. In a long history of resistance, from the Xhosa chief Maqona to Mandela, a discourse of defiance has developed. It has its earliest echo in the actual

name of the first explicitly political organisation, *Imbumba Yama Nyama*, founded in 1882, which reflects Ntsikana's exhortation to his people to be "'hard, solid sinew' ... an inseparable group" in the Xhosa fight for "national rights" (Odendaal 1984:8); the inchoate nationalism discernible here echoes in the Ethiopianist slogan of the 1880s, "Africa for the Africans" (Odendaal 1984:23-29), that persisted in Africanist politics from the 1920s to the 1940s, eventually becoming the slogan of the ANC Youth League. Its contemporary echo is heard in a slogan that originated during the same period, "*Mayibuye iAfrika*", a call for the "return" of a (long-vanished) Africa and its traditions.

The aesthetic that emerges from such a context is a product of decolonisation, and is central to the process of self-discovery. In the tradition of anti-colonial mockery and insult, Mothobi Mutloatse powerfully expresses the black consciousness quest: "We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through .... Because we are in search of our true selves" (1980:5). By 1984, the Bikoesque "black man, you're on your own" rhetoric of the 1970s had enabled the reclamation of the self and prepared the way for an aesthetic that defined itself in terms of the actual struggle for liberation. In this climate, Mphahlele claims that the aesthetic of black writers "is not the aesthetic of white writers" (1987:53). He foregrounds the causal effect of "place": apartheid's "balkanization of culture" created a "fragmented nation" (Mphahlele 1987:58) where the "zones" characteristic of colonial societies are not merely separate - they are also opposed.

However, Mphahlele's argument obscures the contradictions that exist not only within apartheid's separate areas, but also within the consciousness and discourse of those who

inhabit them. Therefore, by standing Mphahlele on his head, it may be claimed that it is precisely in the "place" that tyrannises that a genuinely counterhegemonic aesthetic is emerging. The borders of group areas were never secure, resulting in "crossover" and "fusion", tropes that currently inform the broad terrain of cultural discourse. The discursive spaces thus produced provide neither a liberated nor a comfort zone, however. Having introduced the problematics of "race" and "place", both of which "mire" the critic and "speak" her, it is necessary to reflect further on their implications for the self that critiques.

The question of race conjures the problem of affiliation to the "critical institution": because the question of transformation has only recently appeared on South African university agendas, the role and function of the university and therefore that of critical discourse also, continues to be problematic. Njabulo Ndebele claims that white radical research has only a limited capacity to benefit the African struggle, since it is not situated in the "current" of that struggle with which it has no "organic relationship" (1988b:326). Moreover, the institution rather than those who are the object of research is empowered, as the dependency of the former on information-production increases (1988b:330). There is, indeed, a connection between the "nature of cultural practice" and the "dominant hegemony" (Ndebele 1987:7).

It is instructive to examine the model of analysis developed by Antonio Gramsci which is situated in a historical period of socio-political transition and is therefore appropriate to the present project. The current moment falls between traditionalism and modernity, between narrow nationalisms and an emergent nationhood predicated on notions of

heterogeneity and inclusivity. South Africa may be said to be in a period of "crisis", where

> the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.
>
> (Gramsci 1971:276)

It is not surprising that the notion of the interregnum informs not only critical discourse (see Wilhelm 1984:102; Gordimer 1988:220; Chapman 1988b:36), but also broader social discourse in South Africa.[15]

A further notion, that of hegemony,[16] is central to critical practice. Gramsci relates hegemony to "civil society" (as opposed to dictatorship and "political society"), arguing that, in presupposing voluntary consent, hegemony is the state exercise of control over its citizens by ideas rather than force (1971:271). Thus, the institutions of civil society (such as universities) contribute to the formation of social and political consciousness. Intellectuals (to which class literary critics belong) are, according to Gramsci's schema, "the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government". An important aspect of this is

> [t]he "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.
>
> (Gramsci 1971:12)

In the light of Gramsci's description of the role of the intellectual, criticism matters in a very real sense in contemporary South Africa. He condemns the intellectual class for being a "parasitical section" of the state (1977:334),[17] a description that Amuta appropriates in his trope of the traditional critic as part of "a *parasitic* elite .... a tick on

the body of the cattle of literary creativity" (1989:17). And yet, such a critic does not necessarily function exclusively as an instrument of neo-colonialism and bourgeois culture. The South African situation dramatically illustrates Gramsci's contention that the "living realities of national life" permeate institutions such as universities. For all the ambiguity of the position of South African intellectuals, many have demonstrated not only the will but also the capacity to intervene at the interface of discourse and the living realities of their world.

A primary task of the present venture is to determine the nature of the discursive space in which I find my own subject-position and, consequently, its place in a continuum that ranges from a "traditional" or "universal" intellectual to a "progressive", "specific", or "organic" intellectual - terms which currently inform literary-cultural discourse. For example, Jean-Philippe Wade contends that the Black Consciousness period of the 1970s produced "progressive" black intellectuals whose participation in a (putative) "discourse of 'blackness'" resulted in their becoming "organic" allies of the masses - an option not open to "progressive" whites (1994:200-202). The binarism set up here by the notion of a "discourse of blackness" results in the negative construction of "white" critique that can do little more than subvert the ideological basis of liberalism, since it is excluded from the terrain fought and won by a truly revolutionary black "counter-hegemonic struggle". However, as Joshua N Lazerson's study of white activism in the 1970s shows, radical spaces were won at the University of Natal, Durban, through the intellectual activity of political science lecturer, Rick Turner, as well as the Wages Commission, which not only analysed, but organised among black workers (Lazerson 1994:246).[18] These spaces are the product of a white radical tradition that Lazerson traces to H W Sampson's union

activities at the turn of the century, through Bettie du Toit and Solly Sachs in the 1930s and 1940s, to Ruth First, Joe Slovo, Albie Sachs and others, more recently.

A decisive moment for white activists occurred in the 1980s when the narrow cultural nationalism of the BC paradigm[19] was displaced, a reconstituted non-racial culture emerged, and the concept of an inclusive South African nation was imagined anew. The resultant shift in discourse is a crucial one for the white critic, since it reopens the space created by the formulations of the Freedom Charter in 1955. The latter document departed from the ANC Youth League Programme of Action (1949) to inscribe racial inclusivity, as is evident from the first clause of the Preamble, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white". However, while there are similarities between the period of the 1950s and the 1980s,[20] the "thread" from the 1950s to the 1980s is discontinuous: the organically-derived doctrine of non-racialism was reconstructed in the wake of the experiences of the 1970s and 1980s.

The Charter has, since, shifted from its position as an article of faith (Lazerson 1994:250), to a national policy. To appropriate Bhabha's formulation, it projects a "Third Space", an "ambivalent", unstable discursive space subject to the fluctuating determinations of culture and history (1994:36-39). This liminal space is one where polarities and essences collapse into each other, and meaning is translated and negotiated. Non-racialism therefore negates closure and *telos*. A re-imagined "South Africa" is conceived in terms other than racial difference and separation. Here, intersecting strands of local criticism produce a discourse of miscegenation. It is the product of trans-gression and trans-lation - of lives, cultures and languages. In the latter

process, certain historical events have proved seminal. Among these were the Culture and Resistance Conference (Botswana, 1982), the Culture in Another South Africa Conference (Amsterdam, 1987) which included South African artists and exiles from all over the world, and the Zabalaza Festival (London, 1990) which aimed for "the development of an inclusive South African consciousness" (Serote quoted in Oliphant 1993:17).

Various forms of cultural and other exchange and change preceded the momentous political events of the years that followed, endorsing Amuta's assertion:

> If society is to change for the better, it must depend on the collaborative efforts of all social forces, compelled to resolve their antagonistic relationship in a purposive unity forged by historical forces that place every occupation in a purposive context geared towards a definite progressive goal.
>
> (1989:121)

The significantly titled Crossing Borders (Coetzee, Ampie & Polley, James, eds, 1990) documents a cultural exchange between "cultural workers" and "the ANC" in 1989. Here, previously separated and silenced voices interconnected as the question of a cultural identity for South Africans was explored. During this exchange, Mongane Wally Serote said of the paper of Afrikaans woman writer, Jeannette Ferreira, "She [has] stolen my story" (1990b:92). Serote's "tough tale" - ensuring that "our past is not erased" (1987:37) - has many versions, many points of entry, since experiences overlap even in the most separate of South African lives. From Codesa through the Multiparty Forum to the Government of National Unity, the forces of South African society have worked towards their own "definite progressive goal" (Amuta 1989:121) of a democratic society. Such historical forces may claim responsibility for a transitionary moment that foresees "the subaltern group become really autonomous and hegemonic" as it brings into being "a new

form of State" (Gramsci 1971:388). The role of the critic as participant in the construction of "a new intellectual and moral order, that is a new type of society", is to develop a discourse that is characterised by "more universal concepts and more decisive ideological weapons" (Gramsci 1971:388). The use of the comparative is instructive. In the local context, such "concepts" and "weapons" may refer not only to those of "traditional" white intellectuals, but perhaps also to those of "organic" black intellectuals. The fixities, whether those of new criticism or Marxism, are undermined by the insights of postcolonial theorists like Spivak, Said, Bhabha and Lionnet, who give new meaning to the notion of universalism,[21] and give substance to Gramsci's formulation.

The South African critic stands poised on the edge of "a new intellectual and moral order, that is a new type of society" (Gramsci 1971:388), and the problem of race cannot be ignored in the challenge to develop concepts and ideological weapons appropriate to the moment. However, because the category "white" is not homogeneous, I refuse to claim: "This is a white position". Instead, since my position relates to a specific set of cultural matrices, the following formulation is offered as a starting point: I am a white, English-speaking South African ("WESSA").[22] This identity is not stable, however. Africanist discourse contests the term "South African" or "African", acknowledged by the ANC during the 1950s as applicable to "all people whose home is South Africa and who believe in the principles of democracy and of equality of men" (Mandela 1965:148). Africanists replace these terms with "settler", or "Euro-South African" (Mashabela 1991:76-77) - thus emphasising the colonial filiations and affiliations of the "WESSA". Nevertheless, both the latter terms, unlike the official "European" of the 1950s, implicitly acknowledge historical displacement and translocation, thus (however inadvertently)

supporting Spivak's contention that "the diasporic cultures are quite different from the culture that they came from originally" (1990:64).

As a consequence of the process of colonialism, polarities are dissolved by the realities of a world where distinctions between self and other fade as cultures cross borders and the human condition becomes one of liminality: "we live in a post-colonial, neo-colonized world" (Spivak 1990:166). The pronoun "we" collapses centre and margin, first and the third world, subaltern and elite, "black" and "white", categories that are mutually constitutive in a social text where the "meaning" of one term is constructed by and inheres in its opposite. White South African identity is produced in a space that is "between", at the "rim", "borderline" or "crossroads" (the terms are those of Bhabha (1994:13)), a space that still bears characteristics of the frontier that the settler inhabited. Put differently, and to introduce a current (somewhat inspirational trope), it is at the meeting points of the colours that make up the "rainbow nation"[23] - where the bars blend - that a heterogeneous culture may be forged.

It may be proposed that any act of speech or writing comprises a "collection" of languages which conflict with and contradict one another to produce "heteroglossia".[24] In a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial context such as South Africa, the writing subject is constituted in polyphony, and her speech is polyglot. The idea of linguistic (or cultural or racial) purity or separateness is, accordingly, a myth, as I hope will be clear from my analysis of black autobiographical writing of the 1950s and 1960s in Chapters Three to Five.

If the notion of heteroglossia is coupled with the postcolonial proposition of hybridity, the possibility emerges of constructing a counterhegemonic critical paradigm. To signify this as "miscegenation" is to displace the binarist model set up by colonialism/apartheid and to reclaim a term that connotes inferiority. As Said points out

> [It is an] uncontroversially accepted view, based on experience and common sense, that all social situations - and, hence, all populations, states, and groupings - are *in fact* mixed. Thus there cannot be any such thing as a pure race, a pure nation, or a pure collectivity, regardless of patriotic, ideological, or religious argument. A corollary to this is that all efforts ... to purify one or several of these human agglomerations are tantamount to organized discrimination or persecution....[for example] South Africa.
>
> (1986:40-41)

Criticism is thus re-conceptualised not in terms of "white" or "black", "Eurocentric" or "African", but as a polyphony of voices or languages that derive from a multiplicity of societal and cultural matrices.[25] What Sole asserts with regard to literature holds true also for criticism:

> Black consciousness and the mass democratic action which came after it, plus the rise of radical Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist and cultural studies at the same time in South African studies, have all influenced and changed our assumptions about literature in this country to a marked degree.
>
> (1991:5)

Each of these influences or languages enacts a particular ideology ("assumptions") or set of ideologies that interpellate the subject that speaks them. However, these ideology-laden languages occupy a discursive terrain whose main characteristic is one of contest.[26] In this terrain, critical discourse, because it is produced largely by the dominant (white) culture, is in a crisis of moral legitimacy. Its contests and conflicts are not only inter-racial and inter-class but also intra-racial and intra-class - with regard to criticism both in English and in Afrikaans.[27]

In the sphere of criticism by white, English-speaking South Africans, the contest has been between a traditional, broadly liberal-humanist position whose earliest exponent was Guy Butler, and a post-60s Marxist approach that incorporates a colonial paradigm as well as semiology and certain oppositional elements of poststructuralism.[28] Mike Kirkwood and Tim Couzens were two articulate oppositional voices heard at the National Poetry Conference organised by the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies of the University of Cape Town in 1974, a period that marks the ascendancy of SASO and the Black Consciousness Movement. The publication in 1971 of Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum and Serote's Yakhal'inkomo (1972) and Tsetlo (1974) registered seismic shifts in criticism. Couzens and Kirkwood attempted to draw the attention of academics to the necessity of acknowledging the inadequacy of their inherited critical practices (which Couzens dismissed as mere "prejudice" (1976:50)) in circumstances where the task was to confront a new form of writing which articulated anew the experience of blacks and the movement towards the development of a revolutionary poetry. Kirkwood attacked "Butlerism", a coinage denoting the tendency of English-speaking South Africans to deny their implication in the power-politics of South African history. He demystified Butler's neutral English South African, whose location had historically been "in the middle", "between the Dutch pastoralists and the African tribesmen" (cited by Kirkwood 1976:106).[29] Clearly, such a critic cannot be accused of failing to

> recognize the leading and central role to be played by the indigenous oppressed people in their own liberation in every area of struggle, including academic and research.
>
> (Nkululeko 1987:96).

Butler's paternalism - the "self-inflating false-consciousness of the colonizer" (Kirkwood 1976:106) - reflects the liberal urge in 1953 to intervene in the clash of two nationalisms,

African and Afrikaner. However, this intervention was paralysed by its politics of the middle ground, its members entering, after 1964, "the white laager" (Watson 1983:127), finally puncturing the liberal illusion of being able to occupy a centrist, "neutral", position such as that postulated by "Butlerism".

Kirkwood proposes a radical alternative to the liberal model that presumes to reconcile boer and black. Given the context of extreme racial polarisation, and the formation of the Black Consciousness Movement in the early 1970s, his is a model of inevitable racial opposition within "the Manichaean structure of South African society" where white is opposed to black as evil is opposed to good. According to his absolutist model, "[T]here is no way of being in [this society] but to be White or Black in the world" (Kirkwood 1976:108).

White criticism became increasingly self-critical during a decade which saw a resurgence of resistance. At the 1979 conference of the Association of University English Teachers of South Africa (AUETSA), Isabel Hofmeyr took up issues raised by Kirkwood, emphasising the connection between criticism and the

> class-based practices of a privileged and insulated fraction that lives, perceives and understands the world through an ideology of liberalism.
>
> (1979:42)

As a symptom of the fundamental changes signalled by the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1984, the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit of the University of Natal devoted an entire issue of its journal, Critical Arts, to questions concerning the transition in English studies from liberal practices to new forms of criticism. Seven years later, soon after the historic unbanning of the liberation movements

on February 2, 1990, the editorial of The English Academy Review, a journal with strong liberal/colonial affiliations, celebrated the displacement of the "lies inscribed in ... traditional vocabularies" (Rabinowitz 1991:iii).

The relationship between literary discourse and politics is a close one. Kirkwood's exposé of the agenda of neo-colonial cultural hegemony was published in Polley's seminal Poetry South Africa in 1976, the year the school-children of Soweto rejected a culture theory which expressed itself in a grotesque form of colonisation. 1984, the year that marked organised mass resistance, saw whites seeking to redefine their role
and confronting anew the vision of non-racialism and its implications for political action. Borders would be crossed and new frontiers established in all spheres of social activity. "[S]cholar and activist", Andre Odendaal, describes his personal experience of "crossing boundaries", and the relationship between being and knowing:

> That's what I'm talking about, crossing boundaries. Once you've met black South Africans on equal terms, you've had supper with them, you've talked, you find them dignified and interesting, there's no way that those boundaries could lock behind me again.
>
> (quoted in Lazerson 1994:262-263)

He goes on to describe a 1984 township experience that transformed his identity: "From then on, I was UDF" (quoted in Lazerson 1994:263). This is the personal testimony of an intellectual who wrote a book (Vukani Bantu!) on the "beginnings of black protest politics", and was instrumental in establishing the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa which is, *inter alia*, an archive for the liberation struggle. Like other dissenting voices (Kirkwood, Couzens, Hofmeyr and Sole), Odendaal spoke from within hegemony, his praxis signalling a significant rupture in an all-but-seamless white discourse.

The disruption that ensued reflected the contest between forms of Marxism and certain emphases within poststructuralism, as Dirk Klopper's analysis of "radical critical practice" reveals.[30] Theories travelled from the West, irrupting into local critical discourse. Many critics have felt compelled to "take sides" since the adoption of a theoretical position is interpreted by some as a disguised form of "political move"; the "realm of ideas" is expected somehow to relate to the "revolution on the streets" (Liebenberg, 1990:160-1).

This is dramatically illustrated in the critical intervention made by Michael Chapman between 1985-1988, when the "morbid symptoms" of the interregnum were perhaps most acute. The State of Emergency years were a period of radical change and revaluation. In this context, certain intellectuals transgressed the boundaries that the State was desperately attempting to reinforce, and in 1988, the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA), was established. In her Presidential Address, Mala Singh discussed the "struggle to establish a greater and more organic relationship between the university and the community" (1989:11).[31] It is useful at this point to recall Gramsci's "organic intellectual": one from the class of "traditional intellectuals" who has been won over by "the group that is developing towards dominance" (1971:10). S/he works to transform social attitudes and perceptions. It is in this context that Chapman's tentative call in 1985 to "institute a critique of so-called [*sic*] bourgeois culture" (1985:159), followed by his view in 1988 of the "responsible" critic's task - the consideration of "larger, extra-textual questions" (1988b:33) - should be viewed. Chapman's discourse is significant for its obsessive awareness of the overarching reality of the State of Emergency. His quest is for a "liberated zone" of criticism during a period when such a zone was being fought for in the terrain of politics and claimed in the culture of resistance.

Chapman's agonistic awareness of his position as a "white academic", rather than a "comrade" or a "leader of the UDF or NUM" (1988b:38), recalls Kirkwood's "colonizer who rejects his role" (Kirkwood 1976:131), signalling a buried longing to blur traditional barriers. In the same year as Chapman sought a liberated zone, Njabulo Ndebele suggested such a blurred space: his redefinition of the academic as "cultural worker" or "progressive intellectual" (1988b:346) displaced the notion of difference underpinning the discourse of critics such as Mphahlele and Nkosi. This discursive shift reflects the conceptual change that emerged in the 1980s, that saw the "challenge of the future in South Africa ... [as] the creation of a *common* national spirit" (Ndebele 1989:18, my emphasis). Ndebele produces a "zone" from which the (white) critic might (however momentarily) speak.

A common or shared space is, moreover, the product of multiple inscriptions and overlapping elements of "white" and "black" discourse. In this regard, Ndebele's discourse of praxis is instructive. It represents a local version of travelling theory, since Ndebele is a peripatetic critic. His criticism is therefore palimpsestic, revealing traces of a career that started at St Christopher's High School in Swaziland, where he read Mphahlele's banned The African Image as well as T S Eliot and Dante (1991b:40); later, at Cambridge University, he read widely in modern European, eastern European, and Soviet literature; he acknowledges the influence of an eclectic Lewis Nkosi[32] and endorses George Steiner's dictum that the critic should "respect and suspect everything and all views" (Ndebele 1988c:343-4). Contradiction, convergence and collision characterise South Africa's multivocal field of discourse and cultural practice in which my own is embedded, inscribing the language(s) of the northern hemisphere as well as those of "Euro-

acculturated" indigenous voices.

The polyphonic discourse so produced is in a state of radical cultural and ideological flux, as existing matrices are remoulded and reshaped by the forces of historical change (both locally and internationally). The linguistic model of polyphony or heteroglossia displaces the binarism of "white" and "black" writing. Coetzee's category, "white writing" is the corollary of Richard Rive's "writing black",[33] i.e. writing reflecting the realities of votelessness and an ideology based on skin colour (Rive 1981: Preface). Both interrogate an essentialist racial discourse: Rive posits the possibility of a day where "ethnic labels" will have vanished, and "writing South African" will ensue (1981: Preface), while for Coetzee, white writing is the discourse of a moment of transition, of a people no longer regarded as "European", though not yet "African" either (1988:11). Implicitly, the language of criticism should be appropriate to its context, "authentically African" though not in some mythical precolonial sense, but rather reflecting the historical reality of three centuries of European influence in South Africa. The problem is whether there is

> a language in which people of European identity, or if not of European identity then of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa.
>
> (Coetzee 1988:7-8)[34]

Like Kirkwood, Couzens and Chapman, Coetzee confronts that persistent problem of postcoloniality: the relationship between identity and language - both of which are subject to continual disturbance as borders are crossed and contaminations ensue. In such a context, contest is inevitable, and so, problems of difference and dominance persist.[35] Indeed, in attempting to problematise some of the voices that "speak me", I have no doubt disclosed some of the hegemonic voice(s) in my own border-line discourse.

The "selves" constructed in the polyphonic discourse of postcoloniality form the basis from which ruling-class hegemony may be resisted, as a new "writing South Africa" (Rive 1981: Preface) informs the imagining of a new national identity. However, it is a logical and strategic necessity that the subaltern group becomes autonomous and hegemonic as a precondition to the emergence of a hybrid discourse appropriate to the narration of a new national self (or collection of selves). Criticism that emerges from the either/or of a black/white dichotomy, and is itself a version of "writing South African", will have passed from a state of "knowing" to "understanding" (Gramsci 1971:418) if, first, it has acknowledged the necessity of subaltern autonomy and thus hegemony. Hence, a critical discourse emerging from a "sentimental connection" with the "people-nation" (Gramsci 1971:418) during a period of national "reconstruction" may counter certain claims of Western theory: in desiring to "build" it denies anti-foundationalism; in marshalling terms such as "autonomous" and "understanding", it acknowledges voluntarism and betrays its humanism as well as a residual positivism; it calls unashamedly for the bringing into being of a new nation in what amounts to an act of flagrant denial of the scepticism of late capitalist Western discourse. This is because, historically, it cannot (yet) afford the "iconoclastic intellectual behaviour" or "[c]onscientious opposition to the creation of master narratives" advocated by Rory Ryan. The simple choice is indeed between tolerating "old fascisms" or risking the emergence of new ones (Ryan 1990:14).[36] The challenge is, however, to suspend radical scepticism so as to enable "the new" to be born.

In local discourse, the essential oppositionality of postmodernist sensibility took root in conditions where the Manicheanism of apartheid and a concept of society at once monolithic and static, prevailed; this gave rise to white writing during the 1980s whose

hostility to any form of power borders on pathology, born as it is of a deep and abiding fear of authority in a society characterised as few others have been by discipline and punishment. Gramsci's "historical bloc" - the shared relationship between "intellectuals and people-nation" - opposes this paradigm of pessimism and paralysis with its dynamic concepts of potency and potential, its stress on that which is "organic", "alive" (1971:418). Instead of closure or stasis, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and hegemonic rule suggests process, leaving room for the development of antagonistic cultural expressions. In a post-apartheid context, it is suggested that a new hegemony (effected by counterhegemonic struggle) denotes neither a teleology nor political and social closure, since its context is one where new identities are in a process of negotiation and therefore of mutation.

A new critical discourse in South Africa may arise out of an understanding of the struggles of its peoples, and the attempt to make audible the repressed voices of their narratives. In this way, criticism may detach itself from its traditional affiliations with the dominant culture, establish a positive relationship with "the people"[37] and thereby engage in a form of "political work".[38] However, it is instructive to note the loss of belief in collective political action that Julia Kristeva experienced after her 1974 encounter with Marxist practice in China. Subsequently, Kristeva was to urge a new form of political commitment in what is essentially an argument for a radical mode of intellectual mobilisation (its local appeal is discernible in the criticism of Ryan, for example). She describes a new "spectre [that] haunts Europe: the dissident" (1986:295), whose opposition is expressed in the activity of "thought", in a radical scepticism, a fundamental irreverence and continual vigilance (1986:299). Kristeva speaks from the position of exile, uprooted from home and country (1986:298). However, for the critic subjected to the

tyranny of the particular place and time that is the South African interregnum, the "common-sense" that Kristeva eschews insistently asks: is anything to be gained in the present instance by a critical practice that subverts the very thing - the writing subject, counterhegemonic writing - that is engaged in the subversion of colonial/apartheid hegemony and the establishing of new identit(ies), hegemony, and nation?

It is proposed that a constructive dissidence could emerge from the rupture or dis-ruption of local critical discourse, laid waste with local forms of the "pity and guilt" identified by Kristeva (1986:293): a "crippling colonizer guilt" (Kirkwood 1976:104), the pathologies of liberal paternalism and paralysis (Watson 1983), opportunistic sycophancy (Watts 1989:13), and uncritical solidarity (Sachs 1990:20).[39] When things seem to fall apart during the crisis of an interregnum, sophisticated intellectual theories may lure the critic beyond the barrenness of empty left optimism or the vapid pessimism of the right. However, a migration to "foreign" critical territory may foreclose effective intervention in the local discursive terrain. Briefly, the implications for the present critical task are that postmodernity, rather than being uncritically accepted or rejected, should be contextualised and reappropriated in the light of current South African realities. Its theses relating to oppositionality, the self, mimesis, history and nation are valuable to the critic of black South African literature, but only insofar as they do not subvert the function of counterhegemonic literature. The deployment of the insights of postmodernity should, as Spivak suggests, be strategic.

It is one of the features of counterhegemonic literature to establish a new national identity by creating a narrative of society and history which contradicts the versions

offered by hegemonic discourse. In the process, new myths are marshalled to effect political transformation. The racial discourse of fragmentation is contested by one of "nation-building"[40] that has its roots in the struggle for national liberation that predates the petitions of the South African Native Congress at the beginning of this century.[41] It is a commonplace that national liberation is essential if the "nation" is to play a meaningful role in history. In deciding to put an end to colonisation, the native is able "to bring into existence the history of the nation" (Fanon 1971:40). The achievement of nationhood is (like that of selfhood) a necessary phase in empowerment.

Postmodernism constructs "nation" as a chimerical phenomenon in the late twentieth-century, "a mere illusion which [after the Second World War] would be preserved only for ideological or strictly political purposes, its social and philosophical coherence having collapsed" (Kristeva 1986:188).[42] While the concept, "the nation" (*isizwe* or *sechaba*) has been been put to political and ideological use by South African liberation movements, as a counterhegemonic trope it simultaneously signifies an image of coherence that gives reality and form to peoples' lives. This is not, however, the narrow "coherence" of Afrikaner nationalism, or the ideology of the *volk*. A post-apartheid notion of nation is inclusive and heterogeneous, and may be justifiable (like the "selfhood" achieved by the subaltern) in a way that the nationalism and hegemony of the exploiter and imperialist are not. The implication for criticism is that the self claimed in autobiographical narrative be granted the status of the "real" so that its narrative will not be disabled in its crucial task of constructing a new hegemony, and so, a "new" South African culture that is neither uniform nor homogeneous.

Approaching Autobiography

In attempting a historical critique of my position as a white critic of black autobiography, I have hoped to locate myself in the crossroad context of critical discourse. Rather than a "liberated zone", this is a continually negotiated space with indeterminate borders. It is from this "position" that the theorisation of black autobiographical writing may be undertaken. The twin problems of "(re)colonizing the black text through the imposition of Western theory" (Gates 1984:20) and the "translatability" of literary-theoretical discourse outside of its "text-milieu" may be resolved (as Gates suggests) by taking

> from contemporary Western critical theory that which enables me, in some way, to respond to the signifying structures that a sensitive reading should produce in the texts of the black canon.
>
> (1984:4)

Gates's assertion should be read together with that of Barbara Harlow, who claims that resistance literature "presents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and practice of literature and its criticism as these have been developed in the West" (1987:xvi).

Black autobiography is a hybrid, acculturated form. As a written form it requires acknowledgment of the linguistic dimension of the "I" who speaks, and thus of its indeterminate character. As such, the subject may be said to be in crisis.[43] Though a radical critique of the self is not appropriate to the present study, it needs to be emphasised that the very notion of the crisis of the subject is problematic, since identity is a major weapon in the struggles of the oppressed. Postmodernist procedures have, consequently, come under sharp scrutiny by local critics who question its appropriateness to

> the culture of the people who have to deal with the harsh realities of Apartheid

> and repression, who do not bracket or question the reality of their everyday experience, and who unite in struggle to establish an alternative metanarrative to that of Apartheid.
>
> (Liebenberg 1988:285)

The issue is identity, an "I" who counters the lie of the hegemonic narrative. Hence,

> [f]rom the perspective of those previously excluded from the cultural elite, the death of the subject or the death of the author seems somewhat premature. Surely it is no coincidence that the Western white male elite proclaimed the death of the subject at precisely the moment at which it might have had to share that status with the women and peoples of other races and classes who were beginning to challenge its supremacy.
>
> (Fox-Genovese 1986:134)

The moment of self-assertion signalling the entry into history of the indigene is, however, part of a process,

> the movement from the colonised state (assimilation to the oppressor's codes), through contestation (reverse and counter-discourses) to the liberatory moment (the moment of a new heterogeneity).
>
> (Bertelsen 1990:136)

The counterhegemonic narrative contradicts the master's voice. In the light of this, Emile Benveniste's theory of the relationship between language and subjectivity takes on a peculiarly political significance:

> [the subject] makes use of the act of speech and discourse in order to "represent himself" to himself as he wishes to see himself and as he calls upon the "other" to observe him.
>
> (1971:67)

Postcolonial theory mobilises Lacan and Fanon to construct a model of rupture, disruption and irruption.[44] Bhabha subverts the static, absolute "other" that is the "subject" of colonial discourse by proposing instead a fluid and ambivalent subject whose discourse speaks the "other" of the self (1994:39). A related concern is that of "the subject in ideology" (Belsey 1985:45-58), its construction in and by the multivalent narrative of postcoloniality. If counterhegemonic literature is to perform its function - in

Belsey's terms, "precipitate a crisis in the social formation" (1985:51) - it must be theorised in a way that addresses the critical concerns outlined above, and that reconciles the poststructuralist critique of identity with the subaltern's claim to an "I" and therefore to agency.[45]

The initial task, however, is to

> define and comprehend the rhetorical context [of the writing], which is constituted not only by the political use of literary images, definition, and self-definitions of minorities in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic texts but also by the economic, political, and social formations and interests that are intimately linked with the literary and critical struggles.
>
> (JanMohamed 1984:298)

A related activity will be to "articulate and help to bring to consciousness those elements of minority literature that oppose, subvert, or negate the power of hegemonic culture" and, conversely, to articulate elements that support and even promote "the power of hegemonic culture" (JanMohamed 1984:298). As JanMohamed demonstrates in his study of Richard Wright's autobiography, Black Boy, the subject, a "formation by the hegemony" (JanMohamed 1987:255), is educated to "internalize the hegemonic system", and thus "forced to 'collaborate' in his own negative formation" (1987:256).

There are subtle forces at play in black autobiographical writing that counteract hegemonic subject-constructions. Among these is the production of a communal, collective subject that subverts the conventional notion of the (autobiographical) "I". This subject is metonymic, though factors such as class and gender disturb a putative symmetry between "I" and "we". Moreover, while it is claimed that the colonial subject is "overdetermined from without" (Fanon quoted in Bhabha 1986:xiii), and that "what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact" (Fanon 1986:16), the hegemonic

negation may itself be negated.[46] The interpellated colonial subject "deconstructs" the racist category to which s/he is consigned by turning it on its head· (e.g. Mark Mathabane's Kaffir Boy). The subjected subject represents the processes - social, political, economic, linguistic - of subjection, thus recognising her/his own "misrecognition". The mirror image is thus refracted.

Writing at a moment that signalled the era of South Africa's historic transition to a post-apartheid, if not yet democratic, dispensation, Nick Visser's caution of a decade ago continues to resonate:

> Critical approaches are not simply intellectual constructs existing in some purely abstract realm. *They are positions that people hold*, positions that serve particular interests and satisfy certain needs.
>
> (1984:4)

I have hoped, by acknowledging and analysing some of these positions, to continue the work of other white critics since the 1970s of exploring ways in which criticism can "interven[e] strategically in the politics of contemporary culture" (Nixon 1984:31). This would entail a recognition of the interests expressed in black autobiographical writing of the 1950s and early 1960s, writing that clarifies a vision that may inform the collective imaginings of a heterogeneous society seeking to re-define itself. If criticism is to make a significant intervention, South Africa should be re-envisioned and (re)constructed - and its narratives deconstructed - on the basis of its being, as Africa is, a

> highly heterogeneous and multivalent geo-political entity whose problems need to be confronted at the level of theories with practical value for both the present and the future.
>
> (Amuta 1989:35)

In the context of a "heterogeneous and multivalent" South Africa, the question Ndebele asks of cultural practitioners applies equally to their critics:

> In the reconstruction of society, what progressive societal role do we ascribe to cultural practice? How do we free ourselves from notions of culture that are tied to the ethos of oppression?
>
> (1991a:124)

It seems that one way of liberating oneself from the "ethos of oppression" is to rupture the categories of racial difference and separation in which the consciousnesses of black and white South Africans are mired. My discourse articulates, appropriates (and possibly mis-appropriates) a variety of voices that seem to speak me - though it is, no doubt, the silences that "speak" repressed, truer voices. What is represented here is, after all, nothing more than a discursive construct that represents, at best, the writer's desire to participate in a polyphonous discourse, and enact a miscegenated aesthetic. The latter notions are predicated on a postcolonial principle of cross-border, cross-over culture, and the liberating vocabulary (for a white critic, especially), of in-betweenness, interlinking, liminality. If there is nothing outside of colonialism, then all who live in South Africa are in the same postcolonial boat: distinctions between self and other, "boers and blacks", collapse. As Serote declares,

> they are there
> here
> among us
> (1992:5)

The "contaminations" of our hybrid selves preclude a racial either/or, and the terrible exclusions of the past open on to the shifting terrain of newly-negotiated spaces. There can be no meaningful movement forward without a re-membering, a re-collection of the lost and erased elements of a repressed past; there must, therefore, be a "return to history" (Cabral 1979:130), to what Serote refers to as the

> ... simple things which are forgotten
> desecrated

and defiled
they are fossilised into a past which is out of reach

(1992:9)

Memory is crucial to the resurrection of the past. Cabral suggests that the writer return to the peasant and working classes as the authentic repositories of cultural values that have survived the colonial experience, and so provide the best basis for the forging of a new national culture (1972:22). However, given the full impact of colonialism, with its ongoing displacements, migrations and diasporas, this seems inappropriate in the South African context. Ndebele states, unambiguously, "We are in the cities", eschewing a return to an idealised peasant past (1988b:327-328). Given the historical reality of urbanisation and the resultant cultural hybridisation, it is not surprising that contemporary cultural theorists call for an inclusive strategy, whereby "indigenous, including settler elements" provide the foundation of a "national culture" (Oliphant 1993:136). An acknowledgment of the seepages, entanglements and intertwinings of South African culture (Mphahlele 1981a:xi) precludes "facile oppositions between African and European aesthetics", as well as the valorisation of "ossified" African forms; it facilitates, moreover, an awareness of the "internationalist dimension of South African society" (Oliphant 1993:138).

I hope to show that an enduring means of surviving the colonial experience and forging a national culture has been developed in the autobiographical writing of Abrahams, Mphahlele and Jabavu, each of whom was, in a particular way, the product of missionisation, industrialisation and urbanisation. The writings of this embourgeoised intellectual class inscribe the anxieties of the experience of cultural liminality, and produce identities that refract the experiences of being "neither/nor", or "both/and". They

demonstrate the truth that "cultures are too intermingled, their contents and histories too interdependent and hybrid" for simple separations into ideological oppositions (Said 1994:xi).

A symptomatic reading of the discursive inscriptions, the "internal contradictions and debates" associated with resistance texts (Harlow 1987:55), is required. This includes the contrary meanings, *aporia* and silences that threaten the text - and the identity constructed in the text - with collapse. It remains, finally, to emphasise the importance of historicising, or "rewriting" the history inscribed in the text, in short, of developing the "exemplary worldliness" of Gramsci's literary criticism (Buttigieg 1982/83). This form of criticism sets out to ascertain the forces operating at the moment of writing; it thus breaks down "history" into its locally constituent moments while it investigates "the moment of the subject as it experienced specific places at specific times" (Simpson 1988:745).

Critical discourse in South Africa is constituted by the contesting African and Western voices that comprise its heterogeneous context. Western theoretical premisses and procedures are indigenised in a discourse that inscribes the "cross-border" condition of postcoloniality, transforming these theoretical modalities in the process of deploying them in the local context. In the chapter that follows, I will examine the implications of such appropriations and transformations with specific reference to the theorisation of black autobiography in South Africa. Thereafter, I will examine the autobiographies of Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Noni Jabavu in terms of the postcolonial notions of liminality, ambivalence and hybridity. Mphahlele claims:

> We are pioneers at the frontier, seeking a definition of ourselves and the past from which we have come. The frontier lies between us and the white man's technology, religion, mores, economics and so on.
>
> (1973a:198)

The postcolonial critic is, similarly, located at the frontier, a territory of flux and indeterminacy, at a time when there is a national quest to define ourselves anew. In the light of this, it is as well to recall Ndebele's reminder of the enormity of the critic's responsibility: what is needed above all at the present time is "the work of radical restoration, not just information but also the most profound revelation of meaning" (Ndebele 1986:53).

Notes

1. I have cited Spivak because she provides enabling strategies in a situation where issues such as race and gender function to silence the critic whose race and/or gender categories are perceived as factors that exclude him/her from the right to criticise the "other". See The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), esp. "Questions of Multi-culturalism", pp.59-66.

2. See the 1993 special issue of Journal of Literary Studies 9(1), which includes papers delivered at the conference, as well as an Introduction, in which Betty Welz, Gertrude Fester and Hlengiwe Mkhize respond to the demand, "all white South Africans must get out" (p.2), by asking, "What role - if any - does this leave for white women?" (p.11). See also Elizabeth Thompson, "Mad Women in the Tropics", Agenda 15: 61-62; Lumka Funani, "Nigerian Conference Revisited", Agenda 15: 63-68.

3. In "Who Theorises?", Current Writing 2(1): 22-25, Sisi Maqagi draws a connection between race, privilege and knowledge:

> Privilege, with all its concomitant oppressive structures, widens the gap between the experiences of black and white women. How can Lockett [who is white] understand black women and theorise about their work when she is unable to shift from her position? (p.23)

Lumka Funani makes similar claims in "Nigerian Conference Revisited", Agenda 15(1992): 63-68. She states emphatically that "[c]ollecting data, analysing it, reporting is not the same as living it!" (p.64), thus refuting the validity of the "colonist/white person['s] ... mere academic knowledge" (p.65) and denying that "black experiences" can be shared (p.66).

4. See Karen Press's review of Cecily Lockett's anthology of South African women's poetry, Breaking the Silence, New Coin Poetry 27(2): 42-46. Press analyses the contradictions between the poets' "self-representation" and the motives and schema the anthologiser employs (in "representing others"). She shows that a failure to historicise results in a "feminist" or "progressive" intervention being nothing other than "patronising", "patriarchal" or reactionary. Lockett takes for granted a "consensus" and a "community" that is contradicted, as Press shows, by the history and experience of women in South Africa (pp.42-43).

5. See Miki Flockemann, "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Other Unspeakable Texts from Different Margins by Keri Hulme and Lindiwe Mabuza", Journal of Literary Studies 9(2): 194-210. Flockemann foregrounds textual problems that arise out of a situation where marginalized communities exist in a "Third World relation to the dominant hegemonies" (p.194). In addressing the "issue of the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism", she recognises, for example, that the voices of the marginalized may, "when translated into texts ... [be] in danger of becoming re-appropriated by dominant discourses" (p.195).

6. It is increasingly prevalent in local discourse. Current Writing recently devoted an entire edition to South African autobiographical writing and addressed problems raised by poststructuralism in a postcolonial context, particularly where these relate to the nexus

of identity, society and discourse. See J U Jacobs, Preface, Current Writing 3(1): i-iv.

7. Felicity Nussbaum cites Andrew Ross on this relationship in "Autobiographical Spaces and the Postcolonial Predicament", Current Writing 3(1): 24-30. See note 1, p.29.

8. For an example of such a critique, see Vasu Reddy, "Oral Testimony Into Text: A Critique of Belinda Bozzoli's Women of Phokeng", Journal of Literary Studies 9(3/4): 266-283.

9. Again, when Johanna Masilela pleads, "Let Me Make History Please", she inscribes a fundamental imperative of local autobiographical writing that disturbs postmodernist (un)certainties relating to the self and history. Vukani Makhosikazi: South African Women Speak, Jane Barrett *et al* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1985), pp.39-44.

10. Forms of autocritique are increasingly common in critical practice. In "Cultural Translation and Cross-Border Readers: Joseph Conrad, Ethnography and the Postcolonial Paradigm", Current Writing 6(1): 13-28, M J Hooper acknowledges her "difference as a white first-language speaker of English" as a prelude to "embarking ... on a theorisation of [her] position" (p.13). In "Map-making in the Missionary Position: A Response to Kelwyn Sole", Current Writing 6(2): 53-54, Gareth Cornwell takes Sole to task for failing to acknowledge "the extent to which his [Sole's] discourse is implicated in ... power play" (p.54). In the same edition, in "A Meeting of Soles: Overhearing Democratising Culture and Literature", Current Writing 6(2): 38-48, Guy Willoughby castigates Sole for his "deafness to self-dialogue" (p.38). It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the project of autocritique can have no originary point, and it cannot reach closure. There will always be blind spots, *aporias*. Therefore, in the same way as the autobiographical text is an incomplete narrative, so the critic's attempt at locating him/herself - an essentially "autobiographical" enterprise - is necessarily incomplete.

11. Christopher Miller cites Paulin Hountondji and others in his survey of the "market dynamics that control the relation between Western academies and the African world", where Westerners assume "the highly valued role of *theorizer*" while "Africans are confined to the gathering of raw information". Theories of Africans (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.2-3.

12. Wole Soyinka complained in 1976: "We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation - this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of *their* world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems." Myth, Literature, and the African World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.x.

13. See Leon de Kock's "Literature, Politics and Universalism: A Debate between Es'kia Mphahlele and J M Coetzee", Journal of Literary Studies 3(4): 35-48; also Martin Trump's unpublished conference paper, "Literature, Liberation, Aestheticism: Taking Issue with Certain Key Terms in Recent Debates about South African Literature", African Studies Forum, UNISA, where he shows how "'the political' and 'the artistic'" continue to be polarised in "black" critical writing. See also Emmanuel Ngara, Ideology

and Form in African Poetry: Implications for Communication (London: Zed, 1990). Ngara, an avowedly Marxist critic, advocates the "development of taste", and uses categories such as "genuine art" and "good literature". He uses problematic formulations such as, "A work of art that degenerates into political propaganda...." (p.3), and warns against "applying the methods of disciplines such as philosophy and linguistics to the study of literature" (p.4) (in contrast to fellow Marxist, Chidi Amuta, who proposes "an interdisciplinary social-science-related approach" in The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism (London: Zed, 1989), p.8).

14. As early as 1948, the journal of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstitut, Volkshandel, observed:

> It must be acknowledged that the non-white worker already constitutes an integral part of our economic structure, that he is now so enmeshed in the spheres of our economic life that for the first fifty years/hundred years (if not even longer), total segregation is pure wishful thinking.

Quoted in Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido, "The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism", in The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-century South Africa, eds Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido (London: Longman, 1987), pp.1-70, p.20. Of course, the effects of industrialisation eventually eroded all hopes of a segregated society altogether, as later events were to demonstrate.

15. See, for example, Mark Gevisser, "The New SA has a Different Position on Everything - Including Sex", The Weekly Mail & Guardian Dec. 23 1994 to Jan. 5 1995, pp.10-11, where he avers that "we live in an interregnum between new regulation and old" (p.11).

16. This concept is a problematic one, as Walter L Adamson shows in Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), esp. Chapter 6, "Hegemony, Historical Bloc, and Italian History". The concept includes the idea of the "consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society", and the advance to "class consciousness" and a common culture (p.171).

17. Elsewhere, Gramsci describes the "middle classes and petty intellectuals" as "reactionary and regressive", a callow group "that would be glad of any regularisation that would prevent sharp struggles and upheavals". Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p.258.

18. On the same campus, a group of student leaders (Fink Haysom Geoff Budlender, Halton Cheadle, Charles Nupen, Duncan Innes and Paul Pretorius), influenced by Turner, emerged to become NUSAS leaders and later, human rights activists. They extended the zone in which intellectuals could function. In the same period of the 1970s, University of Cape Town student, Jeremy Cronin, made contact with the ANC in exile - silenced "voices of the land" - and was subsequently imprisoned.

19. Mongane Wally Serote explains:

> [Black Consciousness] incorporated Indians and "Coloureds" into the definition of black, and a "state of mind" which had to be created to fight against oppression.

> At the same time, Black Consciousness was a rejection of whites as a group....

On The Horizon, Foreword Raymond Suttner (Fordsburg: COSAW, 1990), p.8.

20. See Foreword, 30 Years of the Freedom Charter, eds Raymond Suttner & Jeremy Cronin (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1986), p.x.

21. Edward Said, for example, stresses the importance to criticism of "a universal standard":

> Universality means taking a risk in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others.

Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures (London: Vintage, 1994), p.xii.

22. The term derives from Guy Butler's 1985 category, the "ESSA". Its members form part of a "privileged white minority whose position is an "equivocal" one. See "English and the English in the new South Africa", The English Academy Review 3: 163-176, esp. pp.170-171. In "Ghosts with Ears: the WESSA in Contemporary Drama", The English Academy Review 6: 19-27, Yvonne Banning examines the ideological construction of the "WESSA", and suggests that this historically constructed liberal, colonial identity may be abandoned or denied by reshaping its "role as cultural benefactor and liberal master in South Africa" (p.21) through a process of "africanisation" (p.25). The "WESSA" may thus be reconstructed as a "USA", a "Useful South African" (p.26). Replying to Banning in "The White English-speaking South Africans: 'Bastards', 'Wimps', 'Ghosts with Ears', or Something Else Again?", The English Academy Review 8: 15-29, Andrew Foley points to the "identity crisis" of the "WESSA" who is "locked into a situation of intense inter-group tension and violence" (p.18). His argument seems to be little more than a restatement of "Butlerism", however, since it assumes an ideology-free position of neutrality for dissenting WESSAs whose position "in the middle between the competing nationalisms has aided their role as mediators and conciliators in the political conflict" (p.23).

23. The term, somewhat problematic because of its emphasis on colour, and therefore on race, has become a commonplace. Its origin is attributed to Archbishop Desmond Tutu. See Jennifer Crwys-Williams, "We South Africans are going to be the rainbow people of the world", "As I was saying", The Weekly Mail & Guardian, Dec. 23 1994 to Jan. 5 1995, p.9. President Nelson Mandela gave the term official status when he referred to the "rainbow nation" in his Inaugural Address on May 10, 1994.

24. See M M Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin, Texas: Texas University Press, 1981). Wayne C Booth explains this concept in "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism", in Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago: University Press, 1986). According to Booth, any act of speech (or writing) is polyglot; it includes a "collection" of languages. The subject is therefore "constituted in polyphony" (p.151).

25. A directive such as that offered by Henry Louis Gates, "Editor's Introduction: Writing 'Race' and the Difference It Makes", in "Race," Writing, and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.1-20, that critics of black writing should "turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures" is problematic (p.13). Such a "tradition" is neither a *ding-an-sich* nor is it discernible without a postcolonial squint.

26. The notion of contest is central to South African literary discourse. See, for example, Malvern van Wyk Smith, Grounds of Contest: A Survey of South African English Literature (Kenwyn: Jutalit, 1990):

> Just as the history of South Africa essentially became the history of the struggle for the land and its resources, so its serious literature would turn out to be a record of the mythology developed by its people to justify or resist that process (p.3).

27. See, for example, the ideological contest between André Brink and Wilhelm Liebenberg, De Kat, April/May, 1989. At the heart of this debate is a contest between Liebenberg's "committed criticism" and Brink's more quietist poststructuralist position.

28. For an analysis of "radical critical practice" and the approaches it deploys, see Dirk Klopper, "Ideology and the Study of South African English Poetry", in Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Literary Culture, ed. Martin Trump. (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1990), pp.256-294. Klopper identifies the publication of the papers from the Poetry '74 Conference as marking the "first decisive challenge to the dominance of traditionalist literary criticism in the study of South African poetry" (p.256).

29. Butler's position "between" carries with it none of the meaning of Bhabha's "in-between space". The former connotes a solid, certain position (in Bhabha's terms, an "originary" subjectivity), whereas Bhabha suggests indeterminacy and flux, associated with "processes produced in the articulation of cultural differences" See Homi K Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994), p.1. The key terms of Butler's form of liberalism are conciliation and benevolent paternalism, neutrality and objectivity. In 1953, however, with

> the entire population ... almost split into two hostile camps in consequence of the policy of racial discrimination, and where recent political events have made the struggle between oppressor and oppressed even more acute, [Nelson Mandela warned that] *there can be no middle course*.

Nelson Mandela, "The Shifting Sands of Illusion", in Nelson Mandela: The Struggle is My Life (London: IDAF, 1986), pp.43-45, p.43 (my emphasis). In his essay, "What Liberalism Means to Me", in Save the Beloved Country (Johannesburg: Hans Strydom, 1987), Alan Paton outlines the principles of the Liberal Party as stated in 1954:

> 1. The essential dignity of all human beings and the maintenance of their fundamental rights.
> 2. The right of each human being to self-development.
> 3. The Rule of Law.
> 4. Full participation in the democratic process.

Paton goes on to define liberalism in the following terms: "generosity of spirit, tolerance of others, an attempt to comprehend otherness..." (p.254). See also Stephen Watson,

"Recent White English South African Poetry & the Language of Liberalism", in Stephen Watson: Selected Essays 1980-1990 (Cape Town: Carrefour, 1990), pp.23-34, esp. p.28.

30. Klopper himself suggests in "Ideology and the Study of White South African English Poetry" in Rendering Things Visible, ed. Trump, that "material practice ... be grounded more explicitly in a semiological conception of material processes" (p.264). See also the debates occasioned by Albie Sachs's paper, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", in Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents, eds Ingrid de Kok & Karen Press (Cape Town: Buchu, 1990); also Exchanges: South African Writing in Transition, eds Duncan Brown & Bruno van Dyk (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1991).

31. In his review of publications of the late 1980s (including Cobbett & Cohen's Popular Struggles in South Africa (1988), and Alex Callinicos's South Africa: Between Reform and Revolution (1988)), D Hirson observes that "the worker" is the central focus of many academic studies. See "Between a Rock and a Hard Place", Southern African Review of Books 2(5): 17-18.

32. Though Lewis Nkosi has been dismissed as a "bourgeois" critic who applies "Eurocentric" criteria (see Mbulelo Mzamane, Momentum: On Recent South African Writing, eds M J Daymond *et al*, (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1984), p.302), Nkosi is, in fact, a sophisticated pragmatist. In an interview in Out of Exile: South African Writers Speak, eds Kevin Goddard & Charles Wessels (Grahamstown: The National English Literary Museum, 1992), pp.26-36, Nkosi argues that, while "the black majority" should have "effective control" of discourse, this should not preclude "critical equipment [such as deconstruction] that is available in Europe or in America" being adapted "for local use" (pp.32-33).

33. Neither term reifies racial difference. "White writing" is seen in terms of colonial history. J M Coetzee asserts in White Writing (Johannesburg: Radix, 1988) that it is the product of a people of "a highly problematical South African-colonial identity" (pp.6-7) "generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African" (p.11). See also Richard Rive, "The Black Writer in South Africa", in Momentum: On Recent South African Writing, ed. Daymond *et al*, where he argues that the category "black writing" may be seen in terms of a "politico-economic rather than ethnic" reality (p.92).

34. Coetzee's formulation is somewhat problematic in the light of V Y Mudimbe's study, The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), which examines the manner in which Western epistemological systems produce categories such as "Africa", thereby perpetuating the dichotomising systems typical of colonialism.

35. See Lawrence Wright, "English in South Africa: Effective Communication and the Policy Debate", The English Academy Review 10: 1-13; also Chris Jeffrey, "Standards in South African English", The English Academy Review 10: 14-25, where questions relating to "Black South African English" (BSAE), "British standard English", and the "indigenization" and "acculturation" of English are discussed. That contest is central to public debate is clear from the debates around questions of culture and language in "SAfm", a public broadcasting channel, and the appearance in a national Sunday

newspaper of an article on the findings of the National Education syllabus revision project. Chris Barron, "A Flock of Pidgins", Sunday Times, Jan. 29 1995, p.9.

36. See Rory Ryan, "Literary-Intellectual Behaviour in South Africa", in Rendering Things Visible, ed. Trump, pp.1-21, where he argues that "the marginalized voice opposes *this* particular knowledge hegemony and seeks the displacement of the prevailing monuments in order to erect others and to codify a new totalization of knowledge, one as potentially repressive as that which it seeks to displace" (p.13). According to Ryan, knowledge in South Africa is always institutionalised; his urging of the critic to explore the disturbing implications of his thesis should not go unheeded, but neither should it deter her from pursuing the activity that Gramsci suggests is possible.

37. Sole argues that there are pitfalls in such projects, however. See "Politics and Working Class Culture: A Response", South African Labour Bulletin 10(5): 43-56, where Sole contends that an act of will cannot easily effect class suicide, and categories such as "the people" (or, for that matter, "the worker") are problematic in that they assume a homogeneity that functions all too often to obscure vested interests. .

38. The corpus of writing by a critic such as Kelwyn Sole, for example, intervenes directly in the terrain of politics. As the exchange between himself and the Naledi Writers' Unit between 1984 and 1985 illustrates, writing both shapes and is shaped by political discourse and events. See "Politics and Working Class Culture: A Response".

39. The publication in 1990 in South Africa of Sachs's 1989 "in-house" ANC paper, "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom", in Spring is Rebellious, eds de Kok & Press, represents a significant moment of rupture. Sachs inscribes a discourse of commonality and employs a trope of confluence: "Each cultural tributary contributes towards and increases the majesty of the river of South African-ness" (p.25). In its wake followed numerous newspaper articles and exchanges, as well as collections of criticism.

40. This concept, propagated by the editor of The Sowetan, Aggrey Klaaste, in the 1980s, has become part of a post-apartheid discourse. Its value has, however, been questioned. In "Nation-building an Example of Outdated Thinking?", Democracy in Action, June/July, 1990, Johan Degenaar analyses the concept in the South African context and concludes that the building of a democratic society and the tackling of injustices should take precedence over the "romanticism of the notion of nation-building" (p.10).

41. See André Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984), where he demonstrates the "line of continuity between this early period [before the establishment of the Union of South Africa] in African politics and modern-day African nationalism" (p.xii).

42. It would be interesting to know how a sophisticated theorist such as Kristeva would explain the nationalisms that have re-emerged in Europe and elsewhere, and whether these may be discounted as "mere illusions". The Second World War has been superseded as a historical marker by post-Cold War realignments; old orders and hegemonies give way daily, as new ones are born.

43. See M Zavarzadeh & D Morton, "Theory Pedagogy Politics: The Crisis of 'The Subject' in the Humanities", A General Issue: boundary 2 xv(1&2): 1-23; also Paul C Jay, "Being in the Text: Autobiography and the Problem of the Subject", Modern Language Notes 97: 1045-1063, esp. p.1059.

44. See Henry Louis Gates's "rehistoricising" of Fanon and his relationship with Lacan and Bhabha in "Critical Fanonism", Critical Inquiry 17: 457-470.

45. For a discussion of the problems posed by contemporary theory to the question of individual agency (the "structure/subject" *agon*), see Anthony Appiah, "Tolerable Falsehoods: Agency and the Interests of Theory", in Consequences of Theory, eds Jonathan Arac & Barbara Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), pp.63-90.

46. For an extensive discussion of this process, specifically in relation to Richard Wright's Black Boy, see Abdul JanMohamed, "Negating the Negation as a Form of Affirmation in Minority Discourse: The Construction of Richard Wright as Subject", Cultural Critique 7: 245-266.

Chapter Two

RE-MEMBERING IDENTITY

> Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.
>
> Homi K Bhabha

Introduction

In this chapter I elaborate on the problem of authority (introduced in Chapter One) in relation to both the autobiographical subject and text. This I do as a preliminary to tracing the shift from Humanist to a "new humanist"[1] ideology in local autobiographical criticism; this shift marks the struggles of the subject to assert him/herself anew in a contemporary critical environment that has eroded the authority of the "I". In conclusion, I shall examine the inscription of colonial autobiographical criticism, and its displacement, in a local criticism whose condition is, as argued, one of crisis.

The method I shall use is, broadly, that described by Françoise Lionnet as "non-coercive", a reading practice that "allows text and reader to enter a dialogue that does not follow the usual rules of linear, agonistic, and patriarchal discourses" (1989:28).[2] In South Africa today critical discourse inscribes indeterminacy; in the interregnum, old boundaries blur and new languages, forms and identities emerge. In this liminal space and time, heteroglossia, hybridity and miscegenation are key terms which autobiographical criticism marshalls as it negotiates a way forward in its encounter with the imperatives embedded in the autobiography it reads and consequently rewrites. Autobiography that is

counterhegemonic sets up a self that contradicts the ideology of separation, apartness and inferiority. Since its condition is one of postcoloniality, it is what Lionnet describes as "heterogeneous and heteronomous" (1989:8). This multivalent, "plural" self denies polarised and polarising notions of identity, culture and race.

It does this, moreover, within a local and pan-African tradition that sets specific tasks for writing in general, and autobiography in particular. As recently as 1991, it was claimed that

> [francophone] African autobiographical narrative functions as a collective voice as it recreates an individual yet representative life. Mimetic discourse is its deliberate strategy. With or without overt messages, it provides an eyewitness account to history. The African writer has inherited, in a way, the role of the traditional storyteller. Unlike this ancestor, however, his or her book has the potential of reaching a larger audience.
>
> (Larrier 1991:83)

Significantly, the written text is seen as instrumental in "building a nation". In the present context, "nation" signifies not a totalised oneness, fixed boundaries, or a myth of origins, but rather heterogeneity, liminality (the politics of thresholds), and conceptual indeterminacy.[3] The narration of the "I" corresponds with the narration of a new nationhood. While memory, "re-membering" or "putting together ... the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 1986:xxiii), is integral to the process of redefining and reconstructing the nation, so, too, is "forgetting to remember":

> Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification.
>
> (Bhabha 1990:311)

Even though the writer may use mimetic discourse as a "deliberate strategy", as Larrier suggests, the critic will examine what is refracted as well as what is reflected in the text

and its *aporia* where "forgetting" may operate unconsciously in the production of genuinely liberating autobiographical writing.

While the acculturated genre of autobiography has achieved a special status in black South African writing, it is a relative newcomer in an emergent body of writing in English[4] that, by the 1950s, already included a substantial body of journalism, critical essays, adapted traditional forms such as plays, short stories and poems, and appropriated literary forms of the novel and biography. The documentary impulse prevails in fictionalised forms, as fact and fiction are blended to produce "faction" that closes the gaps of colonial history . R R R Dhlomo's novella, An African Tragedy, appeared in 1928, and Sol T Plaatje's Mhudi (written some ten years before) in 1930. Pre-dating both, however, is John Knox Bokwe's biography, Ntsikana, The Story of an African Convert (1914). These texts emerged within a published local corpus of black writing in English that dates from the establishment of mission stations in the early nineteenth century. Tiyo Soga's translation of Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (1868) was the predecessor of a number of texts that emerged from the mission presses of Lovedale (1826), and later Mariannhill (1882) and Morija. As early as 1862, Soga began writing journalism (Mphahlele 1992:38-48). All this was in addition to folktales, traditional songs and praise poems in the vernacular that were transcribed into writing after the arrival of European missionaries and settlers.

As Mphahlele points out, writing before the 1950s was the product of educational institutions, mass media, a changing rural landscape, regulatory legislation, and urbanisation. This writing was concerned with "historical events; it was in effect a

dialogue of two selves, the dramatisation of a dual personality - the traditional and the Christian" (1992:48). Mphahlele makes two important points. The first concerns history. There is a connection, as Georges Gusdorf has suggested, between the emergence of autobiography as a genre and peoples' emergence from a "mythic framework of traditional teachings" to the "domain of history" (1980:30). Colonialism signifies the moment of disruption, and resistance signals the entry into history and the regaining of a people's identity (Serote 1989:16).[5] Mphahlele's second point concerns the effect of colonialism on the indigenous subject, the "fracture of consciousness" that Fanon discerns in the Negro who "is forever in combat with his own image" (1986:194). Black writing was, from its beginnings, inscribed with certain central features of postcoloniality: the irruption of colonial culture into traditional life and the subsequent splitting of the self (and therefore the production in autobiographical writing of a hybrid identity). In a recent collection of essays, Perspectives on South African English Literature that recall and replace the Perspectives on South African Fiction of a previous literary and political era), various tasks are defined for postcolonial writing. Mphahlele advocates reconstruction, particularly of the originary myth,[6] "a process of reassembling the fragments of Africa into a whole and single consciousness" (1992:57).

In the same way as Mphahlele's Africanist emphases subvert postcolonial critical notions (of hybridity and ambivalence), so do certain emphases in A E Voss's argument where writing is defiantly posited as a means of "knowing 'what happened'. This will mean a reordering of the past". Autobiography is singled out as being of especial importance in this process (Voss 1992:8). The notion that autobiography serves as source material for human history originated with Wilhelm Dilthey in 1883,[7] and was developed in 1907 by

Georg Misch whose Geschichte der Autobiographie, "demonstrated the value of autobiography as an 'instrument of knowledge'" (Spengemann 1980:193). More recently, William Spengemann has proposed the category, "historical autobiography" whose origins he locates in "the climate of opinion regarding the self that prevailed from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment" (1980:xv). In the present study, this form will be approached instead as a complex socio-cultural product in a postcolonial context. In Don Mattera's Memory is the Weapon, history, or what happened, is given a privileged task: there is a "history which South Africa ha[s] to know", a history that only those who were witnesses, who were "there at the time" can tell (1987:14). For critics such as Mphahlele and Voss the relationship between writing and the emergence of a post-apartheid national identity and culture is self-evident. So, too, is the limited relevance of postmodern problems relating to textual authority, history and identity.

The Author, Authority and Authorisation

The theorisation of autobiography in postcolonial contexts inevitably and increasingly incorporates and dismantles postmodern principles and procedures. Notions of textual authority, history, truth, realism, referentiality and factuality occupy, together with fictionality, facticity,[8] and historicity, the critical terrain. The problem of fictionality is, indeed, central to contemporary studies of autobiography. Robert Elbaz argues that "through the processes of mediation (by linguistic reality) and suspension (due to the text's lack of finality and completion), autobiography can only be a fiction" (1987:1). The implications of this position were discerned seven years earlier by Michael Sprinkler, whose "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography" claims that "no autobiography can take place except within the boundaries of a writing where concepts of subject, self

and author collapse into the act of producing a text" (1980:342). Clearly, the conquest by *graphos* of *autos* and *bios* can have little currency in a context where autobiography has been assigned an historical task.

Nevertheless, postmodern doubts and disturbances cannot be wished away. For this reason, the terms of the "contract"[9] entered into by author and reader become increasingly complex. While the pact rests on the assumption that the *bios* is represented as truthfully as possible in the writing, precisely because it is representation in writing, autobiography can never be entirely referential of a life. Moreover, as Sidonie Smith argues, the process of writing involves selection:

> Because the autobiographer can never capture the fullness of her subjectivity or understand the entire range of her experience, the narrative "I" becomes a fictive persona. In fact, as Louis A Renza notes: "The autobiographer cannot help sensing his omission of facts from a life the totality or complexity of which constantly eludes him - the more so when discourse pressures him into ordering these facts."
>
> (Smith 1987b:46-47)

Memory constructs a life from certain events that are themselves confluences of fragments. This realisation is clear in Mphahlele's admission in Down Second Avenue: "No use trying to put the pieces together. Pieces of my life. They are a jumble" (DSA 74-5).

Feminist autobiographical criticism such as that of Lionnet, Smith, and Stanley is useful in that it deals with questions of authority, identity and truth, as readings of the (gendered) "other" are negotiated in a postmodern critical context. This criticism deploys, as it deconstructs, poststructuralist positions in addressing the problem of truth in autobiography:

> A concern with auto/biography shows that "self" is a fabrication, not necessarily a lie but certainly a highly complex truth: a fictive truth reliant on cultural convention concerning what "a life" consists of and how its story can be told both in speech and, somewhat differently, in writing. But this does not mean that such writings have no points of connection with the material realities of everyday life: it rather emphasises how complex this relationship is and that neither realism nor a total rejection of it will do.
>
> (Stanley 1992:242-3)

Feminist analysis recognises the political claims of *bios*. More specifically, it acknowledges the right to recognition of the individual *bios*. For the critic, this entails an awareness of the embeddedness of "realist facticities" in the "narration of *a life*" (Stanley 1992:244). The emphatic privileging of *bios* over *graphos* is relevant in South Africa, where the connection between autobiographical writing and the "material realities of everyday life" of black people is an overtly political one. Moreover, Stanley's recognition of the claims of realism in a postcolonial context empowers both the writer and her writing.

In the cause of women's autobiographical claims, Stanley gives political resonance to questions of identity and referentiality, questions that are raised in Philippe Lejeune's seminal formalist essay "The Autobiographical Contract" (1975):

> An author is not just a person, he is a person who writes and publishes. With one foot in the text, and one outside, he is the point of contact between the two. The author is defined as being simultaneously a socially responsible real person, and the producer of a discourse. (Lejeune 1982:200)

The social responsibilities of Lejeune's "real person" are confined within the parameters of Europe, as he points out. They have little in common with the responsibilities set out for and by the black autobiographer. Lejeune confines his theorising to post-1770 European writing, suggesting criteria that may be "anachronistic or irrelevant outside this area [Europe]" (1982:192). The disclaimer is an interesting one, since it raises many of

the concerns that currently preoccupy postcolonial criticism regarding "time" and "place". These concerns are foregrounded in an emergent body of criticism, that of post-apartheid South Africa. Voss, for example, raises the question of relevance, based on his recognition that South African society does not "synchronise" with other societies (1992:8). Lejeune's phrase, "outside Europe", inscribes the self/other dichotomy of a cultural narrative whose founding premiss is a spatial notion of a Europe that is separate from the world that lies beyond its own perimeters. This model has been rendered invalid, and is broadly contested from within Europe, or "the West", itself. Standing Lejeune on his head, the "other" "writes back" to Lejeune's "this area" - the imperial centre - thus reclaiming, redefining and reconstructing the self in postcolonial spaces. There are no boundaries here, no "inside" or "outside", but only shifting liminalities, or thresholds. Nevertheless, Lejeune's insights and tentative disclaimers, his concern with the reader's role and of "historically variable" conditions that inform the "*contractual product*" (1982:220) that is autobiography, resonate anew in the current context.

Questions of referentiality and identity are increasingly the preoccupations of studies centred in local academic institutions, in particular those with colonial affiliations. An important intervention was made in 1984 when J M Coetzee, in his inaugural lecture at the University of Cape Town, addressed the question of "Truth in Autobiography":

> There is a sense in which, going over the history of his life from a specific point in time, the time of writing, an autobiographer can be said to be *making* the truth of his life. The gaps and evasions, perhaps even the lies, are then elements of the life-story, elements of the making of the story, elements of the maker of the story. (1984:4)

In describing the autobiographer's "story" as being "written within the limits of a pact, the pact of autobiography, one of the many pacts negotiated over the years between writers

and readers" (1984:5), Coetzee brings Lejeune's contractual trope to bear on local autobiographical critique, foregrounding facticity. Coetzee's critique is, moreover, embedded in a tradition that privileges the individual and the personal, evidenced in Lejeune's use of what is taken to be a self-evident category, "personal writing" (1982:192). Yet it swerves from this by appropriating Lejeune's phrase, "producer of a discourse", and refracting Pierre Macherey's insights regarding literary production. It proceeds to focus on the not-said in a text, the silences that are produced by the subject in ideology who cannot stand outside of him/herself. The notion of identity as unified, actual and self-determining is questioned. In short, the "I" that signifies the protagonist in the *graphos* subverts the author, or the actual "I" of the *bios*. As a product of the contract between author/narrator/protagonist and reader, autobiography is not a *ding-an-sich*, an entity whose truth awaits the reader who sees, through the supposedly transparent medium of writing, a putative "thing in itself as it really is". Poststructuralist insights subvert positivist methods of investigation, and reading itself is seen as an activity that constructs rather than discovers, the self, and therefore, the "truth".

It is, however, important to bear in mind that poststructuralism itself is a "symptom and a product" (Young 1990:1): the challenge to "the sovereign self of Europe" by "Europe's other" (the colonised world) is a challenge also to the grounds of Western knowledge (Young 1990:17). There is a necessary connection between postcolonial writing and poststructuralism. Central to this connection is the issue of power: the decentring of "Europe" and the empowerment of its "others". Autobiographical criticism negotiates a course with texts and in a context where hegemonic certainties crumble as new and buried "truths" emerge and new identities are constructed. The autobiographical texts

examined in the chapters that follow simultaneously construct and deconstruct history and identity, and establish truth claims as these very claims are undermined. This is evident, for example, in the contradiction between the disclaimers uttered by the subject, and the documentation of his life that follows, in Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue. The effect of his first words, "I have never known why...", is reinforced by (the already quoted) "No use trying to put the pieces together. Pieces of my life. They are a jumble." (DSA 74-75). Mphahlele proceeds to explain and document in a chronological account, his life. Yet, side by side with his realist account are attacks on the realist fallacy, and an implicit exposure of the inadequacies of correspondence theory.

Autobiographical writing itself provides the clue to the critic, for while it is clear that the insights of poststructuralism should not - and cannot - be discounted, they need to be deployed with circumspection if they are not to function in such a manner as to reinstate the power of the "self" or same ("Europe", or "the West"), thus condemning the struggling "other" to a position of marginality and political powerlessness. The claims of counterhegemonic writing cannot be disposed of as mere chimerical longings. *Ex nihil nihil fit*, and the historic task of autobiographical writing will have been dismissed in the interests of the *status quo*.

The dualistic thinking that opposes poststructuralism and black writing is not only ignorant of the historical origins of the former, but also creates a stalemate. Local theorisation should be guided by the implicit claims of autobiographical writing. Ellen Kuzwayo asserts, in Call Me Woman:

> I was born on 29 June 1914, the only child of Phillip Serasengwe and Emma Mtusi Merafe, born Makgothi. My place of birth was the farm of my maternal

> grandfather, Jeremiah Makoloi Makgothi, in Thaba Patchoa in the district of Thaba'Nchu in the Orange Free State.
>
> (1985:55)

When the author constructs the narrator in this manner, she creates the sense that the protagonist is a "real person", whose life-history is "legally verifiable, a matter of record" (Lejeune 1982:200). This kind of claim is exemplified in Peter Thuynsma's identification of the autobiographical narrative with the cry: "I AM!" (1990:10). Consequently, the critic must deal with the truth-claims of narratives that set out to counter certain falsifications produced by the hegemonic narrative. It is crucial, for example, that Kuzwayo establish the facts of her "birthright" if she is to counter the history that depicts her as having no legitimate claim to land or culture. According to Spivak, postmodern discourse results in "epistemic violence" where it undermines the capacity of the text to "answer one back" (1985:131). Integral to the act of answering back is the claim to identity and authority, one that Kuzwayo overtly and uncompromisingly makes in her declaration, "I am the author of this book" (1985:55). Because answering back can occur only in a context where colonial authority is resisted by a subject whose renaming of him/herself "I" constitutes an act of reclamation, critical discourse must avoid setting itself up as a form of colonial authority, one that pre-empts, moreover, the very act of reclamation.

It is significant that postmodern influences that occur in the (white) writing of J M Coetzee preclude the possibility of the subaltern subject's answering back, thus foreclosing the subject's renaming of him/herself. Coetzee examines the process of distortion and domination in Life & Times of Michael K, where the phenomenon of official identity-construction is addressed. The "story" of K's life is constructed severally

by institutions and individuals, each of which inscribes the narrative. The official version that appears in the "register" is as follows:

> Michaels is an arsonist. He is also an escapee from a labour camp. He was running a flourishing garden on an abandoned farm and feeding the local guerrilla population when he was captured. That is the story of Michaels.
> (1983:179-180)

Coetzee's protagonist suffers the erasure and falsification of his identity. This results in the paralysis of radical doubt, a sense of the futility of telling his story at all, since it is inevitably "always a story with a hole in it; a wrong story, always wrong" (1983:150). In this, the narrative expresses something of the postmodernist tenet that "autobiography (like fiction) is an act of ceaseless renewal: the story is never 'told' finally, exhaustively, completely" (Elbaz 1987:13).

Clearly, however, while doubt may plague, it neither paralyses nor silences the black autobiographer who is driven by a compulsion to speak, to declare "I AM" in order to counter erasure and misrepresentation. As suggested in Chapter One, this paralysis is not a feature of African American autobiography. It is absent also from autobiographies that emerged in contexts similar to the South African one. These forms are concerned to reconstruct identity (and, in certain cases, to reclaim a land) where identity has been assaulted and fractured by dominant cultures.

By way of illustration, I shall turn briefly to Aboriginal writing, where, as Chris Tiffin asserts, identity is a central concern (1985:156). Archie Weller's writing is exemplary in that it explores the effects for Aborigines of being "at the lowest point of two intersecting cultures" (Tiffin 1985:168). According to Weller, writing negates the racist narrative of "niggers, treacherous blacks, filthy or degraded degenerates" and replaces it with "the true

wonderful life of Aboriginal Australia, with its rich tapestry of story, song, dance and painting, splashed with patches of magic and humour"; it is, moreover, a story that "only Aborigines" can tell (Weller 1991). Displacing the imperial "self" in a "dialectics of the centre and the margin", the aboriginal story actively questions Eurocentric premisses of Western knowledge, thus effecting the West's "deconstruction" (Young 199O:18-19).

Criticism plays a dual role here: on the one hand, it interrogates the story of the "other" - whether it be a "wonderful" Aboriginal one, or the "tough tale"[10] of a South African. On the other hand, it enables liberatory narratives to be told, narratives that implicitly claim the status of the "real" and the "true" in constructing a decolonised self, history and nation. The postcolonial critic may recognise the political claims of the writing if, at the same time, s/he acknowledges that current Western hermeneutics - the suspicion and the scepticism of postmodernity with regard to the truth-claims of the text - is the product of a particular time and a particular place. The critic needs to "hold on to a historical moment which does not synchronise with that of other civil communities" (Voss 1992:8). In this way, problems of neo-universalism may be avoided.[11] Liberatory narratives concerned with "reconstruction" (Couzens n.d.:3) may then be deconstructed,[12] read not simply in terms of their contestation, but also their inscription, of the colonial system.

The subject of colonial discourse is constituted by a "repertoire of conflictual positions" (Bhabha 1994:77) and does not occupy a simple ideological position. Moreover, because there can be no absolute otherness in a culturally heterogeneous context, a strictly dualistic distinction between self and other is a false one.[13] The theorisation of black autobiography is sharpened if subjectivity is conceived as constituted by and in ideology,

a nexus of signifying practices, and if this subjectivity is perceived as produced within a set of lived relations in a specific context at a particular historical moment. Clearly, however, in a context where what Couzens calls the "real world out there" demands not only recognition but transformation, the subjects produced by the (black) writer who struggles against apartheid should not be reduced to "mere ragbags of linguistic codes" (Couzens n.d.:3).

The question of historical context is an important one. The postcolonial "I" does not claim transcendent or universal status, but rather locates itself within the specificities of historical place and time. "I do not come with timeless truths", Frantz Fanon declares (1986:9). When, in Tell Freedom, Peter Abrahams tells his father that he wants to go to England and tell the people there "about life in this country", the former asks, "Will you tell them about us? About this little place?" (TF 299). The pronoun includes Angelina, Natalie, Harry and the larger family of the Vrededorp community (and by association those who suffer under apartheid throughout South Africa). The place is specific, as is the time, the 1950s, though the latter is also colonial and apartheid time, the continuum that Lesego Rampolokeng describes as follows:

> this is racist time
> the hour of fascist mime
> (1990:44)

Nevertheless, neither the "place" nor the "time" of South Africa should be constructed in simple, homogeneous terms. Rampolokeng's reference to the practice of "mime" recalls Bhabha's interpretive model of mimicry in his discussion of the relationship between the colonial subject and the coloniser. Trapped, and therefore complicit - to a greater or lesser degree - in the process of colonial power, the colonial subject may become its

agent. However, this ambivalent agency may simultaneously support and subvert this power.

The question of history, and the textual rendering of the specificities of its place and time, is a thorny one. The problem of the relationship between what actually happened in the "real world out there" and the construction of a narrative is hinted at in the very first black South African autobiography, Tell Freedom, where the narrator's father says, "Come, Lee. Tell us what you see and we'll *make it into a story*." (TF 10, my emphasis). The use of the indefinite article subverts at the outset the idea that the one, true history of the struggle for freedom is about to unfold. This is underscored in the words of his father on the eve of the son's exile:

> "Remember the story you made up for the children at Christmas? Well, the children, and many of us grown-ups still remember it. If you *make stories* like that for the white people of England, they will listen and you can tell them about us." (TF 299-300, my emphasis)

This passage raises problems concerning telling and making, truth and fiction, as well as readership and the writer's purpose, thus calling into question Ndebele's categorisation of autobiography as "expositional narrative" (1991a:92).

There is no simple (his)tory of freedom, but only "conflicting and incommensurable histories", or "differentiated histories" (Young 1990:63). These militate against the idea of a single, uncontestable "truth". Postmodern scepticism influences much recent criticism in South Africa,[14] and historical writing, "like all other writing", is perceived as having a "necessarily imaginative and inventive dimension" (Wade 1990). If, moreover, it is assumed that history is a site of ideological struggle over the past,[15] criticism that examines the historical record in black South African autobiography must bear in mind

that the "sanction of the past is sought by ... those intent on subverting it" (Tosh quoted in Wade 1990). "History", or a particular (constructed) version of the past is vested with authority at the same time as the official, or hegemonic version, is discredited. However, if the writing subject is understood according to postcolonial models such as hybridity and mimicry, then the past that s/he constructs must itself be read against the grain. In such a reading, the monologic surrenders to the dialogic, thus enabling silenced voices to be heard, and to answer back. The ensuing cacophony of contending voices may be said to constitute a "multi-story" that displaces hegemonic "his-story".

In short, postcolonial criticism must confront and deal with problems relating to the author/"I" of the utterance, and the relationship between history and fictionality. The purpose of such investigation must take cognisance of the local context and therefore acknowledge in black autobiographical writing the compelling importance of the past and of history, as well as the claims of the self. The assertion, "This is what happened", and the political dimension of the personal testimony (Ndebele 1991a:92) that claims, "I AM", must shape the critical response. In this way criticism can undermine and unmask hegemonic constructions of identity and history, and so displace and, for a strategic moment, replace the colonial/apartheid narrative with a counterhegemonic multi-story.

Complex narratives thus emerge: multivocalic "selves", and a collection of contradictory "histories" counter the narrative that produces the identity of the "other" as separate, fixed and inferior. The identities and histories thus produced are, moreover, in process. In this regard, Helen Tiffin usefully theorises the postcolonial text as one that speaks

> of the erosion of that former authority and a liberation into a world in which one's own identity may be created or recuperated not as an alternative system or

> fixture, but *as process*, a state of continual becoming in which author/ity and domination of any kind is impossible to sustain. Through *polyphony, hybridisation*, and the continual erosion of all the traditional strategies of European containment, *post-colonial texts liberate themselves from both historical capture and contemporary containment*; and escape relegation as "other" by recuperating "self" in the process of annihilating such constructing binaries.
>
> (Tiffin 1988:179, my emphases)

For example, on his first meeting with a white policeman, Mphahlele is named (and appropriated): "my jong" (my boy), "Kaffir", "bastard", "jou donder", "son of a stinking Kaffir" by the white policeman (DSA 42); later, as an adult, he is "'Jimmed' and 'boy-ed' and 'John-ed' by whites" (DSA 170). The counterhegemonic autobiography constitutes a liberation from such capture and containment - but it goes further, as I shall demonstrate in the chapters that follow, in that it subverts the very assumptions upon which such othering is built.

The theorisation of black autobiography functions in accordance with certain principles. It must at the outset acknowledge the major thrust of postcolonial writing: decolonisation and the retrieval or construction of an independent identity. However, decolonisation cannot result in the retrieval of a precolonial identity, since the "tribal umbilical cord had long, oh so long, been severed" as Mphahlele (painfully) acknowledges (DSA 203). Similarly, because the overall context is a postcolonial one, the redefined identity that may be achieved is itself a product of the process of colonisation - the result, as Bloke Modisane suggests in his autobiography, of "history".[16] If an autobiography does function as a counter-narrative, the identity that is retrieved or constructed is likely to deviate from the author(itative), author(itarian) "I" of patriarchal hegemony.

The occurrence in counterhegemonic narratives of authorship signified by "I", though necessary, is problematic. Replication rather than liberation occurs if the hegemonic "I (the all-knowing subject)" (Minh-ha 1989:9) of patriarchy is not dismantled. An alternative to this "I" may be found in the multiple, rather than monolithic, self discernible in certain autobiographical narratives. The "I" that claims "I AM" may, accordingly, be signified as "I/i (the plural, non-unitary subject)" (Minh-ha 1989:9). In place of hegemonic devices and structures (such as monologism, coherence, unity and autonomy) that consolidate patriarchal power, Minh-ha proposes the dialogic self. This self may be signified as a metonymic pronoun that incorporates the plural pronoun "we". Indeed, this imperative is embedded in much South African writing. As I have argued elsewhere (Gilfillan 1992), the metonymic I is explicit in a poem by South African activist/poet Rebecca Matlou,[17] "Mother Patriot" (Molefe n.d.:44). Here,

> individual identity is expanded into an inclusive, communal self as the personal pronoun "I" is conflated into the first person plural. A common awareness of injustice forges a new identity: "me you us"
>
> (Gilfillan 1992:82).

This identity is articulated, not in a "universal" language of a "man" who speaks to other "men", but in a language that is produced in the communal experience of a particular time and a place: "my words are born deep in the land's heart", Rampolokeng asserts (1990:47).

Clearly, in the politics of the centre and the margin, what needs to be avoided is the recuperation of the marginal "other" from a centrist position. It is not simply a question of the old, hegemonic self being displaced by a newly-empowered "other" whose narrative assumes magisterial status. This would be nothing more than a changing of the guard, in a context that remains structurally unchallenged and unchanged. Instead, the main aim

of postcolonial criticism should be to rewrite - from a shifting perspective, and by occupying a diversity of strategic positions - the hegemonic narrative. This it may do in a manoeuvre whose paradoxical effect is the reclamation/restoration of the *still peripheral* "other". The theorisation of counterhegemonic writing such as black South African autobiography must go much further than an unproblematic (re)writing of a counter-history in which the "other" simply becomes the subject of his/her own history and the very structures and presuppositions of hegemony remain uncontested.[18] The point is an important political one, since it relates to questions of perspective (that of the critic) and of power (that of the subject). The critic must, in all this, mark her theoretical positionality and acknowledge her complicity as an investigator,[19] as well as the probable effects of this.

Re-membering Theory: "Toward a New Humanism"

The criticism of black autobiography has undergone a marked shift from the confident Humanist position of the 1970s and 1980s that privileged the autonomous, self-defining author. The Humanist position is evident in Christie *et al*, for example, who adopt the dominant Western model by treating Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue as an exemplary life, a *bildung*: it evinces the "universal phenomenon" of an individual's "gradual growth to awareness" (1980:124). This model conforms to the "autobiographical archetype" of the *Bildungsroman* defined by Liz Stanley as

> the tale of the progressive travelling of a life from troubled or stifled beginnings; in which obstacles are overcome and the true self actualised or revealed; and then the tale may, prototypically, end, or it may go on to document yet further troubles turned to triumphs.
>
> (1992:11)

While Mphahlele's subsequent autobiography, Afrika My Musik, and his autobiographical novel, The Wanderers, may be cited as examples, it is problematic to do so. This is because criticism that employs the *bildung* model is underpinned by assumptions about individuality, linearity, chronology and progress that encode Western thought systems, in particular the ideology of Humanism.

The question of individualism is an important one in the context of black autobiography. Black autobiographers subvert Humanist notions of the subject in a number of ways that will be dealt with in more detail in the chapters that follow. They do this by telling typical life histories of ordinary people who have suffered oppression, and therefore - like many women's autobiographies - these life histories

> are *group* projects: even those that centre on particular individuals do so in ways which stress the close interconnectedness of these lives and those of families, friends, enemies, employers and others.
>
> (Stanley 1992:12)

There is what Stanley calls a "challenge to boundaries" in this rewriting of the conventional relationship between the autobiographical self and other people (1992:13). A similar transgression of norms occurs in the structural characteristics of certain autobiographies, as is strikingly exemplified in Mphahlele's interruption of the narrative in Down Second Avenue with the series of Interludes. These displace its linearity with an alternative circular pattern, at once self-reflexive and introspective; at the same time the Interludes displace the authority of the "I" of the narrative, thus changing the terms of Lejeune's autobiographical contract. According to its terms, the story is true, and the protagonist, the writer and the name of the person who appear on the cover are identical and completely synonymous. In Mphahlele's autobiography, the author, Ezekiel (now Es'kia), refers to the "pieces", the "jumble", of a past life, of another self - the child

Eseki- that he must "put ... together" (DSA 74-5) in order to construct "Eseki", and the young Ezekiel.

Furthermore, difference is substituted for identity between narrator and subject. Lejeune refers to "changes of 'voice'", a device that may consciously be used to express uncertainty about the autobiographer's identity (1982:195). In the fifth Interlude, there is a shift to the second person pronoun "you", and a sudden resumption of the first person "I" in the final sentence. The self who writes cannot have simple access to the self who was (Barthes 1975), and neither, therefore, can the reader. This kind of narrative disruption has the effect of disturbing the reader's sense of a unitary, autonomous self; instead, the self is in process, there is a procession of selves, as the "I" reacts to and is reacted upon by the changes of the tyrannous place it inhabits. There is, furthermore, a disturbance of notions of linearity and referentiality. This narrative strategy subverts, in the local context, the assumptions of the hegemonic Humanist aesthetic of the day, and represents a disruption of the story of "empire". In Derridean terms, it subverts the universalising mission of the white man's *logos*, or "white mythology" (quoted in Young 1990:7) - in this case, Humanism.

The "I" is not treated as a problematic entity either in Christie *et al* or in Ursula Barnett's study some three years later (it would take a while for the insights of poststructuralists to influence local criticism). Barnett, for example, defines Down Second Avenue as a "true autobiography" because it

> offers us a picture from a specific present viewpoint of a *coherent* shaping of an *individual* past, reached by means of introspection and memory of a special sort, wherein the self is seen as a *developing entity*, changing at definable stages, and

> where knowledge of the external world, and both together provide us with a deep *grasp of reality*.
>
> (Bruce Mazlish quoted in Barnett 1983:224, my emphases)

Endorsing the Humanist and positivist assumptions embedded in the above definition, Barnett finds no discrepancy between Mphahlele the person, the narrator of the autobiography, and the "I" constructed in the narrative. Any silences and gaps (including the significant one relating to Rebecca, Mphahlele's wife) are attributed to mere "reticence" (Barnett 1983:225). Barnett discerns "truth" in this autobiography of a man who, we are told, "never compromises with the truth ... for effect" (1983:225). Barnett's Humanist premisses are evident not only in her emphasis on authorial integrity and intentionality, but also when specific autobiographies are universalised as stories "of the human spirit and of human warmth" (1983:226). The reader's role is that of passive and trusting observer: "With him, we watch his world ..." (Barnett 1983:226); this world is "out there", an unproblematic object of positivist investigation.

More recently, however, this Humanist tradition of criticism has given way to other models of interpreting the subject. As argued in Chapter One, the 1970s and 1980s saw the beginnings of the appropriation by academic discourse in South Africa of Marxism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism. However, the latter remains problematic because of the persistent apartheid legacy in criticism.[20] White, male dominance in postmodern criticism has been problematised elsewhere by feminist theorists of autobiography. Liz Stanley warns that the "postmodernspeak" of "the death of the author" (1992:16) may function to disempower emergent groups (blacks, women, gays) and ensure the dominance of the "few white middle class male first world elite self-styled 'intellectuals'" who hijack the insights of postmodernism (1992:17). While a significant number of

theorists of autobiography in South Africa are women, the fact that the majority of them are white inevitably identifies them with structures of oppression and male dominance.[21]

The displacement of Humanism by postmodernism is, clearly, problematic in a context where the instrumental value of autobiographical writing in the process of national (re)construction is widely acknowledged. More than a decade ago, Mphahlele emphasised the documentary nature of black South African writing, including autobiography, which he traced to the imperative to remember, to recall the source of anger (1987:53). More recently, Voss has stressed the importance of autobiography as a means of knowing "what happened" - an essential aspect of the process of building a "new South Africa" (1992:8).[22] Where Humanist categories such as "the author" and "history" have been displaced, the project of "knowing what happened" is apparently doomed. Indeed, the possibility of human agency is radically questioned at the same time as the political necessity of the autobiographer's "I AM" is affirmed in a context where this same "I" desires "to inform, to influence, to record, if only to affirm existence in history" (Ndebele 1989:19). However, a way out of the impasse is discernible as theorists (such as Voss) marshal the insights of black theorists (Achebe, Langa, Masilela, Ndebele, Ramgobin, Plaatje, Tsedu) to produce a hybrid form, a criticism of indeterminacy. This goes back to Mphahlele's palimpsestic criticism in The African Image, Kirkwood's 1974 postcolonial critical essay, and Ndebele's more recent theorising that draws on a diversity of critical insights.

In this process, interventionist postcolonial discourse is enabled and the problem of critical quietism avoided. The "I" (or "I/i", or "me/you/us")[23] of anti-imperialist discourse may strategically be reconstituted and claimed. As suggested, however, this entity and its accompanying category of consciousness does not necessarily replicate the discourse of hegemonic imperialism. For one thing, the critical "other", is not forever confined to a category of radical alterity in a static world of immutable and total polarities; if it were, it would indeed be politically immobilised, since it could never say "I", and so engage the dominant discourse in order to answer it back. The *cul de sac* described by certain critics[24] is avoidable. A way forward may tentatively be negotiated, as local critical discourse shows. It is, finally, a matter of manipulation, of strategy and tactics - and here, Spivak's theory of critical "strategy" is relevant. The term, "strategy", relates to "skill in managing any affair". It derives from the context of war: a strategem is the "[use of a] trick or device to deceive [especially the enemy in war]" (OED). In the current context, "still ... the interregnum diagnosed by Nadine Gordimer in the early 80s" (Voss 1992:2), a dying "old" assails an emerging "new". The counterhegemonic meets a hydra-headed enemy on various terrains of struggle, including that of literary discourse - and it uses whatever means necessary to defeat it. "All's fair", it may be claimed, in this "war" in this place, at this time.

In this regard, Spivak's deployment of the term, strategy, amounts to a facilitative sleight that outmaneouvres and forestalls conventional attacks on the implications of her logic and therefore the value to postcolonial theory of her theoretical position(s). This is implicitly understood by critic Robert Young, whose recognition of the necessity of the moment leads him to commend the inventive pragmatism of Spivak's method that is not

strictly a method: "I am a *bricoleur*, I use what comes to hand" (Spivak quoted in Young 1990:156). Indeed, Spivak's phrase "comes to hand" subverts the notion of pure intellectual work, playing havoc with the intentions of those who search for conventional systematisation.

The question of consciousness relates not only to the writing subject of autobiography, but also to the reader. Difference (of class, culture, race and gender) may operate to polarise reader and autobiographer, thereby precluding the possibility of interventionist criticism. However, because consciousness is not overdetermined, intervention is possible. A strategic critical position is advanced that relates knowing to being, releasing the critic from the prison of "cognitive Apartheid".[25] The polarity of self and other is disrupted in a gesture that acknowledges the validity of "knowing about": "the critic or historian who traces the activities of such [subaltern] agents can also be termed 'subaltern' in relation to the dominant forms of academic historiography" (Young 1990:160).[26] A form of voluntarism inserts itself and subverts the stasis of an overdetermined consciousness. The problem of heterogeneity is thus obviated by the intentions and actions of the historian or critic who consciously "aligns him- or herself with the subaltern as *a strategy* for 'bringing hegemonic historiography to crisis'" (Young quoting Spivak 1990:160, my emphasis). There is, as argued in Chapter One, ample evidence among local critics of the possibility of effecting such a "crisis" or disruption of the dominant discourse.

Spivak's resourceful appropriation of the politically useful aspects of poststructuralism provides a working model in the present venture. Moreover, just as, paradoxically, the anti-essentialist and anti-realist "foundations" of feminism and "de/constructionist

experiences and analyses" have resulted in "realist, foundationalist ways of working" for feminist critics (Stanley 1992:243), so foundationalism and realism (as well as a new humanism, and redefined "consciousness") emerge as working categories in the present venture, facilitating the attempt to deal with the shifting claims, status and authority of the black autobiographical self. The "i" claims from the margins the status encoded in "I" - a status that a poststructuralist theorisation both recognises and resists: having rejected hegemony's "I" (and therefore "not-I", or the absolute "other") it simultaneously discerns/constructs the postcolonial "I/i".

In short, a "new humanist" position is discernible in the theorisation of that important field of counterhegemonic writing, women's autobiography. The life and times of the writer are privileged, for, as Stanley argues, "we have to accept that material reality does exist, that it impinges upon us all the time, that texts are not the only thing" (1992:246). Nicole Ward Jouve stresses "the need to speak as a subject", arguing that "[y]ou must have a self before you can afford to deconstruct it" (1991:7). What Jouve claims here for the "self" of the woman critic has equal application to the "self" of black autobiography which proclaims "I AM". There is common ground between Jouve's scepticism towards conventional deconstruction and Spivak's "affirmative deconstruction". By "aligning" herself with "the pattern" of subaltern writing, the critic emphasises the "sovereignty" of "rebel consciousness". In the full knowledge that "such an emphasis is theoretically non-viable" the critic then "breaks his theory in a scrupulously delineated 'political interest'" (Spivak 1987:207).

Such criticism implicitly denies the validity of a universalist poststructuralist position. Similarly, the Western Humanist thesis is challenged and displaced by autobiographical writing that refracts and simultaneously enables the formulation of a redefined humanism[27] that empowers the subject in a local context. Here, in the manner of Fanon, the subject does not "speak of timeless truths" (1986:9), narrating instead a self and a (hi)story whose specificities may be said to constitute a form of "truth". It may thus be claimed that the local critical narrative traces the fall of Humanism and the rise of a "new humanism", inscribing a discourse whose characteristic feature is, even more explicitly, one of crisis. Spivak's definition is germane: "What I mean by crisis is the moment at which you feel that your presuppositions of an enterprise are disproved by the enterprise itself" (1990:139). The postcolonial critic proceeds in the knowledge that, while the anti-Humanist aspects of poststructuralism are inadequate to the postcolonial task, and the Humanist enterprise contradicts its aims, defiant voices define a new, hybrid humanism.

Re-membering Autobiographical Criticism

The negotiation of a criticism whose key terms are hybridity and a new humanism requires a mapping of the appropriation in local critical discourse of certain autobiographical theories (a procedure that represents a form of autocritique). Criticism, particularly that of whites, has drawn on what Stanley refers to as the "male theorists of the autobiographical canon", Roy Pascal, Philip Lejeune, Georges Gusdorf and James Olney (1992:89).[28] Olney has been particularly influential. His study, Tell Me Africa (1973), provided a reference for local critics of the 1980s, while his more recent work[29] continues to inform criticism. Olney's 1973 analysis of African autobiography concentrates

on its anthropological value, in keeping with much criticism of African literature at the time. It perceives the function of autobiography as follows: "to preserve a disappearing world"; to "describe the African milieu for outside readers"; and to depict a "representative case of a peculiarly African experience" (1973:27).

The unproblematic language of mimesis and the positivist world-view detectable here are fully present in the full-length study that appeared in 1980: Perspectives on South African Fiction. The "perspectives" of the title do not take into account the distorting effects of such factors as gender, race and class on critical perspective.[30] Olney's anthropological[31] assumptions are endorsed: "non-Africans" may discover, in autobiography "the truth about black Africa" (Christie *et al* 1980:122). In the process, however, the aesthetic is implicitly privileged over the anthropological for critics "brought up in the British tradition" and consequently autobiography is relegated to the category of non-literary "background studies" (1980:122).[32] It is significant, however, that, at the time of publication of Perspectives on South African Fiction, what Christie *et al* regarded as "background studies" - history and sociology, presumably - were increasingly being foregrounded in the criticism of Tim Couzens, Isabel Hofmeyr and Kelwyn Sole.

The critical discourse of (the early) Olney and Christie *et al* constructs the black autobiographer as the colonial "other"; this criticism assumes the existence of a unique and separate African personality, and therefore ontology and epistemology. It thus proposes the notion of "the especial Africanness of the writer" (Olney 1973:52). Such discourse reifies racial difference, which is said to be located "in our bones, in our blood, in our very moral being" (1973:53). A putative African world-view - communal, holistic -

is, accordingly, forever separate(d) from that of the "Westerner" with his "isolated, unique, and individual experience" (1973:76).

This view conflicts with the self that is constructed in many black South African autobiographies, as I hope to demonstrate in the chapters that follow. Suffice to say, at this point, that Olney's "especial Africanness" is displaced, for example in Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue. Here, the writing reflects and refracts the racial polarisation of the political discourse of the day, for example in a phrase such as "I never forget I am black" (DSA 219), where "black" does not necessarily signify a racial essence, but is rather a colonial/apartheid category signifying oppression. The writing inscribes a deliberate disclaiming of "Africanness". It does this in an overt claim such as "(my) tribal umbilical cord has long, oh so long, been severed" (DSA 203), as well as by registering Western cultural markers from Chekov (DSA 216) to Vivaldi (DSA 220).[33]

Moreover, it at times asserts and demonstrates the "downright individualism" (DSA 220) and isolation claimed by Olney to be the special characteristic of autobiography produced by "the Westerner" (1973:76). These "non-African" voices are clearly detectable amid a range of contradictory voices in a polyphonic text that nevertheless asserts values associated with an African communalism, for example, where the "group" is privileged over the "individual" in the discussion of the role of Church in the context of apartheid South Africa (DSA 221). The important point for the purpose of the present argument, however, is that categorical statements that set up an essential "Africanness" or reify "blackness" are unhelpful: they disregard issues such as class and gender as well as the hybrid nature of postcolonial culture. Indeed, as I hope to demonstrate, black

autobiographical writing collapses oppositions such as "African/Western", as well as "self/other".

The binarism that informs the criticism of Olney and Christie *et al* is evident also in Watts's full-length study, Black Writers from South Africa: Towards a Discourse of Liberation (1989). Distinctions are made between African/European, Africa/the West (Preface, p.x) as if the terms are essentially dichotomous. These categories are undifferentiated, homogeneous, and generally ahistorical in Watts's study. This approach leads to claims such as the following: "the township youth see themselves as fighting for the world, for the global restoration of political integrity, not just for South Africa" (Preface, p.x). In the same way, entities such as the "literary past" and "African cultural values" (Watts 1989:1) are posited as somehow outside of language. Watts's critical procedure replicates many of the assumptions detected in earlier, "colonial" criticism that is predicated on mimesis, the autonomy of the author, the transparency of language, and a Humanist conception of identity:[34]

> By examining what has happened to them, [South African writers] offer the readers a reflection of their own fate; by seeking out their own identity, they help the readers to find theirs.
>
> (Watts 1989:30-31)

Her analytical schema, which weds Marx to Sartre, is inadequate in that "it obscures certain anomalies and complexities in the literature" (Attwell 1991:146). While her discourse registers an acquaintance with the language of poststructuralism,[35] Watts's "new approach" ends up being little more than an unproblematic re-inscription of autobiography as a "self-making process" (Watts 1989:113) rather than one in which the self is constructed in and by discourse.

Watts's discourse is, however, interesting for its complex inscription of ideologies. Writing is a wondrous weapon-cum-wand in a discourse that inscribes the culture-as-a-weapon-of-the-struggle rhetoric of the period, but always within a Humanist framework. She pleads on behalf of the autobiographers for "reassurance that they in fact *have* an identity" (1989:115), that they "bear witness" (1989:125) to a truth out there, that the author reflects reality. Because Watts's Humanism is not *strategically* located within an "anti-Humanist critique" (Spivak 1987:207), its neo-colonialist assumptions perform acts of epistemic violence against the autobiographical "I". In Spivak's terms, the (black) other must "cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the Imperialist's self-consolidating other" (1987:209). Watts's critique thus enacts the paradox Spivak detects in certain anti-imperialist writing. By espousing Manganyi's "radical positivism" (Watts 1989:110), Watts escapes having to deal more fully with the implications for autobiographical criticism of the Western theoretical positions she glances at, for example regarding consciousness and language. Watts supports the positivist position by endorsing certain assumptions evident in Roy Pascal's 1960 study, Design and Truth in Autobiography, based on the model of the autonomous, self-defining "I": "Autobiographers ... establish the power of man ... as a realisation of an inner self...." (Pascal 1960:194).

Watts's critique does not, finally, go far enough. She refers fleetingly to Pascal's insight that "there are limits to the "truth" of an autobiography" (quoted in Watts 1989:113), but does not explore Pascal's analysis of the problematic relationship between fact and fiction in autobiography - what Judith Coullie was to term, some two years later, "the constructedness of the verbal form" (1991:1). Watts's critique assumes that

autobiographical writing is the transparent revelation of "the truth of a person's nature" (1989:113). It claims, moreover, an unproblematic metonymic status for the "I", an entity that "stands for all the people for whom the authors are the voice - that is, their own partitioned racial group" (1989:116). Watts's quest for a "discourse of liberation" is, finally, limited by its emphasis on race. It does not explore the effects of collusion, or of the crossings and convergences that occur despite partitions.

Current trends in autobiographical criticism suggest the emergence in the 1990s of an authentic "discourse of liberation". Positivism and poststructuralism collide and simultaneously collude as confident assertion encounters radical doubt in the contradictory terrain of contestation that is black autobiographical writing. At the 1990 AUETSA Conference held at the University of Stellenbosch, a number of papers dealt with the topic "South African Autobiographical Writing and its Relation to Fiction". Six of these related specifically to black writing: three by white critics Judith Coullie, Stephen Gray and Jenny Williams, and three by black critics Aubrey Mokadi, Mbulelo Mzamane and Peter Thuynsma. Significantly, each of the white critics foregrounds, to a greater or lesser extent, challenges posed by poststructuralist/Marxist assumptions to the theory of autobiography in the local context. The most striking example of the former is Coullie's "'Not Quite Fiction': The Challenges of Deconstruction and Poststructuralism to the Theory of Autobiography". Coullie marshalls the poststructuralism of Robert Elbaz and the later Olney who, as editor of two collections of autobiographical criticism in 1980 and 1988, emphasises the constructedness of autobiographical writing, and the subversion by the writing itself - the intersection of discourses - of its claims to truth.

The question of textual reception is a further concern. In a politically charged context such as our own, the white critic must take full cognisance of an important question that Coullie raises: "And what of real readers, the actual consumers of such texts?" It is, clearly, not enough merely to "remark in passing that most people who read autobiographies read them as a species of personal history" (Coullie 1991:19). Coullie's "most people" is echoed by Stanley's "common reader" (1992:96): in her analysis of anti-referential feminist theory and her project of "reinscribing 'bio' in autography" (1992:89-123), Stanley posits the "common reader" as one who is unlikely to be preoccupied with "problematics regarding the self and its constitution" (1992:95). In the present context, the critic and the common reader cannot be set up as separate and exclusive categories; local theorising must be informed by the why and wherefore of the reading of "most people" if it is to avoid irrelevance and elitism at best and hegemonic imperialism at worst.

Voices such as those of Christie, Watts and Coullie need to be read in dialogue with black theorists. While the latter is not a homogeneous group, certain commonalities are evident in their work. From papers presented at the same 1990 Conference, it is clear that problems concerning the relationship between language, the "I" and reality are generally subordinated to the enabling task of language as regards the subject's claim to identity, and the documentation of lives, communities and cultures. Such readings privilege *bios* over *graphos* and therefore reflect aspects of readings associated with the putative category "most people", or the "common reader". The reasons for this are no doubt complex. One of these may be the deliberate adoption of an interventionist strategy through the retention of politically useful elements of Humanist discourse. On

the other hand, it may be argued that the criticism of blacks constitutes a strategic reinscription of the Humanism, mimesis and realism that form part of the colonial inheritance, and therefore go some way towards establishing Fanon's "new humanism". These discourses are discernible, for example, in the valorisation of the author, the treatment of writing as a transparent medium that reflects or represents reality as well as "personality" (Mzamane 1990b:2), and the implication that "artistic unity" is the implicit product of the moral integrity of the "I" (1990b:13). Here, writing itself appears to be taken at face value: neither the identity nor integrity *per se* of the author is questioned, and language is perceived as a tool that the writer uses to convey the truth of his/her life.

It is probable that the experience of being-black-in-the-world, particularly in the South African context, acts as a determinant on the theorising of certain critics - an aspect of the tyranny of place. The experience of oppression, while never homogeneous, produces a set of attitudes regarding the relationship between writing and the world that may result in an apparent similarity between the readings of black critics and the alleged readings of "most people" outside the by no means impervious walls of the academy; these readings are informed by an expedient, "common-sense" set of humanist assumptions. Since the "meaning" of writing (the text) is, in a significant sense, the product of reading, the critic should seriously consider the extent to which humanist assumptions regarding identity and language are necessary prerequisites if writing is to perform an effective counterhegemonic function.

It is useful at this point to turn once again to the strategic interventionism of Spivak as she theorises the relationship between the postcolonial critic and the writing of the subaltern. In an enactment of the very caution she herself advocates regarding "epistemic violence", Spivak marshalls Derrida in support of her argument concerning the relationship between language and empowerment in the writing of the subaltern:

> "Logocentrism is not a pathology," it is the thing that enables us - except, if because it enables us, we say that it is correct, it would be a mistake. That is all [Derrida] is saying. So that, in fact, all that he looks at is *the way in which the subject centers itself.* He is not decentering the subject. The subject is - the subject must identify itself with its self-perceived intention. The fact that it must do so is not a description of what it is. That is the difference between decentered and centered. There is no way that a subject can be anything but centered. *Logocentrism, phallocentrism, gynocentrism - all of these things enable....*
>
> (Spivak 1990:146, my emphases)

In short, if there is not a subject, there can be no agency, and therefore no possibility of autobiography achieving the "identity and liberation" specified for it by Thuynsma (1990:2). By centring the self and privileging meaning, Thuynsma's criticism is as much a part of the process of "enabling" as the autobiographies it mobilises. It boldly foregrounds a fundamental aspect of the larger text within and by which black autobiography is produced:

> Such writings grew quite logically out of the essence of the African ontology whose fundamental premise is that the universe is *HUMAN-centred*, rather that *thought-centred.*
>
> (Thuynsma 1990:3)

While Thuynsma appropriates the language of literary Humanism, a distinction is nevertheless drawn between the "self" usually associated with the hegemonic "I" of, for example, autobiography of the male canon, and the "I/i" or "me-you-us" referred to above. Here, the self is transformed beyond the personal into a "metaphor which straddles a communal obligation, and the raw edge of a political psyche" (Thuynsma 1990:2). Similar

assumptions to those expressed here are embedded in the criticism of Aubrey Mokadi and Mbulelo Mzamane.

However, while the strategic necessity and value of logocentricity in such discourse is acknowledged, there are certain problems. Among these is the uncritical acceptance of Olney's construct, "the African mind", which Thuynsma uses to support his notion of "own experiences" that are "representative of their people/community" (Thuynsma 1990:5). The notion of "own experiences" bears an unmistakable trace of apartheid, setting up a racial polarity and homogenising notions of "people" and "community". Moreover, the experience of blackness - what Thuynsma refers to as "the African ontology" - should not be conflated with moral or critical authority.

It is instructive to turn briefly to the criticism of Mokadi, whose struggling, "struggle" aesthetic is produced in a crucible of Western and African influences at a time when "cultural relevance and value" are elevated norms (Mokadi 1990:1). Mokadi's aesthetic incorporates a variety of voices from Gerald Moore to "people's poet" Mzwakhe Mbuli. Amid references that resound with two sets of voices, namely, black writers and critics, and certain white critics such as the early Olney, Christie *et al*, and Ursula Barnett, there is, however, a notable absence: poststructuralist criticism.

In tracing the relationship between criticism and hegemony, it is important to note that voices such as Mokadi's tend to fade from public discourse. In a 1991 volume of Current Writing that focuses on South African autobiographical writing, the sole black voice is an "imported" one, that of Jamaican scholar Gitahi Gititi. For a variety of historic reasons,

literary journals give preference to poststructuralist readings, though a "[m]ore subtle analysis of [poststructuralist] reading practices" is advocated (Jacobs 1991:iv). One way of achieving the latter would be the development of an editorial strategy that ensures greater inclusivity among the critics a journal gives voice to. This might go some way towards dismantling hegemonic critical influences and creating, instead, a confluence of critical voices.

If critics were to examine how "autobiographical writing is actually being read in South Africa" (Daymond 1991:31), how these texts are "actually read by their primary readers, black women" (1991:32) and black men (Coullie's "most people" and Stanley's "common reader"), the polarity of "thought-centredness" and "human-centredness" might collapse and the relationship between *graphos* and *bios* be tackled anew. Within the context of a "new humanist" discourse autobiography might indeed have a central role to play in national reconstruction, as a vital source of knowing not only "what happened" (Voss 1992:8), but also how to reconceptualise ourselves.

In the chapters that follow, I hope to demonstrate the process of forgetting and re-membering in Peter Abrahams's Tell Freedom, Es'kia Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue as well as Noni Jabavu's Drawn in Colour and The Ochre People, autobiographies written during the period in which "identity" was officially manufactured by the apartheid state. These autobiographies produce hybrid identities, sites of convergences and contaminations, which, I hope to show, function as counterhegemonic cultural and national tropes.

Notes

1. A distinction is drawn between the former, an ideological system with connotations of authority and universalism, and the latter, a perspective which emphasises particularity in its recognition of human struggles.

2. See Françoise Lionnet, Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Formulated by Lionnet, a native of the "so-called Third World" island of Mauritius (p.5), this "non-coercive" practice seems to be an apposite strategy. The conditions on Mauritius coincide with those in South Africa to produce, on the one hand, a critical stance "where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages" (p.6); on the other, it produces the notion of "a true site of *métissage* and creolization" (p.6), and therefore of the heterogeneous identities of postcolonial subjects (p.8).

3. For a full discussion, see Homi K Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation", in Nation and Narration, ed. and introd. Homi K Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp.291-322.

4. It is beyond the scope of the present venture to examine orature, even though black writing is embedded in the oral tradition of Southern Africa.

5. While Serote's formulation functions as rhetoric, it does point to the relationship between the regaining of an identity and political action.

6. This notion of a return to an Africa uncontaminated by colonialism, a "still-pure Africa", goes back to anthropologist Leo Frobenius, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor, and is the foundation of Negritude. Christopher Miller points out the contradictions in the idea of a "return" in Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), esp. pp.16-19.

7. See Ein Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften (Leipzig, 1883).

8. Liz Stanley defines facticity as the "re-creation" of the past in autobiography. Because the past is "made", or mediated, it cannot be regarded as "fact". See The Auto/biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p.92.

9. The term originates with Philippe Lejeune in "The Autobiographical Contract", in French Literary Theory Today: A Reader, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp.192-222. The autobiographical contract is the "affirmation in the text of ['identity' between the names of the author, narrator, and protagonist], referring in the last resort to the *name* of the author on the cover" (p.202), a "*real person* ... whose existence is legally verifiable, a matter of record" (p.200).

10. The phrase is the title of Mongane Wally Serote's narrative poem, A Tough Tale (London: Kliptown, 1987).

11. See Helen Tiffin's discussion of neo-universalism and marginal texts in "Post-Colonialism, Post-Modernism and the Rehabilitation of Post-Colonial History", Journal of Commonwealth Literature, xxiii(1): 169-181, esp. pp.170-171.

12. Deconstruction exposes the operations in writing of the mediating system of language, of the way in which thought is affected or infected by linguistic signs that are themselves socially produced. The implications for autobiography are manifold. The language that the author uses does not simply reflect, express or represent the "I" of the narrative. Instead, the textual "I" is structured in and by language; it is neither autonomous nor self-defining but rather produced. In this sense, the biography of the author is a "text". Moreover, because deconstruction contests the foundationalism of Western thought-systems upon whose first principles hierarchies of meaning are constructed, the "self" does not enjoy privileged status over the "other". Instead, in keeping with the idea that oppositions invert or collapse into themselves, there is no necessary boundary between the "self" and "non-self" produced in discourse. Clearly, the possibility of discursive intervention (by the narrative of the "other" who in saying "I" assumes an identity, thereby claiming a "self") in the process of social transformation is minimised. In this sense, there is nothing outside of the text. The "I" who claims in writing, "I am", is, paradoxically, negated in the very process of writing, since this "I" is now a mere textual construct. The absolute presence has been translated into an absence. See Gayatri Spivak, "Interview with Radical Philosophy", in The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.133-137, for a discussion on the limitations of deconstruction. Spivak argues that deconstruction "actually operates ... [by fixing] on small things: margins, moments, etc. *But something unifying is needed* ...." (p.136, my emphasis).

13. In White Mythologies: Writing History and the West (London: Routledge, 1990), Robert Young problematises categories such as "self"/"other", "colonizer/colonized", arguing that "there is never a simple distinction between colonizer and colonized" (p.151).

14. See Jean-Philippe Wade, "Truth and Power: The Status of 'History' in Marxist Literary and Historiographical Studies", unpublished conference paper, AUETSA, University of Stellenbosch, 1990; Leon de Kock, "'History','Literature', and 'English': Reading the Lovedale Missionary Record within South Africa's Colonial History", The English Academy Review 9: 1-21.

15. See Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History", in Comparative Criticism, ed. E S Schaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.3-20; also Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power", in Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (Brighton; Harvester Press, 1980), pp.109-133.

16. See Bloke Modisane, Blame Me on History (Craighall: Ad. Donker, 1986), particularly pp.217-218, where Modisane argues that the "logic of history" is responsible for producing "our problems, and ourselves" as South Africans.

17. Sankie Mthembi-Nkondo (currently Minister of Housing) adopted this pseudonym while in exile.

18. Among such presuppositions would be the universal desirability of feminism, or nationalism; both are derived from the very (Western) culture that postcolonialism resists.

19. The phrase is from Spivak's "The Rani of Sirmur", in Europe and its Others, ed. Barker *et al*, 1, though, as Robert Young points out in White Mythologies, it is not "just a matter for occasional reflection", nor does it presuppose the possibility of producing an oppositional criticism (p.169).

20. In "The Narrow Ground: Critical Intellectual Work on South Africa Under Apartheid", Critical Arts 5(4): 30-48, Rupert Taylor argues that the "lack of critical black intellectual work is primarily related to the fact that blacks in South Africa, due to apartheid, lack adequate access to higher education and institutional bases from which critical work can be developed" (p.31).

21. Opinions to this effect were expressed at the "First Conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges Across Activism and the Academy" in Nigeria, 1993 (see my Chapter One, Note 2). It remains to be seen, however, whether black women critics (literate and middle-class) will, in the future, break significant new ground.

22. In "Nation, Race and Ethnicity: Beyond the Legacy of Victims", Current Writing 4(1): 15-20 (which appears in the same edition of the journal that includes Voss's article), Zoë Wicomb investigates the colonial origins of a term such as "the new South Africa", the relationship between naming and the maintenance of ties with the colonial past, as well as the accompanying danger of "repetition and mimicry" (p.15).

23. See Mphahlele, "The Tyranny of Place and Aesthetics: The South African Case", in Race and Literature/Ras en Literatuur, ed. Charles Malan (Pinetown: Owen Burgess, 1987), pp.48-59, where he states, "if you survive together with your people the individual voice and the public voice are one and the same thing in your writing" (p.58).

24. See, for example, Annamaria Carusi, "The Postcolonial Other as a Problem for Political Action", Journal of Literary Studies 7(3/4): 228-238, where she analyses the political consequences of Spivak's "antihumanism and anti-essentialism" (p.230) that constructs the "colonized subaltern *subject* [as] irretrievably heterogeneous" (quoted in Carusi, p.234).

25. The term "cognitive Apartheid" is coined by Marlene van Niekerk in "Impaired Vision", a review of Judy Gardner's Impaired Vision: Portraits of Black Women in the Afrikaans Novel 1948-1988, Current Writing 4(1): 124-127. Van Niekerk raises the problem of the relationship between "first-hand experience" and "valid criticism", advocating a "hermeneutic conversation" as a means for understanding the "other" (p.127).

26. This recalls the notion of the "organic intellectual" discussed in my Chapter One, above.

27. The "humanism" that is refracted is a version of the African Humanism that emerged from the Negritude philosophy of Senghor via the writings of, for example, Es'kia Mphahlele. It emerges also as "*ubuntu*", whose basis is to be found in traditional cultural

expressions such as "*Motho ke motho ka batho babang*" (a person is a person because of other people).

28. See, for example, Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography (Cambridge: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960); also Phillipe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Contract", in French Literary Theory Today, ed. Todorov. In The Auto/biographical I, Liz Stanley refers to such critics as "guardians of the male autobiographical canon", thus evoking the dissatisfactions of feminist criticism, including the "masculinisms" of certain "guardians", among whom Olney is numbered (p.95). The important point is that women theorists experience misgivings about the privileging of a Humanist unitary, individual, private self that is to the detriment of women's - and, I suggest, black - autobiography.

29. See "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography", in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.236-267.

30. See Cecily Lockett, "Searching for Words: Towards a Gynocritical Model for the Study of South African Women's Poetry", Journal of Literary Studies 7(2): 161-163. Citing Ellen Messer-Davidow, Lockett describes the critic as a "diverse knower" whose "multiple stances" result from such factors as sex, class, race affiliations, affectional preference, personal history, technical approaches and self-reflexivity (p.161).

31. It is interesting that recent criticism calls for a return to the anthropological, though with a new historicist slant that foregrounds the effects of the subject's intervention in attempts to know "the other". Christopher L Miller argues in Theories of Africans that "a fair Western reading of African literatures demands engagement with, and even dependence on, anthropology" (p.4).

32. The work of critics from non-British traditions (Lejeune, Benveniste, and Gusdorf) has been influential in shifting autobiography from the borderlands of literary study to a more central position.

33. Compare Bloke Modisane in Blame Me on History: "I want to be accepted into white society. I want to listen to Rachmaninov, to Beethoven, Bartok and Stravinski [*sic*] ... I want to look at the paintings and feel my soul touched by Lautrec, Klee and Miro" (p.218).

34. Similar assumptions are to be found in Piniel Viriri Shava's A People's Voice (London: Zed, 1989), which claims that autobiographies function mimetically to "reflect the pain of legislated segregation" (p.29); or, following expressive theories, they function as vehicles of "protest" (p.30), "lament" (p.31), or catharsis (p.35). In this study, the voice that Shava decries is that of "a people". Monologic, undeconstructed, it is a deceptive one, however.

35. For example: "There can be no analysis of the distribution and manipulation of power through culture before the participators in the culture have deconstructed its naturalising processes and reconstructed their alienated identities upon which control and manipulation had originally depended." Jane Watts, Black Writers from South Africa (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.107.

Chapter Three

THE HYBRID "I" OF PETER ABRAHAMS'S *TELL FREEDOM*

> It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.
> Frantz Fanon

> I am a child of the plural societies.
> Peter Abrahams

Introduction

This chapter examines the first black autobiography to be published in English in South Africa:[1] Peter Abrahams's Tell Freedom (1954). Abrahams's autobiography demonstrates the evolution of a consciousness that Abrahams had defined the year before in Return to Goli, a consciousness freed of the binarist racial paradigm, where "no Negro would be either proud or ashamed of being a Negro" (1953:26). The latter statement echoes Frantz Fanon's dictum in his 1952 study of racial identity, Black Skin, White Masks, "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man" (1986:231). It is to be argued that, like Fanon, Abrahams disturbs the "familiar alignment of colonial subjects - Black/White, Self/Other", and disperses "the traditional grounds of racial identity ... found to rest in the narcissistic myths of Negritude or White cultural supremacy" (Bhabha 1986:ix).

The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate the counterhegemonic strategies and status of Abrahams's autobiography; its focus is the still peripheral "other", the "I" that tries to speak of freedom from the margins of the hegemonic discourse of apartheid. The

conceptual point of departure of this critique is the notion of hybridity, the "*problematic* of colonial representation ... [whereby] other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1994:114). Hybridity is the condition of postcoloniality, with its politics of the frontier, the border, the in-between space where the meeting - and collapse - of the "Colonialist Self" and "Colonized Other" occurs (Bhabha 1986:xvi); in this space, each is transformed and transforming. Related aspects of this critique are, first, the interpellation of the subject of the discourse (in Bhabha's formulation, "the White man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body" (1986:xvi)) and, second, the strategies of resistance adopted by the writing self or subject (Peter Abrahams), who examines in his autobiography what Bhabha terms "the liminal problem of colonial identity" (1986:xvi).

Typical of similar postcolonial texts, Abrahams's autobiography is a counternarrative - though not a totalised one; here, the colonial subject, the "I", is at once the same, and different from, the coloniser: "not quite/not white" (Bhabha 1994:92). In Abrahams's case, this means that the identity of the protagonist, as a product of a colonial context, is and is not its victim. This is evident from his writing, for as he tells freedom, a slippage occurs in the discourse: Abrahams does not fall victim to hegemonic logic by constructing a fixed identity that falls neatly into the official race-category, "Coloured". Instead, he creates a fluctuating, liminal identity that eludes categorisation, and produces a multivocal discourse and a subject that is constituted by "a repertoire of conflictual positions" (Bhabha 1994:77).

The present critique appropriates notions such as hybridity and mimicry in order to

theorise postcolonial writing; it does so at a moment when a key political term such as reconstruction is underpinned by a discourse of "non-racialism". Replacing the binarisms of the past in its quest to build an inclusive South African nationhood,[2] this discourse is predicated on the displacement of the ideology of racial difference. This amounts to a "displacement of the coloniser's position" (Bhabha quoted in Attwell 1993:103), which in turn contributes to the process of empowerment of the indigene, or the "other".

By way of introduction, I shall briefly examine the construction and "re-membering" of identity in the autobiographical poem of another coloured[3] writer, Arthur Nortje. The poem, "Dogsbody Half-breed", provides a useful point of entry into Peter Abrahams's autobiography.

Dogsbody Half-breed

I

The magnet of exotica that draws
sailors from their holds, blood from the sword,
is that which elicits a gravid sigh
(as witness Captain Cook or sullen Bligh),
is that which brought blond settlers like a hex
into the heartland, oxdrawn, ammunitioned.
Over the rocks, through drought, the laager treks
by fire out of stone, by daycloud holy,
unto a covenant against the Zulu.

Once this was Tormentoso, Cape of Storms,
midway station for the scurvied crews,
bordello for the sea-tossed Dutchman, cum
point d'appui for the growers of wine
beyond whose vineyards stretched the purlieus
of Governor van der Stel in time
before there was an overland
expansion into farm and mine.
Maternal muscle of my mixed-blood life
with child were you heavy, with discontent rife.

II

Some are tanned by the sun and some
sweatsatined in a slum concealment:
white beach or pismire ghetto, through factotum
eyes I am aware of, having spent
at the annealing tunnel, the conveyor belt,
the last ounce of energy for the master of my salt.

Yet glittering with tears I see you pass
in armoured cars, divided from yourself
by golden fortune, natural largesse,
forgetting quite in the siren or the bell
pealing your sanctity, wailing a daily violence,
your bastardies, abortions, sins of silence,
those marooned, dragooned, those massacred or shackled
by your few chosen from the many called.

III

Bitter though the taste be, it is life somehow.
Despite the dark night of long ago, in spring now
looking from Lion's Head or Devil's Peak,
your delicate nooks and moments noble-gentle
bud-open both to blond and black
and I hybrid, after Mendel,
growing between the wire and the wall,
being dogsbody, being me, buffer you still.

The poem reveals typical features of postcolonial writing, in particular the ambivalence of the "I" and its parodic imitation - the "mimicry" identified by Bhabha - of the crudely racist authority it resists. The self of the coloured writer is constructed within the discursive space defined by apartheid, which resonates with prior discriminatory practices whose early echoes are, as the word "dogsbody" suggests, to be found during the era of European exploration.[4] "Half-breed" is a pejorative that predates apartheid and carries with it all the opprobrium of cultures that privileged "blood", the purity of the clan, group and nation. The term carries within it, also, the ideology of social Darwinism, and the taboo of miscegenation that permeated colonial cultures.[5]

Nortje proclaims his identity in terms of his mixed-race origins, of *métissage*: "I hybrid". A certain slippage is, however, evident in the process of constructing an "I/i" (see Chapter Two above) who is at once "half-breed" and "hybrid", "dogsbody" yet "sweat-satined". By means of sleight, transposing the "t" and "a" (in "satined"), Nortje simultaneously deconstructs and reconstructs identity; he re-envisions the received notion of a sweat-stained worker as silken-skinned, noble, in what amounts to an act of verbal restoration. Officially classified "Coloured", and named "skollie", "Capie" and a variety of other pejoratives, the coloured writer (re)names himself. In doing so, Nortje manifests the ambivalence of the colonial other, as he confronts and (re)constructs an ambiguous identity. Central to this process is the desire to remember his severed other - "divided from [him]self" - yet his writing reinforces this sense of dismemberment between his own identity, "I", and a "you" whose identity is separate. The longing is accompanied by disgust and denial, however, since the "you" participates in the violation of those who have been declared its others, and, is, consequently, associated with the violence of state power.

The poem demonstrates the psychological as well as political defences set up by colonialism/apartheid. First, it registers the effects on ordinary people of the policy of racial separation and, second, it encodes the hierarchy of racial difference that underpins a system of inequality and oppression. It is in the actual and discursive space of apartheid hegemony that the writer must (re)construct the self. This is a "hybrid" I, what Françoise Lionnet defines as the "plural" self that "thrives on ambiguity and multiplicity ... not on polarized and polarizing notions of identity, culture, race or gender" (1989:16). The latter were, of course, the ideological basis of colonial/apartheid ideology.

While Abrahams's autobiography depicts the period 1919-1938, it was written during the 1950s, a period when the state embarked on a massive campaign to popularise precisely what Lionnet describes as "polarized and polarizing notions of identity, culture, [and] race" (1989:16). Nortje's poem demonstrates the metaphoric force of words such as "buffer", "wire" and "wall". The overall impact is one of separated, opposing and irreconcilable forces; coloured people function as a protective zone between those who erect "wire" (whites?) and those figured as immovable and solid, a "wall" (blacks?). In his study of South African coloured politics, Gavin Lewis focuses on the "tensions and ambiguities surrounding the issue of coloured identity" (1987:4) as well as the "complex interplay of both collaboration and resistance, cooptation and exclusion" (1987:5).[6] While the latter may also - though probably to a lesser extent - be true in the case of black identity and politics, questions relating to ambivalence, liminality, or "in-betweenness" are particularly powerful in coloured writing, and therefore need to be foregrounded.

Locating the Tale of Freedom

It is the task of the present endeavour to evaluate the role that autobiography, the narrative of the self, may play in the construction of a new national narrative, one that genuinely counters that of the hegemony. The narration of an individual life participates in, parallels and shapes the narrative of a nation. Both forms of narrative are concerned with "remembering", and their provenance is what Benedict Anderson describes as "profound changes in consciousness" (1983:204). The process of such re-membering in Tell Freedom will be traced primarily to establish whether a re-envisioned self (or selves), a hybrid "I/i", is constructed that counters the institutionalised racism of the time. In the process, the profundity of the change in consciousness as refracted in the *graphos*

will be examined, as will the "amnesias" produced by such a change (Anderson 1983:204).

The periodisation[7] of Tell Freedom as writing of the 1950s should not function to isolate this text from other South African writing in English. It forms part of a larger social text that includes other literary forms and incorporates orature, or the textualisation of oral forms. In short, Tell Freedom demonstrates the synchronicity of socio-political as well as literary events during the period that has come to be known as the Fifties, a period marked by the clash and convergence of emergent ideologies, each seeking to define South African identity. As Frederic Jameson points out, however, there is no necessary "homogeneity or identity within a given period", and it is therefore "against a certain conception of what is historically dominant or hegemonic that the full value of the exceptional" can be assessed (quoted in Shear 1989:39). During the period 1919-1954 - the period relevant to Abrahams's autobiography - the historically hegemonic was the racism of colonialism/apartheid, and the "exceptional" was a broad humanism that developed into the Charterist ideology of non-racialism.

Black South African autobiography emerged as a direct consequence of the socio-historical events of the 1950s. The period is marked, on the one hand, by the consolidation of Afrikaner nationalism and the entrenchment of statutory apartheid. On the other hand, it is characterised by what Tom Lodge calls the "second phase" of black resistance in South Africa,

> the phase of mass political campaigning, [which] was to develop as the result of the incorporation by political organisations of the new social forces released in the previous decade. The new nationalist movement contained within it several different tensions, between ethno-nationalists and social radicals, between both

> these on the one hand and the older generation of civil rights campaigners on the other, and, finally, between the movement's working-class base and its largely petty-bourgeois leadership.
>
> (Lodge 1983:viii)

Autobiography registers the attempt to redefine and reclaim a foreclosed identity and history. Apartheid codified the segregationist policies of previous years that were founded on the ideas of "scientific racism", social Darwinism and eugenics (Marks & Trapido 1987:8). A fundamental aspect of these ideas was an essentialist notion of "African culture" that developed during the 1920s and was in turn underpinned by notions such as the "Native mentality" (1987:9). The latter found official expression in utterances such as that of J B M Hertzog:

> As against the European the native stands as an eight-year-old against a man of mature experience .... *Differences* exist in ethnic *nature*, ethnic custom, ethnic development and civilization ....
>
> (quoted in Marks & Trapido 1987:9, my emphases)

Social Darwinism was a model that produced the "native" as underdeveloped and inferior, and it culminated, as Keith Shear points out, in the "segregationist thinking of the Hertzog government [that attempted] to elaborate a more consistent 'native policy'", one that emphasised "control", particularly in the context of the emergence of black political organisations (Shear 1989:58).

These ideas culminated in the codification of racism after 1948: the promulgation of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949), was followed, *inter alia*, by the Group Areas Act and Population Registration Act (1950). Separate racial categories were constructed, ghettos to which "non-whites", or "non-Europeans", were consigned: Black, Coloured, Indian (later, ethnic identities were manufactured for blacks consigned to "homelands").

The arbitrariness of these categories erased a three-centuries old interracial culture that had emerged in South Africa. Apartheid was an elaborate system of containment produced by white fears that expressed themselves in terms such as *swart gevaar* (black peril) and *oorstrooming* (flooding), particularly during the years preceding the 1948 election (Marks & Trapido 1987:20).

As suggested above, the self that narrates Tell Freedom is constituted by a "repertoire of conflictual positions" (Bhabha 1994:77) that are in turn produced by the clashing ideologies of the period. In the context of monolithic apartheid, the counterhegemonic impact of the notion of a "repertoire" is reinforced by the dominance of "non-racialism" among Abrahams's "positions". The assimilationism propagated by the mission schools was an important social force at the time, as was the non-racial class-analysis propagated in intellectual circles and trade unions. A brief glance at the prevailing ideas of the period is instructive, since these comprise aspects of the "repertoire" that constitutes Abrahams's fluid subjectivity.

The overall context was that of the hegemony of Afrikaner nationalism,[8] founded upon notions of racial supremacy. Running counter to this discourse was that of African nationalism,[9] a discourse that had its origins in colonial history.[10] By the 1950s this discourse had come to express itself in two ways. Its dominant form was that articulated as a "democratic, non-racialist, anti-colonial, anti-imperialist nationalism" (Lodge 1983:37) whose principles were codified in the Freedom Charter of 1955. In 1964 Nelson Mandela explicitly defined African Nationalism in terms of the racially inclusive principles of the Freedom Charter (1986:173). These principles developed out of the Constitution of the

South African Native National Congress of 1919 (renamed the African National Congress in 1923) whose objectives propagated an explicit non-racialism, to "bring together into common action as one political people all tribes and clans of various tribes or races" (Karis & Carter 1972:77).

The discourse of the second "stream" of African nationalism may be traced to the influential tradition of Africanism.[11] Propagating the notion of a "real African" (neither "European" nor "black American" (Odendaal 1984:26)), it firmly established difference in a discourse whose racial assumptions are the obverse of those of colonialism and apartheid.[12] The Africanist movement developed to the point where it came to be dominated, particularly during the years 1962-1964, by essentialist notions such as "African personality" (Lodge 1983:306-7). Abrahams's text may be seen as a palimpsest, and as a site where the discourses of the day compete. It is, on the one hand, a text whose different layers document the hybrid history of its subject, while it is also a tale of freedom spoken by various conflicting voices - though the voice of non-racialism is, finally, the most insistent.

Telling/Re-membering the Self

Born in Vrededorp in 1919, the second child of a Cape Coloured woman and an Ethiopian mineworker, Peter Abrahams decided at age twenty to go into voluntary exile. He was compelled to leave South Africa because of "the need to be psychologically free of the colour bar", and the desire "to build a decent dignified life" for himself. His choices at the time were either to "escape or slip into that negative destructiveness that is the offspring of bitterness and frustration" (Abrahams 1953:13-15). Abrahams knew all about

the denigrating, self-negating effects of apartheid ideology, and its attempt to construct categories of identity that foreclosed freedom of choice and thus human dignity and growth. In England he was able, he says, to "pursue [his] thoughts "as far as they would go, and without fear" (1953:27).

An important consequence of exile for Abrahams's autobiography is that

> exile provides a perspective from which his South African years can be viewed almost in biographical terms, since it enables him from his own point of view to be the person he could not be in South Africa.
>
> (Shear 1989:51)

It is therefore from the point of view of being in a "free" society that Abrahams constructs an autobiographical identity that is not and cannot be identical with his historical self. Moreover, Tell Freedom registers the attempt of the self-in-exile to recover an identity that is in a state of continual collapse, that attempts to "re-collect" or to shore fragments against the ruin caused by colonialism/apartheid. Stephen Gray clarifies the complexity of the historical period of the writing of Tell Freedom:

> Despite its often being read straight as a crying indictment of apartheid practice, which it is, Tell Freedom actually records a prior, British-dominated period between the World Wars which may not entirely be blamed upon the "Boers"; they merely rooted out Pageview-Vrededorp as the end of a long process. Abrahams had to come back (in 1952) and witness this accumulating demise to gain the impetus to recollect his youth: the poverty, diseducation and colour prejudice in the Dominions.
>
> (1991:137)

In the opening scene of Tell Freedom, the author describes to the reader how the protagonist (Lee)[13] is invited by his father ("the man") to "tell" those with him what he sees, so that they can "make it into a story" (TF 10). On the one hand, the act of recollection is a conventional narrative strategy that facilitates the telling of the author's

life history. On the other hand, it resonates (in a way that was not possible in 1954 - the date of publication - or, indeed, in 1922, the actual year the action took place) with problems and concerns that currently characterise criticism in South Africa, particularly criticism emanating from journals such as Current Writing and Pretexts. Poststructuralist and postcolonial concerns with identity-construction have a peculiarly powerful political force in the South African context (see Chapter Two above). The construction of a hybrid "I/i" in the context of institutionalised and legislated racism is tantamount to a guerrilla attack on the hegemonic discourse of the day.

As suggested, the narrative strategy of chronological linearity employed by the autobiographer is a means of achieving verisimilitude, as the *graphos* refracts and records the *bios* of the *autos*. But autobiography is more than this, of course, particularly in a climate where writing is assigned an important political function. Fanon's words thus assume a special significance:

> At the beginning of his life a man is always clotted, he is drowned in contingency. The tragedy of the man is that he was once a child.
>
> (Fanon 1986:231)

The child is father to the man: it is the implications of this "tragedy" for one categorised "Coloured" that Abrahams narrates.

A contrapuntal reading of Abrahams's autobiography with the autobiographical chapter in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks, "The Fact of Blackness", is instructive. There are illuminating parallels in the construction of the ego, of the self who has been "othered" by whites. It is the accidental, arbitrary, contingent aspects of the world surrounding the child that shape his or her ego and so determine identity. As Shear points out,

> [c]ircumstances of birth ... are seen to determine to a greater extent than elsewhere the horizons of the experiential terrain on which identity is subsequently constructed.
>
> (1989:56)

Fanon dramatically introduces his *bios* by describing the discourse that defined his identity in negative, negating terms:

> "Dirty nigger!" Or simply, "Look, a Negro!"
> I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with a desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.
> Sealed into that crushing objecthood .... the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there .... I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.
>
> (1986:109)

The elements that collectively constitute Abrahams's first recollection are a window-pane, a raindrop, and himself as a little boy. Like Fanon, he appears to have come into the world with a desire to discover its meaning: he pushes his nose and lips - his sensory organs - against a pane of glass that separates him from a drop of rain. The latter is characterised as containing within itself "many colours" - and in the context of the autobiography, this may be read as the child's hankering for a world where all is not reduced to shades of black and white, forever separate from one another. The raindrop signifies, in the child's imagination, a warm and dry world, womb-like, utopian, a green world of bright sunshine. But, of course, the glass represents an invisible obstacle between himself and this harmonious world of warmth and bright colours, the child's "raindrop world" (TF 9).

The autobiographer proceeds to construct his *bios* by means of "clear-cut flashes of memory" (TF 12) that express themselves as a series of "I remember[s]" (TF 14-15). This series of memories constructs an ambiguous reality where cruelty is contrasted with the

child's wondrously rich world where "mother and father [merge] into each other .... [the young child's] symbol of peace and laughter and security" (TF 15). The theme of the "raindrop world" is elaborated in the child's recollections of long summer afternoons beside the river in Elsberg, where he is forced by straitened circumstances after the death of his father to live with Aunt Liza and Uncle Sam. The romantic idyll that the older Abrahams constructs of cool willows, a clear river, tadpoles with "myriad colours", wild rabbits, "fleecy white clouds" is archetypal, a "special world" of a child's imagination (TF 42). (Abrahams's experience of the English landscape clearly inscribes this description.) The "I" remembers (having returned to Vrededorp) a "green dream-world of childhood" where there are "leaves of a light, transparent green [and] Soft, downy, new grass grew on the banks of the river" (TF 47). The representation of what amounts to a prelapsarian world suggests Fanon's "will to find a meaning in things", and his "desire to attain to the source of the world" (Fanon 1986:109).

The world of Lee's imagination is one that may be read in terms of the Lacanian symbolic, a world that is prior to history, culture and language that undoes identity in a Crusoe-like re-naming. It is a world that is prior to words such as "nigger", "Negro". This world is, as Abrahams suggests at a later point of the narrative, one where the distinction between story and reality blurs, where "there are no words between me and the story" (TF 66). In this world, language does not alienate; instead, words mediate a reality that displaces the "reality" constructed by the discourse of racism.

It is when he is called by name that Lee is "jerked" out of his raindrop world, and while he momentarily experiences an uncomfortable sense of damp, he is soon reassured by

the soft, dark presence of his father. The reader is aware that the writing self, or *autos*, has already had the experience of being "othered", that through the objectification of the racist gaze, he has been "sealed into that crushing objecthood" described by Fanon (1986:109). And so, when Abrahams describes the protagonist, Lee, his younger self, experiencing his father as one who "belonged most naturally and intimately to me and my world" (TF 9), he is engaging in that activity described by Fanon as "turning beseechingly to others" as a means of self-restoration:

> Their attention was a liberation, running over my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing, endowing me once more with an agility that I had thought lost, and by taking me out of the world, restoring me to it.
>
> (Fanon 1986:109)

This act of restoration cannot, however, reach completion as long as the self is "out of the world". Instead, his father re-locates him in time and history, giving him the task of telling his story which is the story of a people's struggle for freedom. There is, moreover, a special political significance in the fact of his father's Ethiopian origin and the fact that his ancestors had fought for freedom against the Italian colonists (TF 11). This man, Lee's father, is constructed as a metonymic figure representing all oppressed peoples; he assigns to his son the historic task of telling his people's freedom. This is reinforced in the narrative by further exhortations, notably that of father-figure Fezile B Teka, editor of "The Bantu World", who requests Abrahams to "speak for us one day" (TF 227).

However, Abrahams's autobiography demonstrates that the narrative of liberation - whether personal or political - is not the simple one described by Richard Rive:

> An important thing as far as control of the dominated group is concerned is to eliminate the memory of the oppressed, to get rid of their past. We as the dominated group must start rewriting our history. We must rediscover our history.

> We have history and our history has been obliterated; now we are digging back into that history.
>
> (De Vries 1989:49)

Rive assumes an absolute distinction between oppressor and oppressed. However, postcoloniality collapses the binarism of self/other; as Henry Louis Gates observes, "there is nothing outside of colonial discourse" (1991:466). Abrahams's autobiography shows that the rewriting of a people's history is always a (displacing) narrative of the dominant group; postcolonial history is syncretic, synchronic and invalidates a separate our/their history. A determinant on Abrahams's narrative is his target audience, the "good people over there" (TF 299), the "white people of England" (TF 299-300). Like Sol T Plaatje and others before him, Abrahams hopes to persuade, and so he is forced to adopt a mode of discourse that tells a convincing tale. It is, moreover, probable that the enormity of the role assigned him, to be the teller of his people's freedom, causes the author to project his apprehensiveness onto the protagonist in the scene where the child's desperation and uncertainty are portrayed (TF 10). For who, after all, are his people (is he one of "us" and/or "them"?), and what, consequently, is his identity? These problems are central to the structuration of the *autos* and its narrative, and the quest for an answer to the one is integrally connected to the other.

The problem of race soon emerges as a prime concern of the autobiographer. The process of constructing his identity commences in the opening pages of the text as he embarks on the task assigned him and begins to select details from his life. Abrahams proceeds to "tell" about race and to relate the facts that simultaneously circumscribe his freedom and inscribe his identity:

> My mother was a member of the Cape Coloured community. Coloured is the South African word for the half-caste community that was a by-product of the

> early contact between black and white. The first children of Europe who reached the Cape of Storms were men without women. They set up a half-way house to the East there. There was intercourse between white men and black women. The results were neither white nor black.
>
> (TF 10)

The terminology in this toneless description is revealing: "half-caste", "by-product", and the negative "neither white nor black". Demonstrating the mimicry of the colonised, Abrahams deploys the racist stereotypes of the day. He thus establishes his identity in the very terms that colonialism/apartheid has used to negate his identity - and the Cape of Storms offers neither hope nor anything good for his kind. In his description, he mocks the bland history textbook account of the actions of the early colonists. The phrase "there was intercourse between white men and black women" belies the rape and slavery that were endemic during the early days of colonisation. Again, the characterisation of the colonists as innocent "children of Europe" conceals their brutality. The self that narrates ironically and bitterly, parodies the identity inflicted upon him: a "by-product", a mere "result" of such "intercourse", he is, finally, nothing, portrayed as "neither" and "nor".

His father's death and the ensuing poverty condemn Lee to the bleak and austere shantytown of Elsburg, where he stays with Aunt Liza and Uncle Sam. It is here that Lee experiences a shift in consciousness signalled by his feeling of estrangement: "I was the stranger and everyone turned to look at me" (TF 19). Estrangement is to become the central fact of Abrahams's life. This sense of alienation and homelessness is the condition of postcoloniality, of conquered peoples made pariahs by colonising forces. Accompanying his sense of estrangement is that of oppression - the poverty and want of his aunt's household. He soon encounters another, more profound, form of oppression, however: the subordination enforced by the language of apartheid. It is while on an

errand to the local pig farm in Elsburg that Lee first experiences the language of oppression: in being forced to use the appellation "*baas*" (master) he must submit to an hierarchical system and inferior role (TF 35). This is his first contact with white men, and soon after, he experiences the bullying insults of white boys (TF 36-37). A short while afterwards, his mortification deepens to a sense of utter abjection. Lee witnesses the denigration of his uncle's identity when the latter submits to the superior power of the white man who enforces apartheid discipline and punishment; it is a system where black people are used as the very instruments of their own oppression. In a moment of bewilderment, the child succumbs to the imposition of the language and behaviour of racism, an occurrence in which his uncle performs an instrumental role. Friday-like, Lee must learn to speak in order to understand who he is and what his function is in the scheme of things: "Tell the *baas* and *basies* you are sorry", Uncle Sam instructs Lee, who has no option but to reply obediently, "I'm sorry" (TF 40). Lee undergoes the rites of passage of a black South African youth, and as such, the self that is constructed in Abrahams's text constitutes a prototype for many of the autobiographies that were subsequently written.

In a series of recollections that echo the archetypal moment of self-recognition recorded by Fanon when he hears himself described by the other: "Look, a Negro" (1986:109), Abrahams relates certain childhood incidents. The first of these moments - signalling a further shift in consciousness - is when he and his friend Andries are named by the racial other - the "enemy" (TF 37). The naming of Lee "*klipkop*" (fool), "Hottentot" and "bloody kaffir" (TF 37) annihilates the family narrative of proud Ethiopian ancestry and reconstructs his identity in terms of the crudest and cruellest kind of racial

stereotyping.[14] The protagonist is "abraded into non-being" (Fanon 1986:109) through the erasure of the myth of his racial origin so delicately constructed by his family, and in its place is put a brutal, stigmatising image: "Your fathers are dirty black bastards of baboons!" (TF 37). Political disempowerment results in the "labelled interaction" that Vernon A February (1992:314, citing van Arkel *et al*) identifies in racist societies. Here, black signifies absence and lack - of humanity, dignity and value. Drawing on social Darwinism,[15] this kind of labelling or stereotyping signifies the simian nature of darker races. The storekeeper notices Abrahams's colour, and, nauseated as though by "human waste", calls him a "black baboon" (TF 244). Abrahams's sense of identity collapses as he asks himself, "Am I really like ordure to him?" (TF 245).

The pattern of the writing in the childhood phase of the autobiography is a contrapuntal one, as idyll is followed by racist reality. Accordingly, the scene that follows the incident of the pig farmer's racial labelling is again a summer pastoral: "I loved being alone by the river. It became my special world" (TF 42). The events that follow have, in the light of Lee's re-naming by the farmer, a particular significance in the process of the protagonist's identity-formation and its literary construction. Lee's encounters with the Zulu boy, Joseph, alert him, on another level, to his "difference". This difference is, again, primarily racial, since Joseph is perceived as "not light brown, like the other children of our location, but dark brown, almost black" (TF 43). Joseph is, furthermore, presented in ethnic terms, and he is represented as the archetypal romantic Zulu warrior, carrying his traditional weapons, proud and at the same time threatening as he issues a challenge to fight. Abrahams's *graphos* once again inscribes the discourse of difference, separation and inequality, though this textual mimicry displaces the certainties that underpin the official

discourse of difference. It is when Joseph declares his identity in ethnic terms that Lee is faced with a moment of profound doubt regarding his own identity:

> "Joseph! Zulu!"
> I smacked my own chest.
> "Lee ..." But I didn't know what I was apart from that.
>
> (TF 43)

"What am I?" the young Abrahams asks in a manner that is to echo throughout the narrative of his self (his sense of *who* he is is inseparable from *what* he is in racial terms). The reply that Aunt Liza provides reflects the neat logic of apartheid, but it is one that the narrative goes on to deconstruct:

> "You are Coloured. There are three kinds of people: white people, Coloured people, and black people. The white people come first, then the Coloured people, then the black people." (TF 44)

The child's declaration, "Lee! Coloured!" is a paradoxical mimicry of his aunt's explanation of the way the world is arranged, since, soon after, he consciously assimilates the culture of the Zulu by learning his language. This constitutes a subversion of the basis of racial categorisation, since it is an enactment of racial and cultural transgression, as is evident when Joseph asserts "You are my brother. Now my kings will be your kings" (TF 45). In The Path of Thunder, published in 1952, and Return to Goli, published the year after, Abrahams declares an anti-Manichean, and therefore non-racial "manifesto" of sorts:

> The national intermarriage, whether it is between white or black or between pink and red, is a mirror of this highest form of world nationalism when man will really be free.
>
> (The Path of Thunder, 1952:93)

and again:

> this is my declaration of independence, my deliberate revolt against both white and black. For years I have found the burden of oppression both wearisome and

stifling. Now I would be rid of it.

(Return to Goli 1953:18)

Abrahams once more echoes Fanon, who rejects apartheid as a form of social division into contrasting "compartments", the one clean, "brightly-lit", the other grim, overcrowded (Fanon 1971:30). Here, the logic of absolutes prevails, and a "them or us" situation evolves (Fanon 1971:66). In short, "the Manicheanism of the settler produces a Manicheanism of the native" (1971:73).

And yet, the textual effect of the Zulu boy, with his own language, definite skin colour, and his own land (he speaks of "our land" (TF 47)) is to signal Lee's "lack" as a Coloured person. The Afrikaans that Lee teaches Joseph is not his "own" language in the way that Zulu is Joseph's mother-tongue. Indeed, Lee abandons Afrikaans soon after meeting the English-speaking middle-class members of the Social Centre: "I thought in English. It took the place of Afrikaans as my first language" (TF 202). Afrikaans is the bearer of the culture of the oppressor, of the "*baas*" who labels him "baboon", thus fixing his subordinate and simian status. Lee adopts English, as Margaret and Harry, his estranged brother and sister, have done. Ironically, however, their "strangeness" is attributable, as suggested by Lee's deliberate observation that Harry "said something to her in English" (TF 48), to their use of a language that is, again, not their "own".

The sense of alienation and displacement that has, thus far, been shown to be an integral aspect of Lee's identity (TF 9: "jerked out of my raindrop world"; TF 16: "all strange"; TF 17: "I woke in a strange place"; TF 19, TF 23, TF 25: "I was the stranger") is intensified when Joseph leaves Elsburg, and he, too, must leave once again and be "uprooted from the familiar" (TF 47). The moving force behind this sense of

estrangement is poverty, unskilled labour, and migrant labour within the framework of the colonial capitalist economy. The brief moment of brotherhood between Lee the "Coloured", and Joseph the "Zulu" suggests something of the "national intermarriage" Abrahams advocated two years before, in The Path of Thunder (1952:93), though it gives way to the racial realities of the time and place. Soon after his brother and sister take him back to Vrededorp, he has resumed his separate identity, remarking - however ambiguously - "They were well-dressed, Coloured like me, but strangers" (TF 48).

An integral aspect of the process of identity construction is the writer's experience of exile and estrangement, which determines memory's selection of detail. While he may "try to tell everything" (TF 299), he can, in fact describe only those "sharp, clear-cut flashes of memory" (TF 12) that the experience of being no more than a "by-product", and of being "*neither* white *nor* black" (TF 12, my emphases) allows. Paradoxically, however, the fragmented and displaced "I/i" that the *autos* produces has a more subtle counterhegemonic force than the monolithic identity that may have been constructed within the discursive parameters of his mother's genealogy:

> I recall a time when she made me recite, like a catechism, my father's family tree. It went something like this: "I am Peter Henry Abrahams Deras, son of James Henry Abrahams Deras whose name at home was Karim Abdul, son of Ingedi(e) of Addis who was the son of somebody else who fought in some battle who was the son of somebody else, who was the son of somebody else who was with Menelik when he defeated the Italians...." It went on for a very long time. And the "Deras" or "de Ras" was the family title.
>
> (TF 11)

The writer's tone of disbelief and boredom betrays his rejection of this manufactured identity. Abrahams embraces neither the Africanism nor the Ethiopianism offered by such discourse, nor, for that matter, does he embrace the fixed coloured identity that his mother's mixed race origins enable. Instead, the *graphos* chronicles the collapse of the

dual identities conferred on the *autos* on the one hand by his family, and on the other, colonialism and the apartheid state.

The powerful force of the latter on the writing self is first evident in the description of himself as a six-year-old when his half-brother, Harry, and half-sister, Margaret, take him home to his mother after his stay in Elsberg with Uncle Sam and Aunt Liza. In the dark, menacing atmosphere of the streets of (ironically named) Vrededorp,[16] his official identity is conferred upon him in a scene that reinforces the psychological impact of the earlier one where, in his personal capacity, the pig-farmer enacts the racial dominance of white "*baasskap*" and black subservience. In the opening scene of Part II of Book One, the relationship between oppressor/oppressed, and superior/inferior is described in the context of the law and officialdom. The agent here is that emblematic figure of black writing, the white policeman - the black man's "*baas*" - who carries a torch and fixes his victim in its glare. As he does so, the full apparatus of colonial/apartheid legislation is invoked, and the humiliating reminder that all black people are pariahs in the land of their birth is clearly articulated in the policeman's demand that a pass be produced. In a moment that again recalls Fanon, Abrahams experiences a sense of "crushing objecthood" (Fanon 1986:109): "*He* looks like a kaffir" (TF 51). His consciousness, already affected by a "racial epidermal schema" (Fanon 1986:112), now experiences the full impact of racism, its abuse, denial, outrage and insult (TF 155), a racism whose effect is, always, exclusion: "Let's not play with him. He's got woolly hair like a kaffir" (TF 155).

Both Fanon and Abrahams emphasise the materiality of race, the experience of the body: "my body suddenly abraded into nonbeing" (Fanon 1986:109); "the corporeal schema

crumbled" (Fanon 1986:112). It is the further experience that there is nothing that can properly explain the racism that causes Fanon's identity to disintegrate: "I burst apart" (1986:109). At this point, however, the process of reconstructing identity is set in motion by Fanon's writing self: "Now the fragments have been put together again by another self" (1986:109). The activity alluded to here, identity reconstruction, is the focal concern of counterhegemonic autobiographical activity. It is no accident that soon after the incident where the policeman insults Lee, his writing self describes the attempt of his mother to tell a fabulous story, a "Once upon a time, in a far-away land where the trees were blue, there lived a young prince..." type of story. However, the writing self demonstrates that such a story, rooted neither in history nor in actual experience, leads, opiate-like, to a "land of peaceful sleep" (TF 55).

As a corrective to his mother's fable, the writing self - what Fanon calls the "other self" - proceeds to construct a narrative where the determining features of the world are race and group identity. The *autos* describes Lee rediscovering Vrededorp, which he interprets in the clear racial categories that characterise apartheid discourse. In a short space of time, the narrator introduces the reader to "an old Indian" (TF 57), "Basuto women", "Zulu women", "Bechuana and the Barolong" (TF 58), and a "black boy" (TF 60). This mimicry of the discourse of apartheid, with its separate ethnic categories, seems to parody racial and ethnic categorisation, Fanon's "world divided into compartments, a motionless, Manichaeistic world" (1971:40).

Whatever its effect, however, the moment facilitates the introduction of another narrative of Lee's origins. What his mother tells him functions to fill the silence of Aunt Liza's

evasive response to Lee's questions in Elsburg after his meeting with Joseph:

> "Did we have Coloured kings before the white man?
> "No."
> "Then where did we come from? Joseph and his mother come from the black kings who were before the white man."
> And laughing, and ruffling my head, she said:
> "You talk too much ... Go'n wash up."
>
> (TF 45)

What does Abrahams do when faced with the fact that the coloured people have no "kings" of their own, no national myths upon which to build individual identity? He demonstrates the appalling corollary of this "lack" of a history when Aunt Liza declares Lee's fate as a coloured, and his inevitable future relations with blacks: "The little mother said I would call black people that [kaffirs] when I get big" (TF 60).

This memory constitutes a watershed moment in the process of the child's identity construction. His mother attempts to counter the negating effects of a context that erodes her child's sense of self-worth by expanding on the narrative of the "family tree", the myth of her son's origin that she had in the past "*made* [Lee] recite" (TF 11, my emphasis):

> ".... Your father didn't have any white blood in him so he must have been black. Yes, your kings were black."
> "And the ones of to-day?"
> "They are black too."
> Oh, if only Joseph were here now! I would go up to him and
> push out my chest and say: "I am Lee of the ..." No, not the Coloureds. Of the what, then?
> "Ma ..."
> "Yes?"
> "If my kings were black, why am I Coloured?"
> "Oh Lee," she protested.
> "But I want to know."
> She thought for a while.
> "You're only Coloured on your mother's side, that's my side. On your father's side you're Abyssinian."
> "And that is black?"
> "Yes."

> I would say to Joseph: "I am Lee of the Abyshinins! My kings
> were before the days of the white man and my kings are still kings to-day!"
> (TF 61)

Clearly, the logic that satisfied the child is inadequate to the man he has become father to, as the rest of the autobiography demonstrates. The question that remains unanswerable is, "If my kings were black, why am I Coloured?". The narrator cannot - and does not wish to - declare triumphantly, as Lee, the protagonist does:

> I was the strongest, the bravest, the most daring, of all the warriors in that glorious land called Abyshina....
> *Lo, I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon....*
> (TF 62)

Abrahams is not the "black Lee" his mother would have had him believe he is (TF 63), and his origins are neither in Abyssinia nor Jerusalem but South Africa, a state founded upon the principles of racial difference, separation and inferiority. Here, where Joseph is Zulu, he is coloured - a descendant of a decimated people: his maternal grandfather was a legendary drover: "the last of the great Hottentots", a man "who knew every corner of the land, the name of every mountain and river, the piece of history behind every hill" (TF 73). The reference to Oupa Ruiter is an important element in the elaboration of Abrahams's identity construction since it enables him to claim kin with the original inhabitants of the subcontinent. As such it demonstrates that he is "an anglicised man seemingly fighting to recapture his roots" (Mphahlele 1960b:343). While Oupa is not himself a king, he "looked on the face of the great Adam Kok whom [*Hotnot* Annie] claimed to have been the last king of the Hottentots" (TF 73).

Clearly, Book One of the autobiography constitutes a process of constructing a genealogy

that is hybrid, and a postcolonial identity that is metonymic of "the people of Africa". This identity subverts the hegemonic notion of racial purity, and the practice of racial separateness, erecting instead a postcolonial personhood that is incorporative and "contaminated". Indeed, throughout the autobiography there are incidents that ridicule official attempts to achieve racial separation, and it is in casual observations, for example, where Lee discovers that his long-time "coloured" friend, Dinny, is in fact "half-Indian" (TF 97), that the subversive impact of the autobiography is most powerful.

In narrating the story of himself, of the protagonist who has, significantly, a different name from himself, Abrahams focuses on his class origins. He is the son of a man whose forebears were "land-owners and slave-owners" (TF 12), and he lives among the "more respectable" people of Vrededorp (TF 67), in Twenty-second Street. And yet, characteristically, there is a duality in the self that is narrated, since he is simultaneously portrayed as a typical child of the streets, with lice-covered hair, ever-watchful for the police (TF 68). It is at the intersection of race and class that the *graphos* subverts the telling of freedom. The *graphos* "tells" the "unfreedom" of the *autos*, betraying the subject's interpellation by hegemonic notions of race and class superiority. This is evident, for example in an extract such as the following, where Lee describes his cousin, Catherine:

> Catherine was fair as a white person; blue-eyed and with long, straight, light brown hair of a golden texture.
> "Hello," she smiled at me.
> I felt too miserable to respond.
> I sat beside Maggie, stacking up bundles of wood. Splinters entered my fingers. As fast as I pulled them out, others went in. After a time I grew used to the splinters and the routine. By lunch-time I was working cheerfully.
>
> (TF 100)

The misery that Abrahams admits to feeling is the direct consequence of the difference - the physical racial difference - that he perceives as existing between himself and Catherine. She is represented here as having classic Caucasian or "white" features, and his immediate reaction to this is one of abjection. He then proceeds to describe the wounding of his body by splinters, a phenomenon that is the consequence of being black in a white world. He cannot declare "I AM" (see Chapter Two above) because he is ontologically defined "in *relation* to whiteness" (Fanon 1986:110). He must do more than simply endure the pain of being black, he must learn to ignore it - though this amounts to self-denial and even erasure. The autobiography thus records the severance of consciousness from the experience of bodily suffering, thereby encoding self-negation, or "I am NOT". Fanon has described the relationship between racism and that primary element of identity formation, the "development of bodily schema", as follows:

> In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity.
> (1986:110)

Immediately after the protagonist's experience of himself in relation to Catherine's "whiteness", young Abrahams joins his cousins in selling firewood to suburban white South Africa, "another world, another planet" (TF 103). Here, he is initiated into the survival codes necessitated by racism. In a revealing moment, Abrahams records his memory of a white woman's sympathetic defence of him, as well as her generous offer of food. The protagonist is represented from this point onwards as torn between the world of his racial origins and a beckoning world beyond.

Later, he is to feel an overwhelming sense of exhilaration as he looks from a hill towards

Johannesburg and beyond, "into an eternity of space". He opens his arms, and states: "It was as if I embraced all the land I looked upon, and all the people who lived in the land": simultaneously seeing his mother and cousin Maggie as "strangers suddenly .... [he] turned [his] back on them and ran to a solitary tall tree, far to the left" (TF 124). As those around him are caught in the realities of race and the law, and his brother is jailed, the young protagonist longs to soar "like an eagle ... right out of the range of this place" (TF 136). Ten-year-old Lee admits, even when racially insulted and assaulted by a boy with "beautifully clear blue eyes" that he has "no will to fight. I had no reason to fight, no desire" (TF 141). It is as if he knows that he is irrevocably alienated by the fact and the pain of his (black) body, and desirous only of what the blue eyes represent. His alienation extends also to his embittered brother whose sordid life represents Vrededorp. In rejecting this, he becomes "conscious of the beginnings of a new awareness. Something was happening to me and the way I saw the world in which I lived" (TF 148).

The narrative assumes a new orientation at this point, as the protagonist's employer, Mr Wylie, and a young white Jewish girl assume the role of surrogate parents, liberating him through literacy and literature into a world beyond Vrededorp. Significantly, the protagonist un-names and renames himself: "Peter is my real name, Peter Abrahams" (TF 150). When the protagonist expresses his gratitude, "Thank you, miss. Thank you!", the narrating self intrudes, reiterating the child's words: "Yes, thank you, miss. Thank you!" (TF 151). There may be a hint of irony in this expression of gratitude directed at those liberal whites who provide a temporary exit from Vrededorp and all that it represents, but are powerless to create a colour-blind world.[17]

Despite, or indeed because of the protagonist's "negating" "consciousness of [his] body" (Fanon 1986:110) - Abrahams has "woolly hair like a kaffir" (TF 155) - the identity of the protagonist fragments as it transforms, and he begins to live "in two worlds, the world of Vrededorp and the world of ... books" (TF 161). He thus transgresses the boundaries of apartheid, exiting from its confining space. Book Two of the autobiography records the conflict between the "two worlds" that struggle within him (TF 161), as well as his longing to be free of Vrededorp's "lean world" (TF 163) and to enter a more satisfying world:

> I felt lonely and longed for something without being able to give it a name. The horizons of Vrededorp were inadequate. Where was I to find the new horizons of my needs?
>
> (TF 163)

Significantly, he rejects, not poor Vrededorp, his "lean world", but "black Vrededorp" (TF 163). Repeatedly, the writer foregrounds the narrow racial confines of apartheid South Africa in the 1950s, and it is at such moments that the counterhegemonic force of the autobiography is most strongly felt. Ignoring the "RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY" barriers, young Abrahams becomes an "intruder" by daring to desire "what the white folk had" (TF 164). On one level this desire signifies a rejection of himself and his past, yet it also paradoxically impels him beyond the barriers of apartheid, opening a new, transgressive mode of consciousness, and a liminal, plural self.

Central to the process of constructing such a counterhegemonic identity is the deconstruction of the category, "oppressive white", which is the corollary of the category, oppressed black (as suggested above, postcolonial consciousness subverts such Manicheanism). The narrative of Abrahams's transforming self is constructed around such figures as Mr Wylie, Mr Visser (the compassionate "Boer" school principal), and the red-headed "missus" at the market - all of whom "complicate the business of building up

defences" against whites (TF 170). There is also the "short, fat, red-faced white man" whose function in the text is to oppose himself to the practice of *baaskap*: "I'm no Boer", he insists (TF 175), thus liberating Peter from the usual position of subordination. The representation of these characters in the autobiography amounts to a redefinition of the *autos* who has, thus far, constructed his "self" within the limits of apartheid discourse and the genealogy that was his family's defence against the negations of colonial history. The autobiography proceeds to re-write the self constructed in Book One, in a process of textual self-transformation. The self of the narrative is an indeterminate "I/i" whose construction is, implicitly, predicated on Fanon's anti-essentialist premiss, "There is no white world, there is no white ethic, any more than there is a white intelligence" (Fanon 1986:229).

Running parallel to the textual process of (de)constructing white characters is the construction of the narrative of certain black characters such as Jim, the sePedi man from a village in the Northern Transvaal whose life is restricted by the pass laws in a way that a coloured person's is not. The life of Peter Abrahams in the years leading up to the legislation of apartheid in the 1950s, would not be comprehensible without an understanding of the life of a "Jim" (just as Lee's life was defined by that of Joseph the Zulu). Furthermore, by including as part of his own life-history the prototypical life of Jim (TF 178-184), the "I" of the autobiography is amplified on the one hand, and fragmented on the other. Peter Abrahams is, in fact, re-named by Jim who calls him "Beet", a corruption of Peter (TF 177). The observation that Dorothy Driver has made in relation to women autobiographers assumes a particular pertinence in the case of a marginal writer such as Abrahams:

> "Self" is constructed in dialectic with others or another: one cannot see oneself in the absence of projections from the world around one. What the self is awaits its determination by or from those outside the self, those who say "me" to me, and who constitute the self for which I strive.
>
> (Driver 1990:232)

There is, clearly, a duality, if not a multiplicity of selves, in the "I" that Abrahams constructs, since the fifteen-year-old "I" comes to incorporate a number of "i"'s, both black and white, who function to determine or constitute the textual self that is represented as "Peter Abrahams". The counterhegemonic force of this mode of representation is self-evident, since the multiple selves that collectively constitute the "I/i" of the text negate the racial assumptions of apartheid ideology. The "moment of writing" Tell Freedom (the period during which apartheid was codified and legislated) "shapes the autobiographical narrative" (Shear 1989:62), and produces the multiple selves that subvert the apartheid model of an essential, unitary racial self.

The self-in-process is seen as "rapidly moving out of this Coloured world of mine", that represented by his family, (TF 197). Jean-Philippe Wade argues that Abrahams was a "typical product of the ideological apparatuses liberalism established (or re-articulated) in this period" (Pathfinders, Bantu Men's Social Centre, Diocesan Training College, and St Peter's Secondary school) (1989:62). While it is true that liberalism relied on the politics of consent rather than coercion (Wade 1989:62), the consequences for Abrahams are perhaps not as crudely stereotypical as Wade implies. His decision to become a teacher may indeed be construed as a displacement of the political onto the educational (Wade 1989:62), but the events that follow his appointment as "tea boy" at the Bantu Men's Social Centre could also be the result of a radical rejection of the categories that

underpinned the hegemonic racial discourse of the day.

Moreover, in moving out of his coloured world, the protagonist encounters "Negro" writing that pierces "the heart of a black boy" (TF 200). The songs of Paul Robeson and the writings of W E B Du Bois, Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes provide him with identity models, enabling a momentary sense of "black" identity, a sense that is, however, essentially chimerical: "That was a black man, one of us!", but as Robeson's singing ends, there is the recognition that the "moment that had given us a common identity was over" (TF 192) because in the South African context blackness signifies inferiority and oppression. Further, because it is the minor term in the discursive field defined by apartheid, it can offer neither the freedom nor the peace that Abrahams, who now portrays himself as a poet (TF 199), desires. He thus deliberately rejects the path of political activism with its local struggles, which must proceed from the given of racial categorisation. In its place, Abrahams offers a poet's vision that is one of "*universal freedom*" (TF 200) in what may be interpreted as a conscious rejection of the notion of race and therefore a subtle subversion of the race-based struggles waged on the political front. This recalls Fanon's aphorism: "I have one right alone: that of demanding human behavior from the other" (1986:229). Like Fanon who claims, "I am not a prisoner of [colonial] history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny" (1986:229), Abrahams sets out to recreate his identity in his "declaration of independence ... against both white and black" (1953:18-19) and the colonial inheritance of these determining racial categories. Abrahams's desire inscribes the universalism of Charterism at this point.

The textual encoding of the author's plural racial identity amounts to a strategy to produce a transforming, indeterminate identity that counters the force of the notion of racial difference. The treatment of class consciousness is somewhat more ambiguous, however. While there is a satirical edge to the voice that describes a metonymic self as "slumland suddenly catapulted into aspiring City and Suburban [*sic*]", and a note of self-deprecation in figuring himself as one of those who is "ashamed to see ourselves as we had once been", and again, as "we, the aspiring" (the term crops up no less that three times over two pages), the writing does have the effect of establishing a difference between himself and "slumland's children" (TF 203). There is a further ambiguity in his reiterated opposition between white people/light and dark folk/darkness - the "big black blob" of Vrededorp and the "patch of light" of "[u]pper, white, Vrededorp" (TF 204-205); moreover, the English language that he has adopted inscribes the notion of the desirability of "white" - a signifier whose various meanings derive their force from the negative associations of its opposite, black, dark, darkness. As Fanon declares, in Europe "the Negro has one function: that of symbolizing the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul" (1986:190). It comes as no surprise therefore when Abrahams chooses the term "brown" rather than "black" in the opening line of his love-poem to Anne: "I love you for your brownness" (TF 209).

An "aspiring" Peter Abrahams becomes in Book III "a student ... a person, the equal of all the others", and the racist stereotype of the black man, "monkey face", is displaced by recognition of his personhood, as other students call him "Peter" (TF 220). The replacement of "kaffir" by "Peter" at the Diocesan College in Pietersburg ("There was peace here, and I was happy [in a] .... land free of hurt, insult, colour and poverty" (TF

224)) registers a moment in the autobiography where the fragmented self that is the product of apartheid assumes coherence and stability. The self has cried, "I AM", and in being acknowledged, his identity IS, it assumes an ontological status.

The protagonist's class awareness, having distilled this new sense of self, develops "a new seeing coldness" which is symptomatic of his estrangement from his family and his community - neither of which has changed (TF 228-9). Pygmalion-like, he has shed his previous identity, and the Vrededorp community, riven by race, cannot accommodate an educated person whose colour officially confines him to doing nothing more elevated than certain forms of labour; better jobs are, after all, "Reserved for Europeans Only" (TF 234). Moreover, the restrictions of apartheid function to silence his writing self (TF 232-233) and make him long for "another land" (TF 232).

There is, however, a fundamental awareness in the writing self that there can be no exit for him, and that he cannot - despite the ambivalence and indeterminacy of his hybrid identity - assume "the ways of the white man" (TF 236). The narrative includes, at this point, his friend Jonathan's assertion, "these things [Christianity, (Western) knowledge and education] are not for me" (TF 236). At this crucial point, the strategy that the *autos* deploys is one that has effectively been used before: the narrative of the "I" is interrupted by the story of (an)other, this time Jonathan's, that functions in a contrapuntal way with his own, reinforcing the multivocalic nature of the hybrid "I/i" of the narrative. Again, the effect is to counter the hegemonic notion of a monolithic, separate racial identity, one where the "kaffir" is distinct from the "*klonkie*"[18] (TF 243).

It is, finally, the immoral logic of apartheid, the equation of colour with human value - or the lack of it - that results in a telling moment of abjection that precipitates the events of Book III. "I was nineteen now, and this was the year 1938" (TF 249), and Abrahams has decided to discontinue his schooling at the Diocesan College, though he "submits" to Father Woodfield's suggestion that he attend St Peter's in Johannesburg, instead. In another of the pockets of time that interrupt the narrative, the young protagonist experiences at St Peter's an idyllic world where race is irrelevant. He has, significantly, already made his "first white friends" (TF 249), and encountered his first "Christian socialist", Brother Roger. Here, where people are "untouched by the racial disease of the land" (TF 250), monolithic categories, both racial and religious, begin to crumble as the writing self inscribes an alternative vision of South Africa. Abrahams encounters the doctrine of Marxism as well as people whose analysis and practice of its precepts temper his personal pain by offering a political explanation for the social phenomenon that has both denigrated and dismembered his self.

The protagonist's experience of the white world - on both a political and a personal level - is characterised by a sense of lack, however. Marxism and its factionalism lacks "compassionate humanity" (TF 251), while his first sexual experience (which happens to be with a white woman, Jane, a relative of his friends, Harold and Cath) is disappointing. The memory of Jane's reference to his "woolly head" - however playful - is not incidental. The effect of race on the development of bodily schema (Fanon 1986:110) is a negative one, and within the intimacy of a sexual relationship with a white woman, pleasure and the potential for growth is almost certainly foreclosed. While he finds in Jane a woman whose intellectual development matches his own, the realities of race collide with the

"class" compatibility he experiences with her (TF 255).

And so, like everything else he has known, this relationship is not spared the fate of death, or "dust" (the word is taken from a Stephen Spender poem, part of which is quoted, TF 252); aestheticising this experience of disappointment, the writing self relegates his liaison with Jane (again in Spender's words) to the level of the "corrupt" and "unsubstantial" (TF 257). In narrating his self through the medium of English poetry, Abrahams further fragments the "I", adding to the sense of its plural, syncretic nature. A cruder analysis than this might conclude from this device that the authentic voice of the *autos* is ideologically contaminated or even under erasure, but, given the context at the time of writing, the narrative device that Abrahams deploys here constitutes a further assault on the hegemonic notion of racial and cultural separateness and purity.

The encounters with certain liberal and left-leaning whites that Abrahams inserts into the narrative produces (as suggested above) a profound textual ambivalence which functions to subvert the apartheid binarism of white/black, oppressor/oppressed. At one point, the writing self, whose task it is to tell the freedom of the metonymic self that represents South Africa's oppressed peoples, further fragments to include the story of a suffering white woman, Zena, wife of Jewish trade unionist, Max Gordon. In describing the woman's pain, Abrahams reconstructs his identity in a radical manner, setting himself up as the comforter of apartheid's unacknowledged victims, whites:

> The racialism of our land did not only hurt those who were not white. Basically, it hurt all of us, black and white alike .... This deep, overflowing hurt of Zena's was the other side of the penny. And, really, *her hurt was greater than mine.* Whatever it had done to me, and other blacks, racialism had never driven us to this brand of shame and guilt that verged on self-hate. The sensitive, unprejudiced

> whites of our land walk a dangerous emotional tight-rope. And the non-whites rarely understand it.
>
> (TF 264, my emphasis)

Standing the notion of the "white man's burden" on its head, Abrahams re-inscribes Fanon's insight, "There is no Negro mission; there is no white burden" (Fanon 1986:228). This is a pivotal moment in Abrahams's narrative of himself: it has a restitutive effect in that the "stolen" or fractured self of the narrative, riven by memories of rejection and alienation, is enabled by this experience. This self comes to understand what it is that underpins not only its own predicament, but also that of many belonging to the racial category privileged by apartheid. The knowledge of white suffering caused by the colour bar is strangely "comforting", and his subsequent pledge to Zena commits him to write the book in which he tells the freedom of South African peoples (TF 265). He rewrites the "Negro mission" to revive the past by telling of a present, collective self and a shared (South African) history of suffering.

The final phase of the narrative takes the form of a quest for a place free of the paralysing restrictions of racism in which he will be enabled to write. In journeying to Cape Town, however, he encounters again the poverty of South Africa's dispossessed; it is here, too, that he discovers the alienating complexity of the intellectual political world of the African Peoples' Organisation (APO) and its elite leadership: Dr Goolam Gool, his daughter, Sissy, the Abdurahmans, Jabavus and Sogas (TF 273). Here, the self of the narrative encounters again the ruthlessness, intolerance and factionalism that caused Abrahams to turn away from involvement in left-wing politics in Johannesburg. Recalling Fanon, who pleads for "*human* behavior from the other" (1986:229, my emphasis),

Abrahams longs for "pity, compassion, and mercy", crying, "If only they allowed for the human heart" (TF 274). While it may be tempting to dismiss Abrahams's plea as an expression of effete liberal humanism, given the fierce political contests of the 1950s, it is also possible to read the *graphos* as inscribing a transcendant brotherhood that denies the doctrine of racial difference and separation.

The closing pages of the autobiography are an uncompromising reminder of the "crushing objecthood" defined by Fanon (1986:109), as the writing self recalls his final encounter with racist officialdom (this time at the Passport Office): "He [the official] ... looked at me. His eyes were cold and remote. They looked at a thing, not a person" (TF 279). The political moment is 1938, "the year the South African Government made its first moves to deprive the Cape Coloureds of their right to vote on the same roll as the whites" (TF 279). The hegemonic ideology was that of "parallel development", "developing along your own lines" (TF 281). The removal of coloured voters from a common voter's roll resulted in the formation of a resistance front (a "non-European United Front") of previously disunited groups, as well as the African National Congress, the National Liberation League and the All African Convention (TF 279) whose rallying cry was "Dark folk, arise!" (TF 281). Interpellated by the ideology of Christian-humanism, the *autos* remembers a self who, six years before, was appalled at the "terrifying quality in mob-anger. At best, mob justice would be savagely brutal and blind" (TF 283).

It is the experience of Cape intellectual political analysis, rhetoric and the ensuing mob action that causes the protagonist to turn again from political theory and to found a school with the strangely repulsive Rodrigues. This school is on the "desert strip" that is

the Cape Flats - a place where people are "dried-up creatures", represented as being barely human. This description, characterised by its "othering" of the Cape Flats poor who live in a "Dark Age" (TF 287), inscribes the social and political dislocation as well as the alienation of both writing self and protagonist. This sense of estrangement is compounded by later remarks regarding the lack of humanity among certain elements of the political left (TF 294). These remarks may simply be read as expressions of a liberal position, thus explaining Abrahams's rejection of radical political action. However, these comments are especially significant for what they reveal of the profoundly alienating and dehumanising effects of colonial history, not only on the oppressed but also on those who seek to liberate them. It is in the context of the brutal and brutalising discourse of racism that Abrahams constructs a self that tells the freedom of *human* values in a humane society. The autobiography thus demonstrates that the self is not "mired in what the past has determined" and is therefore not "the slave of the slavery that dehumanized [its] ancestors" (Fanon 1986:230).

The writing inscribes the value of human commonality when the protagonist makes his final journey to Durban, his embarkation point for a life in exile that marks the end of the narrative of the self in South Africa. The autobiography's final pages constitute a collage of the country's poor and ordinary people - hospitable "dark people", a "kindly old Boer grandma" (TF 302) and in Durban, Indians who "welcomed [Abrahams] as one of their own" (TF 304). The cumulative effect is to negate the basis of an official discourse of separation that insists, for example, that "Coloureds" should not "mess around with ... Coolies" (TF 304). This discourse is replaced with the simple proposition that the hybrid "I/i" utters and enacts: these people are "South Africans just like you and

me" (TF 304). The textual construction of a migrant, hybrid identity counters the separatist ideology that underpins a "RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY" political practice. This practice fails, as the autobiography demonstrates, to define or delimit the identity of the young man who re-members the fractured identity negatively defined in the official "Coloured Persons' Rights Bill" of 1926 as "someone *not* a 'Native', Asian *or* European" (Lewis 1987:138, my emphases). Abrahams's autobiographical re-membering reconstitutes an inclusive identity which is redefined as "both, and", and is neither fixed nor finite.

Notes

1. In 1939 Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi's autobiography, in Xhosa, U-Mquayi wasentab'ozuko, was published by Lovedale Press; before this, during the 1920s, Sol T Plaatje wrote The Boer War Diary of Sol T Plaatje: An African at Mafeking, though this was only published in 1973.

2. The Preamble of the Draft Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1993) states that there is "a need to create a new order in which all South Africans will be entitled to a common South African citizenship in a sovereign and democratic constitutional state in which there is equality between men and women and people of all races..."; it goes on to state that "provision should be made for the promotion of national unity and the restructuring and continued governance of South Africa". Document Pack for the Meeting of the Plenary of the Multi-Party Negotiating Process, Nov. 17, 1993, Vol 1V, p.1.

3. The problem of definition has bedevilled critics for decades. See John Povey, "'Non-European' Writing in South Africa", Review of National Literatures 2(2): 66-80. Povey argues that the term "non-European" denotes the "'other' writers of South Africa; neither 'Black' nor 'African' can precisely demark the racial or social affiliations" of what is essentially an "unhomogeneous" group of writers (p.66). See also Tim Couzens, "Criticism of South African Literature", Work in Progress 2: 44-52, where he refers to the "problem of categorisation" in a race-obsessed context (p.51).

4. The Shorter OED defines "dog's body" as a "a sailor's name for dried pease [*sic*] boiled in a cloth"; in keeping with similar instances, the term "dog" is used pejoratively.

5. See J M Coetzee, "Blood, Taint, Flaw, Degeneration: The Novels of Sarah Gertrude Millin", in White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (London: Radix, 1988), pp.136-162, esp. pp.136-137.

6. Gavin Lewis points out in his discussion of coloured political activists in the 1930s, Between the Wire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics (Cape Town: David Philip, 1987), that, while this bourgeois class is an "elite" whose middle-class values are frequently pragmatic and favour reform rather than resistance, it also claims support for the aspirations of the subaltern group or underclass - the "people", or the African masses. Indeed, the Wilcocks Commission of 1934, appointed by Hofmeyr to investigate the conditions of coloureds in the (then) Union of South Africa, found that "while the Coloured elite identified with white standards and values, they strongly sympathised with African grievances" (p.165).

7. This term does not necessarily imply acceptance of a single, chronological and continuous history, a total history from which the critic simply recovers a voice (that of the autobiographer) and enables it to speak. In discussing time and history, Althusser questions "the simple time of continuity ... in which the 'content' is the vacuity of events that occur in it which one later tries to determine with dividing procedures in order to 'periodise' that continuity", Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left, 1970), p.103. Tim Couzens similarly argues in "Criticism of South African Literature" that literary periodisation should not obscure the

complex interaction and overlapping of historical forces at any one time. The pattern of events is not neatly sequential.

8. See John Pampallis, Foundations of the New South Africa (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1991). The "second-class position" of the Afrikaner, economically as well as politically, is identified as the driving force behind the emergence of a "narrowly nationalistic ideology" (p.150).

9. In the 1948 Basic Policy Document of the Youth League of the African National Congress, African Nationalism is defined, *inter alia*, as a "liberatory creed" whose fundamental aim is "the creation of a united nation out of the heterogeneous tribes". See Nelson Mandela, Nelson Mandela: The Struggle is My Life. His Speeches and Writings Brought Together with Historical Documents and Accounts of Mandela in Prison by Fellow-prisoners (London: IDAF, 1986), p.21.

10. See André Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! The Beginnings of Black Protest Politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984).

11. Its Garveyist slogans such as "Africa for the Africans" and "Quit Africa" found their earliest expression in the Ethiopian Church (established 1892) - "the first African mass movement on truly 'national' lines". See Odendaal, Vukani Bantu!, pp.25 & 82-86.

12. The latter were, incidentally, inscribed in the South Africa Act with its clauses relating to the franchise and the colour bar: the first principle of this document was racial exclusivity and the privileging of those of "European descent".

13. Stephen Gray points out in "The Long Eye of History: Four Autobiographical Texts by Peter Abrahams", Pretexts 2(2): 99-115, that, until the Afrikaans-speaking Abrahams adopts English at the age of fifteen, he is a "character called Lee de Ras". With English, "Peter Abrahams" is born (p.114).

14. For a discussion of the origins and effects of racial stereotyping in the South African context, see Vernon A February's "The Stereotype and South African English Literature", in Perspectives on South African English Literature, ed. Chapman *et al* (Parklands: Ad Donker, 1992), pp.314-326, esp. pp.314-316.

15. See Gareth Cornwell, "The Early South African Novel of Race", in Perspectives on South African English Literature, ed. Chapman *et al*, pp.75-93, for a discussion of social Darwinism, a theory based on the "scientific observation of differences between the races [that] resulted in the formulation of biological or natural laws 'proving' the inferiority of the darker races" (p.83).

16. A direct translation is "Peacetown".

17. Indeed, England did not provide Abrahams with the world he desired; it was only later, when he went to live in Jamaica, that he seemed to escape the tyranny of colour.

18. A derogatory term for a young coloured boy.

Chapter 4

THE AMBIVALENT SELF: THE CASE OF ES'KIA MPHAHLELE

> Ambivalence, ambivalence. Always having to maintain equilibrium. You walk with this double personality as colonized man .... The dialogue between the two selves never ends.
> Es'kia Mphahlele

> I say I must speak for a public, an oppressed public. My voice is their voice.
> Es'kia Mphahlele

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the (re)construction of identity in various autobiographical writings of Es'kia Mphahlele, with particular reference to his autobiography of 1959, Down Second Avenue. The second autobiography to be published by a South African who is not "white",[1] Mphahlele's has the distinction of being the first to be written in English by a black South African, one "not of European descent" (Mphahlele 1974:14). Mphahlele's biographer, N Chabani Manganyi, refers to Mphahlele's "confessional streak" (1983:7), and it is this that discourages a reading of Down Second Avenue as a discrete entity, rather than a text that forms part of a corpus of autobiographical writings.[2]

Mphahlele writes and rewrites a life that began at the end of 1919 in Cape Location, Marabastad, a township in Pretoria. He was, he tells us, the first son of "a shop messenger in an outfitters' firm" and "a domestic servant" (DSA 11). His parents are not, until later, named, but rather described in relation to their class-position, as workers, in the slum ghetto outside Pretoria, "a tough Jim Crow town". This "*dorp*" (DSA 102) is capital of the country born of the South Africa Act and the Act of Union in 1910 that was overwhelmingly supported by white South African colonists, and whose terms were

opposed by nearly all "politically conscious" blacks (Odendaal 1984:196). In direct opposition to the formation of Union and the repressive legislation that followed, African nationalists established the South African Native National Congress. Mphahlele was born in the year its Constitution, which called, *inter alia*, for the "elimination of racialism and tribal feuds", and the encouragement "of habits of industry" (Karis & Carter 1972:77), was drawn up. He documents a life pushed and pulled, as he often puts it, by the outer force of racialism and the inner compulsion of industry. In one sense, then, Down Second Avenue is a *bildung*, a narrative of an exceptional life of personal and professional achievement against terrible odds; it is also an *exemplum*, yet one whose very ordinariness makes it a representative tale of suffering and endurance; finally, it is a narrative whose *clef* is the experience of exile and displacement, and the search for home and self.

As in the previous chapter, the counterhegemonic strategies as well as the status of the autobiography will be interrogated and determined. The informing notion in Mphahlele's autobiography is, as in that of Peter Abrahams two years before, the emergence of a hybrid - or, as Mphahlele suggests (1974:34 & 41) - an "ambivalent" self within the particular postcolonial context of urban black South Africa during the 1950s. Mphahlele refers to the "dialogue between the two selves" that is the consequence of colonisation (1974:41): "It all started when Africa was shanghaid into the history of the West in the late nineteenth century" (1973a:121). Mphahlele here anticipates Homi K Bhabha's model of ambivalence which I have appropriated. According to the latter, "identity is never *a priori* nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality". This image, in turn,

> marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split - it

> makes *present* something that is *absent* - and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere, a repetition.
>
> (Bhabha 1994:51)

Bhabha goes on to define this site as an "elliptical *in-between*, where the shadow of the other falls upon the self" (1994:60). The result is a multivocal discourse and a subject constituted by "a repertoire of conflictual positions" (Bhabha 1994:77) (see Chapter Three above).

It is proposed that the dialogic or - more appropriately - multivocalic subject of Mphahlele's autobiographical writing estranges the basis of hegemonic apartheid authority, a fixed, separate, tribal identity. According to Bhabha, colonial discourse, of which apartheid is a variety, depends on "the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (1994:66). Mphahlele thus espouses a counterhegemonic South African discourse where the subject is mixed, impure, and therefore transgressive (see Bhabha 1994:77).

In the year of publication of Down Second Avenue, Mphahlele described his own identity as "part urbanized or only semirural", and argued that "the real story of Africa" is to be found "in our shanty towns; our dark cities" and in the "longings, frustrations, hopes, loves and hates" of those who live there (1957:175). Two years later, in an article tellingly titled "Negro Culture in a Multi-racial Society in Africa", Mphahlele emphasised the "urbanized and therefore detribalized" nature of cultural life in a society whose "multi-racial" character defied the "double stream of cultural life in South Africa" that would legally stop Africans "from listening to or performing Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin" if it could (1959b:223).

A major influence on the formation of African culture during the 1950s was African nationalism, a movement that countered the hegemony of ethnicity and tribalism established as apartheid's divide and rule policy. Mphahlele asserts that

> the three main tribes of South Africa - Basotho, Zulus and Xhosas, have merged to a degree that really annoys and frightens the herrenvolk. We intermarry and speak one another's languages and anybody who still talks tribalism is howled down.
>
> (1959b:224)

Writing in English in a Paris-based journal while teaching in Nigeria, Mphahlele's discourse exemplifies a form of cultural "merging" that subverts the fixed ideology of race that underpinned apartheid's power. Mphahlele astutely recognised the strategic political importance of shunning the "traditional culture" that apartheid saw as a bulwark against "Black nationalism" (1959b:225). Instead, he advances the notion of contaminations and overlappings as a counter-strategy. In a passage that anticipates contemporary postcolonial discourse, Mphahlele describes, as early as 1960, the urban culture of the African writer as "a fugitive culture: borrowing here, incorporating there, retaining this, rejecting that" (1960b:346). The same year, he defines his identity thus: "I am a product of cultural cross-impacts, having lived with whites, Indians and colored [*sic*] people all my life in South Africa" (1960c:11).

However, this fluidity should not obscure a fundamental reality of the colonial world as theorised by Frantz Fanon: this world is characterised by "immobility" (1968:51). In the South African context, apartheid sets up a "division into compartments", where the "native" is "hemmed in", and where the "first thing which a native learns is to stay in his place" (1968:52). Mphahlele refers to the

> so-called Hertzog Bills [that] were the cause for much bitterness among the Africans. We were given a *separate* voters' roll, we could only vote communally for

> white representatives in Parliament and communally for the Native Representative Council (N.R.C.) - a Black Parliament *outside* Parliament. Once and for all residential *segregation* was tightened up by law.
>
> (DSA 138, my emphases)

He goes on to record his own experience of forced removal to a compartmentalised ghetto beyond the boundaries of the colonial *dorp*, thus highlighting the fact that the policy of segregation predated the apartheid legislation of the Nationalist Party. One of the earliest recollections of the young protagonist of Down Second Avenue, Eseki, is of the "curfew bell at the police station peal[ing] '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" (DSA 45). Curfews were an ineffectual means of keeping blacks out of the white world, however, and so other, more efficient measures were eventually introduced. Later in the autobiography, Mphahlele refers to "the approval of the Smuts government, to move Marabastad to Atteridgeville, nine miles out of town", at the same time identifying the pathology of colonialism: "the whites decided they didn't like Black people so near them" (DSA 151).

The post-1948 apartheid blueprint attempted to fix forever the static, separate(d) worlds whose boundaries were guaranteed by legislation flowing from the Population Registration Act No 30 of 1950 (and the establishment of a Race Classification Board). Subsequent legislation included the Group Areas Act no 41 of 1950, the Separate Representation of Voters Act No 46 of 1951, the Bantu Education Act No 47 of 1953, and the Urban Bantu Councils Act No 79 of 1961.[3] The physical separation of races was reinforced by social and political separation, as a vast apparatus was devised to keep the "natives" in their place.

Furthermore, apartheid was underpinned by notions of racial inferiority[4] and absolute racial and cultural difference that had their origins in the previous era of Union. In his autobiography, Coolie Location, set in the Asiatic Bazaar section of Mphahlele's Marabastad, Jay Naidoo records a lesson in eugenics or "race-studies" introduced by the "educational authorities [who] esteem that South Africa is a country of many races" where "innate" differences exist between the European and "the Native, whose level of civilisation is still juvenile" (Naidoo 1990:43). Indeed, Jan Smuts explained the aim of the "native policy" of South Africa as follows: "to foster an indigenous native culture or system of cultures, and to cease to force the African into alien European moulds" (quoted in Dubow 1987:84).

Such theories of race and culture persisted in the decades that followed[5]: "*Soveel volke wat daar is, soveel kulture bestaan daar*" ("There are as many cultures as there are peoples/nations", quoted in Thornton 1988:17). This kind of definition is a "statement of identity" (Thornton 1988:18) whose development flowed from and led to an increasingly obsessive concern to establish limits and boundaries (1988:22-23). The latter are, however, nothing more than social constructs, and while boundaries do, indeed, exist, and are closely connected to identity (racial, class, and ethnic),

> [t]hese identities overlap and often conflict with each other. They almost never correspond with other identities, however, in a way that would justify the belief that each "people" has a uniquely different culture.
>
> (Thornton:1988:27)

The apartheid dream of absolute separation proved chimerical in the face of industrialisation and urbanisation. Moreover, political groupings apart from the ANC were advancing theories of South African nationhood that contradicted the hegemonic

one. In 1951, the Non-European Unity Movement claimed:

> The nation consists of the people who were born in South Africa and who have no other country but South Africa as their mother-land [*sic*]. They may have been born with a black skin or with a brown one, a yellow one or a white one ... they may be ... straight-haired or curly-haired; they may have long noses or broad noses; they may speak Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, English or Afrikaans, Hindi, Urdu or Swahili, Arabic or Jewish .... In a nation it is not necessary that the people forming it should have a common language or a common culture, common customs and traditions.
>
> (Karis & Carter 1973:495)

The fluid urban realities of places like Marabastad and Sophiatown, with its "race-class nexus" (Gready 1990:141) and "dynamic hybrid of English" (1990:145) subverted the apartheid dream, creating in its stead an emergent non-tribal culture" in a new urban space with an "inter-racial frontier" (1990:148). Places like Marabastad in Pretoria, Sophiatown in Johannesburg, and District Six in Cape Town produced individuals with dynamic identities and demonstrated the inclination of culture to

> cross national boundaries, [and] defy the *police* action of simple dogma and loud patriotism. Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more "foreign" elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude.
>
> (Said: 1993:15)

Mphahlele's autobiography inscribes defiance of imposed group areas and rigid race classification. Indeed, the alienation of the protagonist, his sense of homelessness, both within and outside of South Africa is the consequence of living a "fugitive" life in a postcolonial context where he is forced by expedience to "borrow" and "incorporate" (Mphahlele 1960b:346). This context is, in short, one of

> massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences - of women, of Westerners, of Blacks, of national states and cultures.
>
> (Said 1993:36)

There are important implications for writing. Mphahalele described African literature

written in English as

> a vehicle of communication among ourselves across diverse cultural and ethnic boundaries [that enables self-discovery through] ... an understanding of the meeting point between imitation and innovation; the meeting point between two cultures....
>
> (1973b:38)[6]

Mphahlele here anticipates the discourse of postcolonial theory in his emphasis on liminality and in-betweenness, the crossing of boundaries, and the convergence or meeting point of cultures. There are also, however, important implications for the definition of identity.

Rediscovering "I AM"

As argued above (Chapter Two), black autobiography is concerned to claim both identity and the historical being[7] of the subject: "I AM". Mphahlele, however, qualifies the latter: the "rediscovered 'I AM'" is the product of a prior act of discovery: "The rediscovery of the self should be through the rediscovery of one's community, the recognition of 'WE ARE'" (1983a:16). What Mphahlele asserts elsewhere, with regard to poetry, is true also for autobiography: "The 'I' is 'we', the 'me' is 'us'" (1973a:7). Such acts of rediscovering and naming the (communal) self, claiming identity, and thus entering history as a subject rather than an object, are central to the process of writing the self and, indeed, of reconstructing a new national identity.

In his essay, "A Question of Identity", Lewis Nkosi, (Mphahlele's contemporary and colleague on Drum magazine), identifies colonial conquest as the event that produced the category, "African" (1983:30). Reacting to the "alienness as well as exclusiveness" of colonial power, the peoples or tribes of Africa "began to define themselves *consciously*

as other;[8] that is to say, as Africans". The term "African" depends for its meaning on its opposite, "European", a heteronymous category that is unstable, fluctuating. African identity is therefore not a fixed essence but is characterised, instead, by "fluidity and lack of permanence, the overlapping of images, and the blurring of categories" (Barnett 1976:112). One of Mphahlele's foremost critics and biographers, Ursula Barnett, here marshalls the vocabulary of contemporary postcolonial theory, unwittingly perhaps articulating notions that inform the criticism of Bhabha, for example, who projects a world characterised by "hybridity" and "in-betweenness", a "culture in permanent transition and incompleteness" (Eagleton 1994:38). Mphahlele's writings inscribe these features of postcoloniality and enable the deployment of postmodernist insights that deny fixed oppositions (such as that of Colonial self/African other).

The dislocating experience of exile recorded in The Wanderers results in a process of self-realisation: "[Exile] has led to a disorientation in my own self, and it has led to discoveries in other territories and a realization of myself" (quoted in Barnett 1976:147). This process denies a closed African identity, and it is as an expatriate that Mphahlele insists that the quest for a universal African identity is a futile one. During this period he displaces the notion of the "African personality" originally coined by Edward Blyden in the nineteenth century to denote a "collective personality of black men throughout the world" based on the "physical ... disposition" and having a "racial connotation" (Irele 1990:90). While he concedes the historical necessity of Negritude as a phase "to restore [the African's] sense of dignity that colonization ... undermined" (1973a:138), he rejects "the assumption of one's blackness as the external mark of an original and fundamental identity" (1973a:70). This is because of apartheid's exploitation of the "external mark" of

blackness: "my body itches from the number of labels that have been stuck on me!" (1963:82). Accordingly, Mphahlele eschews the binarist logic of Léopold Sédar Senghor, "father" of the Negritude philosophy: "'I think, therefore I am', wrote Descartes, the European *par excellence*. 'I feel, I dance the other' the Negro-African would say" (quoted in Irele 1990:77).

Mphahlele argues that the concept of the African Personality should be informed by the experience of the "African as he is, of what is happening to him" (1974:70) in an urban culture where Africa and the West overlap (1963:82). In other words, the daily practices and official procedures of colonial existence produce the dialogic identity of the indigene:

> the real African personality is a dialogue of two selves. A dialogue between two streams of consciousness: the present and the living past. We realize it is an ever-changing personality.
>
> (Mphahlele 1974:70)

Mphahlele goes on to acknowledge the political necessity of the notion of African Personality "with a capital 'P'" (1974:70) thus demonstrating the strategic theorising frequently resorted to by the anti-imperialist or third-world theorist. This is, incidentally, an insight that explains Mphahlele's propagation, on his homecoming in 1977, of the term "African", a term to "be understood in a cultural sense" (1979a:5) rather than a racial one. He returned to a country whose continuing official obsession with ethnicity was to culminate in the Constitution Act of 1983 that prevented blacks - Africans - from determining their destinies.

Mphahlele re-names and simultaneously re-claims an identity that apartheid continued to believe it could erase, by military, constitutional and linguistic means. In this context,

Mphahlele's demand, "We want to be known as Africans" (1983b:12) is a particularly cogent one. It is, moreover, a demand that eschews the crude rhetorical power of an immutable African essence and constitutes a repudiation of the Garveyite call to "return", of an "Africa [outside of historical time] for [an unproblematised category] the Africans". Instead, Mphahlele acknowledges two important things: first, the hybridity of African culture, "a synthesis of ethnic idioms and therefore not stagnant, fixed in a museum cage" (1979a:5), and the duality that characterises the postcolonial African self: "All the colonized people of the world have two selves; the indigenous self over which has been superimposed Western culture" (1983a:16).

The process of restoration in relation to the disinherited self is by way of decolonization. In 1979 Mphahlele encouraged Africans to re-discover their "cultural roots". He exhorted them: "Let us turn into ourselves. Let us re-educate, re-discover ourselves. We have to read widely, intelligently...." (1979a:5). He later elaborated on this process, which was not a quest for lost origins but rather a

> *synthesis* between the rediscovered "I AM" and the best that the environment can yield .... The rediscovery of the self should be through the rediscovery of one's community, the recognition of "WE ARE".
>
> (1983a:16, my emphasis)

The emphasis on merging, conscious selection, and on contemporaneity - the here and now of being - suggests the flux and fluidity that is an essential aspect of decolonisation.

Mphahlele's rejection of race as an essential determinant underlies the claim expressed as early as 1967 by the narrator (a thinly-disguised Mphahlele) of his short story, "A Point of Identity": "Left to ourselves, we should speak of *Africans*, whether 'Coloured', 'White', 'Indian' or 'Negro'" (1967a:62). In the same year, however, Mphahlele advocated that

"cultural alignment with Africans and other non-whites" be a condition for whites being designated "African", though he expresses the hope that "the word African will one day be recognised as one that anybody can rightly claim who is born in Africa and has no other home to look for" (1962:8). The entrenchment of apartheid compelled Mphahlele to acknowledge twelve years later that the status, "African", was inappropriate for the broad category of whites who had chosen not to become "culturally natives of Africa", and who had "still to earn this affiliation" (1974:14). Mphahlele is here, as always, aware of the strategic value of language and subject-position in the context of identity-politics.

Over a period of some three decades, Mphahlele's writing inscribes the problematic relationship between language, identity and power. This is clear from the shifting terminology he uses to denote identity in a context where race is the overwhelming factor. In 1955 he uses the term "African" (1955:6); a year later, probably because of institutional strictures, the term "Non-European" is employed in his M A dissertation title. In 1957, (writing under the pseudonym "Naledi"), he refers to the "Non-White Character" (1957:11), and in the same year the somewhat peculiar "South African Negro" is used in the French journal, Présence Africaine, probably to satisfy international readers. From 1957, the terms "African" and "Black" recur as examples of linguistic reclamation of identity beyond the borders of apartheid.[9] In one interesting instance, Mphahlele asserts his own peculiar difference or "otherness" in the context of pan-African ideology by defining himself simply as "A South African in Nigeria" (1959c:99).

In short, far from betraying nostalgia for a lost "indigenous self", Mphahlele's writings inscribe the historical consciousness of postcolonial Africa. Thus, he proclaims, "I am a

violent person and proud of it" as he goes on to acknowledge Africa's own history of "plunder", "rape" and violence: "The image of Africa consists of all these and others" (1963:83). Elsewhere, he admits, "Africa is not an innocent continent" (1973a:137). He is, clearly, fully conscious of the experience of lack, and the precarious ontology of postcolonial Africans, "a people who stand alienated from our indigenous self and yet do not share the life of Western man who is holding us as spiritual hostages" (1983a:16).

From this ontology of desire emerges an identity of in-betweenness, a collective, metonymic "I/i" continually renewing itself in the liminal spaces produced by colonialism.[10] The central character of Mphahlele's autobiographical novel, The Wanderers, Timi Tabane, concludes that while "human cultures have stone walls" (1984a:247), there are also crevices in the walls of enclaves. Timi therefore advises:

> Take your chances. But what are we seeking when we enter through the crevices? How can we be sure? Maybe humanity must flow like water that cannot leave a crevice unflooded. Woe unto those whose crevices are few, or who don't have any. (1984a:248)

Postcolonial identity is produced in the "crevices" or interstices that exist at the margins of intersecting cultures, and it is at these weak spots that, paradoxically, an identity emerges that is "full" or flooded, and therefore human. It is, moreover, the product of "a situation in which the past and the present live side by side, because the past is not just a segment in time to think *back* upon: we can see it in living communities" (1973a:128), for again, "[t]radition lives alongside the present, and so we the writers commute between these worlds" (1973a:144). Here, Mphahlele again anticipates Bhabha, this time his notion of the "projective past" of postcoloniality (1994:254). Identity is thus the product of the unique temporal and spatial conditions of postcolonialism, and like that of Senghor, Mphahlele's own writing represents an identity produced at the "meeting point

of Europe and Africa" (1973a:166).

While postcolonial identity is produced by the irruption of colonialism into traditional societies, it is also, in the South African context, the product of apartheid legislation. In his short story, "A Point of Identity" (1967), Mphahlele dramatises a situation where the light-complexioned Karel Almeida rejects the race theories of apartheid. The narrator contends

> "But you *are* Negro, Karel. You as good as said so yourself often. You came to live with us blacks because you felt purity of blood was just lunatic nonsense, didn't you?"
>
> (1967a: 68-69)

For reasons of expedience, however, Karel betrays his identity and his family, eventually falling victim to the Mixed Marriages Act and the Group Areas Act which force him from his wife, his home, and the culture that has nurtured him. Though his identity is officially fixed as follows,

> NAME: KAREL BENITO ALMEIDA
> RACE: COLOURED (1967a:78),

this "identity" - Mphahlele speaks elsewhere of "the silly name 'colored' [*sic*] (1974:14) - is as durable as the identity card that Karel's common-law wife tears to bits. Time and again, Mphahlele's writing rejects the manufactured identities of colonialism/apartheid, identities that have no basis in reality: "It is always annoying to read of 'Zulus' or 'Basuto' or 'Xhosas' in South African fiction, because both culturally and politically these ethnic groupings are unreal" (1974:190).

It is against this background that Mphahlele's autobiographical writing will be read. As previously contended (see Chapter Two above), autobiography that is counterhegemonic

sets up a self, an ambivalent "I/i" that declares its historical being ("I AM") and simultaneously contradicts the ideology of separation, apartness and inferiority. In place of the fixed identity imposed on the indigene, the autobiographer constructs a plural self that is, paradoxically, the "heterogeneous and heteronomous [*sic*]" (Lionnet 1989:8) product of colonialism itself. It is precisely the ambivalence, the "ambiguity and multiplicity" (1989:16) of the postcolonial self that Mphahlele's "I/i" encodes in his autobiographical writing. This phenomenon is lucidly demonstrated in Down Second Avenue, which forms the focus of the rest of this chapter.

Putting Together the Pieces

Early reviews of Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue - such as that of William Plomer - stress the writer's struggle against apartheid and the evolution of the self.[11] While "[a]utobiographies in Africa" may indeed - if somewhat crudely - be summed up as "the black man's search for direction within the new world created by the white man's presence in Africa" (Ogungbesan: 1973:8), some, like Mphahlele's Down Second Avenue are interesting for their deconstruction of notions such as "the black man", and their critique of the quest identified by Ogungbesan. In Mphahlele's autobiography, the *autos* (the "black man") collapses in upon itself, disparate "pieces" of a *bios* whose logic is a "jumble" (DSA). Early reviewers, this time focusing on form, equated literary value with unity and coherence, and criticised the autobiography's lack of "structure and cohesion" (Russel 1960:92). Others, reading with Humanist spectacles, praised the autobiographer for succeeding in recreating "the wholeness of personal identity" (Anderson 1970:401).

However, Mphahlele's autobiography subverts the conventional notions that underpin

such criticism. Instead of a linear narrative controlled by an autonomous, self-defining subject, Down Second Avenue represents a ruptured narrative and a fragmented, ambivalent "I/i". This entity is comprised of "[t]wo selves - the indigenous consciousness and the consciousness derived from western civilization" (Mphahlele 1974:281). However, far from being disabled by its multiple, mutant identity, the subject speaks a multivocalic narrative that subverts both the official identity foisted upon it, as well as the myth or "story" that has officially been constructed as a justification for apartheid. It is this paradoxical, ambivalent entity that defiantly declares, "I AM/WE ARE".

It is instructive to turn to Mphahlele's observations regarding Peter Abrahams's schoolboy verse. He recalls Abrahams's poetic celebration of blackness in the tradition of Marcus Garvey: "I remember now how morose the verse was: straining to justify and glorify the dark complexion with the I'm-black-and-proud-of-it theme" (DSA 128). Indeed, given the "either/or" - in Abrahams's case, the "neither/nor" - logic of official race classification, it was predictable that Abrahams would reject the classification "coloured" and embrace instead (however briefly) the Africanism of Marcus Garvey. Mphahlele's recollection of Abrahams at St Peter's College is more than a little satiric. By representing a desperate Abrahams attempting to assume a "black" or African identity, Mphahlele distances himself from the quest for identity through the valorisation of blackness. He implies, moreover, that Africans such as himself had neither access to nor the need for theories that "justify and glorify the dark complexion": "I remember him vividly talking about Marcus Garvey, taking it for granted we must know about him" (DSA 128).

Mphahlele implicitly detects - and rejects - in Abrahams what Fanon identified as the "internalization" or "epidermalization" of inferiority (Fanon 1986:13).[12] He detects in Abrahams's writing the need to "justify himself" (DSA 195), to legitimise his being in a racial context of denial and denigration. This need expressed itself, as Mphahlele suggests, in two related though contradictory ways: on the one hand, the claiming of a black identity, and on the other, his transgression of the colour bar. According to Mphahlele, Abrahams needed "to show the white man that he was equal to him" (DSA 128) in order, perhaps, to satisfy his "tragic longing for socially forbidden things" (DSA 195).

While there are traces of self-justification in Mphahlele's own writing, it is the purpose of the present argument to demonstrate that the particular power of Down Second Avenue lies, first, in the hybrid, ambivalent "I/i" that counters the ideology of separateness and separation and, second, in the representation of a rich and complex postcolonial culture of "borrowing here, incorporating there" (1960b:346) that erodes the basis of apartheid. Like that of Abrahams before it, Mphahlele's autobiography chronologically documents the *bios* of the protagonist to the point where he goes into exile. Mphahlele's narrative is, however, interrupted by five "Interludes" and concludes with an Epilogue that simultaneously signals a new beginning in the protagonist's life. The Interludes disrupt the sense of the "pastness" of the narrative through the immediacy of the stream-of-consciousness technique:

> Saturday night. Darkness. Sounds of snoring from my uncle in the corner. Like the muted lowing of a cow. Tomorrow the other uncle sleeping with him on the floor will complain that he had been roused from his sleep by the snoring. My younger brother doesn't stir beside me. (DSA 44)

The collective effect of these structuring devices is to contradict the notion of closure and fixity in relation to the narrative as well as the consciousness and identity of the speaking subject.

Questions relating to identity and narrative in Down Second Avenue are explicitly dealt with in N Chabani Manganyi's biography of Mphahlele, Exiles and Homecomings (the title of which recalls Lewis Nkosi's Home and Exile, with its own preoccupations with postcolonial identity). Mphahlele refers to himself as "ME and MYSELF, I and he, Ezekiel Mphahlele and Es'kia Mphahlele" (Manganyi 1983:288) in a way that emphasises the self-reflexive, constructed nature of a self that has a multiple identity, an "I/i". It may, furthermore, be argued that the autobiographer's intimate collaboration in the writing of his own biography results, first, in the self becoming other (Smith 1987a:7), and also in the disturbance of the relationship between "narrator, self-narrator, and narrated self, and the relationship of history and fiction" (1987a:7). It is an interesting fact that, in June, 1979, two years after his return from exile, Mphahlele formally renamed himself, symbolically sloughing off the previous selves acquired in the northern hemisphere, re-inventing himself with an overtly political purpose. He changed his name from (the Americanised) "Zeke"[13] to "Es'kia", "to make his name 'sound African'" and because it was the name of his youth, "an abridged version of Esekiah, the name of Ezekiel in the Lesotho Bible" (Nichols 1984: asterisk note on p. 20). These name-changes are, obviously, loaded with ideological contradictions, yet at the same time they display the insolent confidence of postcolonial appropriation, particularly in the "answering back" that the name "Esekiah" demonstrates.

At the same time, the voice of Mphahlele's selves is metonymic, representative: "I say I must speak for a public, an oppressed public. My voice is their voice" (1974:82). It needs to be emphasised, however, that, some twenty-five years after the publication of Down Second Avenue, Mphahlele clearly stated the main motivation behind his autobiographical writings as a "search for self" (Manganyi 1983:289). This search has as its object the individual self that is Ezekiel, Eseki, Zeke, Es'kia. Yet, central to this search is the communal self denoted by "Mphahlele", which is to say the Mphahleles of "Mphahlele-country" (an area that was incorporated into the Lebowa homeland) (1983:33). The patronymic denotes the "tribe" of the father that he lost as a child - and, indeed, the "tribe" that was lost to him. The only constant in Mphahlele's questing, transforming self is, paradoxically, the fluctuating elusiveness of this self as it constantly re-invents itself.[14] The important consequence for the purpose of the present argument is that this multivalent "I/i" negates the notion of identity as a fixed essence and thus radically subverts the crude racial and ethnic categories manufactured by apartheid.

Rewriting the Self

Mphahlele described the autobiographical task in Down Second Avenue as the difficult, perhaps futile, one of putting together the pieces of his life - what Bhabha terms "re-membering". As suggested above, Mphahlele was to continue the process of piecing together his life in the decades that followed. The intertextual, ongoing nature of Mphahlele's autobiographical writings invites the critic to read Down Second Avenue against and in tandem with Mphahlele's later "rewriting" or re-telling of his self and life-history to Manganyi in Exiles and Homecomings (1983). The latter may be read as a paradoxical "un-telling" of the earlier autobiography: the truth-value of the earlier

narrative is both confirmed and eroded as "gaps" are filled, while the authenticity of the self is, through the process of being reconstituted, both subverted and supported. Of particular relevance to the present argument, however, is that Mphahlele's stated "ambivalence" evolves into a "multivalence". This amounts to a potent literary displacement of official identity - an identity that undergoes its own ideological evolution from "Native" to "Bantu" to "Plural" to "Black",[15] though always within a paradigm of racial difference and distinctness.

The problem encountered in Mphahlele's narration of the self is identified by Keith Shear as follows:

> If the "I" of Maupaneng and the "I" of Marabastad and beyond are only imperfectly reconciled, this is attributed to the existential bluntness of rural life. (1989:46)

Shear demonstrates this duality by citing Mphahlele's depiction of a traditional, pre-modern Maupaneng where the purpose of existence is exemplified by "country boys" whose aim is simply "to be" (Shear 1989:46) (DSA 18). Mphahlele's experience of this period is of "time wasted", without "a definite pattern" (DSA 18). Clearly, Mphahlele's self-reflexivity, his profound sense of homelessness and alienation, locate him within a paradigm that is distinctly postmodern. His shifting, ironic position underlines his dislocation from the self of Maupaneng village.

It is from the perspective of exile and the return from exile that this child-self is re-viewed a quarter-century later, as Ezekiel/Zeke/Es'kia reconstructs Eseki/Es'kia/Ezekiel of another time and place. A post-Zeke self resumes the name of his erstwhile self, as the *autos* attempts by linguistic sleight to close the gap between himself and the

protagonist of his narrative, reconstructing the self of 1957 in his attempt to salvage meaning from the Maupaneng experience:

> Was it indeed ever a waste of time to have lived and experienced the life I lived at Maupaneng? Is any personal experience of whatever description ever completely meaningless? Needless to say, my earlier conclusions about my childhood in the North are now questionable.
>
> (Manganyi 1983:37)

The above constitutes an act of re-membering, reconstruction with a deeply political purpose, in a situation where the assault on the African self and African culture and history had reached a nadir. This is why the writing of Es'kia Mphahlele in 1983 restores a sense of *ubuntu* (common humanity), reinstating the "trust in the basic benevolence of life" (Manganyi 1983:37) that the earlier autobiography denied. He salvages meaning, as well, from the experiences around the "communal fire-place", attributing to these the "ruggedness of fibre that was a prelude to [his] early independence of spirit" (1983:37). The latter is re-writing with a conscious purpose in an entirely different political context, with a different reading public in mind (Manganyi refers explicitly to Mphahlele's "engagement with Black life in South Africa" (1983:5)), as he un-tells and re-tells his life. Manganyi correctly warns the reader that "too great a willingness for self-disclosure is in some instances a defence against self-revelation. It is a psychological manoeuvre that pre-empts scrutiny" (1983:6). And what is under scrutiny is Mphahlele's relationship with traditional culture and history; to a black intellectual in the post-BC years of the early 1980s, this culture and history may well have been something of an ideological mine-field.

Down Second Avenue commences by foregrounding the distance between the writing self, the urban exile, and the self that is written, the rural child. At the same time the writing

self pre-empts the possibility of the contract binding reader to *autos*, or at least undermines the basis of such a contract, by starting with the disclaimer, "I have never known why" (he and his siblings were taken from home to Maupaneng, (DSA 11), even though the narrative goes on to make it quite clear that his parents' poverty was the reason). The subsequent claims, "I remember", and "[t]hings stand out clearly in my mind from those years" (DSA 11) merely emphasise the contradiction, the *aporia* in the text, and prepare the reader for the gaps and slippages that follow as the *autos* reconstructs a self, or selves, from the fragments, the "pieces", that memory - and forgetting - furnish.

The discontinuity of Mphahlele's interconnected, overlapping worlds occurs in both the temporal and the spatial spheres. He states:

> Tradition lives alongside the present, and so we the writers commute between these worlds. We want to reflect our immediate present in foreign languages so as to reach a wider audience, and in one way or another we feel the desperate need to come to terms with an ever present past.
>
> (1973a:144)

There is an ironic significance in Mphahlele's naming of the first chapter of Down Second Avenue, "The Tribe". Like Abrahams's Tell Freedom, Mphahlele's narrative starts at a kind of beginning, his recollection of life with his paternal grandmother in the tribal village of Maupaneng. The chronological structure is an attempt to achieve verisimilitude. However, since Mphahlele's autobiography is, like that of Abrahams, assigned a political function, what Fanon refers to as the "clotted" and "contingent" aspects of the narrated life assume a special importance: "the tragedy of the man is that he was once a child" (Fanon 1986:231). So, in the case of the black child living in South Africa during the 1920s there is nothing innocent about the events that determine his life and take him back to "the tribe".

The clotted details of Mphahlele's experiences at Maupaneng, together with the destabilising effect of the child's powerlessness, his subjection to a bewildering contingency, establish the fulcrum of an identity that whirls and swings as it is pulled and pushed by forces invisible and uncontrollable. "I remember feeling quite lost" (DSA 11), states the young exile from Marabastad, as he comes "home" to the tribe. It is here, Mphahlele later tells us, that he learns about "African traditions and customs" (Manganyi 1983:32). The writer's perspective is one of alienation, however, as, in the final pages, the writing self acknowledges: "Your tribal umbilical cord had long, oh so long, been severed" (DSA 203). Mphahlele's consciousness of this severance colours his portrayal of the child's experiences; indeed, the latter cast a somewhat ironic light on Mphahlele's assertion, some twenty-five years later, that the "rediscovery of the self should be through the rediscovery of one's community, the recognition of 'WE ARE'" (1983a:16).

Mphahlele does not portray his childhood experiences as an idyll, or himself as trailing clouds of glory. In a devastating contradiction of the tenet advanced by autobiographer Jason Jingoes, "Everybody remembers his childhood as a golden time" (quoted in Shear 1989:47), Mphahlele depicts a time where the rural landscape is a prison-house that hems him into an existence where his grandmother (the bearer of traditional culture and an ironic reversal of the beloved *gogo* of much African writing)[16] is the terrifying prison-guard:

> 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. (DSA 11)

This is a place of violence and pain where "the rod" (DSA 12), the "lash" and the "stick" enforce "tyranny" (DSA 13). It is represented as not essentially different from the other

oppressive world that the child will soon encounter: that of Pretoria's white policemen, bullies, and madams bordering on the slumland it oversees and exploits.

The moments of pleasure in Chapter One are presented in a conventional, almost formulaic manner: "I was happy", he states, "with the goats" (DSA 11-12), and "rather enjoyed" working in the fields (DSA 12), while hunting hares "was fun" (DSA 13). They do little to dispel the pervasive atmosphere of *anomie* and unhappiness that establishes, *ab initio*, Mphahlele's sense of alienation from traditional tribal life, from his rural roots. This chapter radically questions the assumptions of apartheid regarding the desirability and authenticity of the tribal cultural heritage it sought to establish as the place and provenance (in reality, the starving "homeland" ghetto) of people like himself. Mphahlele barely conceals the disgust he feels towards this rural place populated by a broken tribe, a people dependent on the pitiful salaries of demoralised urban workers (neither of grandmother's daughters, both of whom work in Pretoria, has a husband to support her children (DSA 11)). The *anomie* continues into the following chapter, overpowering images of the communal fireplace and the transmission of oral history by Old Segone and the elders, by means of images of rural filth, poverty and ignorance that together contribute to the "nightmare of those years in Pietersburg" (DSA 20).

The *autos* of the opening chapter prefigures what Mphahlele was, years later, to call the "ever-changing", "real African personality", whose dialogic character is constructed by and within "a dialogue of two selves", "between two streams of consciousness: the present and the living past" (Mphahlele 1974:70). In thus re-membering his childhood, he also dismembers the tribal identity that officialdom foists upon him. This is clearly evident in

the description of the relationship between the Christians and the heathens across the symbolic divide of the Leshoana river. The space the people inhabit is an in-between one that invites transgression. He was later to describe his experience here as one of "shifting gears all the time, responding and moving from one cultural stream to another" (Manganyi 1983:34).

The ambivalence of Mphahlele's position *vis à vis* Christianity, the powerful, ambiguous symbol of colonial conquest, is evident in a telling textual contradiction. The *autos* achieves a distancing effect in the reference to "The Christians", though the description two paragraphs later where Eseki states "*they* [the heathens] thought *we* had no right to know the secrets of *their* creed" (DSA 14, my emphases) sets up an opposition between a Christian self and a heathen other. However, the text records the overlapping of the two communities in the Christians' respect for the witches, and the hospitality that the "kraal communities" show towards the former. The text's inscription of Mphahlele's ambivalence is deepened in his recording of what amounts to his own initiation rite into traditional culture when he breaks the Christian taboo and eats baboon flesh with the heathens.

The writing self inscribes the collision of powerful Christian influences with life under oppression, a collision that causes him to repudiate Christianity (DSA 179-180). This eventually results in a massive internal conflict: "forces ... were tearing inside me" DSA 179). The textual inscription of the conflicting "forces" is established in the first chapter of the autobiography. The narrative tactic of allowing the Christian elders the privileged status of having the final word in the Chapter, only to have Old Segone assert defiantly

the enduring power of traditional belief within a Christian framework, is typical of the ambivalence that structures the narrative as well as the identity of the narrator: "we all have our secret little gods, Christians or none" (DSA 14).

Mphahlele's text demonstrates the characteristic hybridity of the postcolonial condition. His sketch of the overlappings and interconnections between the Christian and heathen communities exemplifies the phenomenon of "'denied' knowledges enter[ing] upon the dominant discourse and estrang[ing] the basis of its authority" (Bhabha 1994:114). The latter occurs within traditional and Christian systems, while Mphahlele's own discourse amounts to a "denied knowledge", of the fact of cultural interchange and exchange, within the rigid categories set up by the dominant racist and separatist discourse of the 1950s.

There is a clearly political purpose in Mphahlele's telling of young Eseki's eager desertion of rural Maupaneng for the city. As pointed out, the writing self acknowledges the severance of the "tribal umbilical cord" and rejects the notion of a return to traditional culture, and "all the talk about Bantu culture and the Black man developing along his own lines" as "tommy rot" (DSA 203). The description of Eseki takes place against the background of officially-sanctioned "Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg" fiction, and, worse, state-supported publishing of literature that generally "portrays a non-white character who comes to the city, [and] shows him up as a wretched picture of frustration" (1959b:226). Mphahlele discerns the purpose of this literary representation that advocates the return to the rural areas as a means of ideological manipulation to support the influx control laws that were soon instituted to regulate the movement of Africans to the cities. The

political context sharpens the effect of Mphahlele's dismissal in his autobiography of "non-Christians" who "didn't seem to like change" and preferred to "stay where their ancestors lived" (DSA 23).

The narrative proceeds to construct a self that functions to subvert the ideological basis of the stereotypical "native". After a symbolic washing and donning of new clothes, Eseki accompanies his mother, leaving behind the "dusty road" of Maupaneng (DSA 24) as he reaches the "bright lights" of Pietersburg station (DSA 23) before he "dived into slum life" (DSA 24). The ambiguity of the verb "dived", together with the metaphor of the "springboard" in his mention of Second Avenue constitutes a significant contradiction in a text that apparently sets out to describe the descent into poverty and degradation that is life in Marabastad, as suggested in the preposition of the title, Down Second Avenue. It is, after all, his entry into "time" in the township that signals his coming to a new kind of consciousness and being. This is partly achieved by means of the detailed recollections of "the first emotional crisis of [his] life", his father's violence in the "pot of curry episode" that was to haunt him beyond Second Avenue (Manganyi 1983:41).

Eseki/Mphahlele's identity formation is linked to his severance from his father and from tradition, or the law of the father. This severance is achieved in the stark assertion, "I hated my father" (DSA 26), and the plain statement of fact, "That was the last time I ever saw my father, that summer of 1932" (DSA 28), after the court sentence. This is followed by a significant bonding with the "grand old ladies" of the township whose "resilience and ruggedness of character ... mapped out some new paths" for the boy to follow (Manganyi 1983:41).

These "new paths" are accompanied by new myths. Mphahlele re-writes the image of the stern mimosa tree associated with his paternal grandmother: in Marabastad, Hibila "presided over the homestead like a big spreading tree". She represents the resilience of a hybrid plant since she is "a consummate combination of the toughness associated with the rural peasantry and the defiant cheek of the semi-literate grand old ladies of African townships" (Manganyi 1983:41). Such a representation departs radically from the traditional, patriarchal mythmaking process that Abrahams's autobiography illustrates. Mphahlele sets up alternative myths: the first is that of a new township culture and identity where there is "an inner culture in the making, a kind of patchwork" (Manganyi 1983:42). The second, related myth is that of matriarchy.

The autobiography is a celebration of various, varied women, his stoical grandmother, Hibila, the matriarch, and resourceful Aunt Dora, and is dedicated to four women, each a force that shaped, influenced and encouraged him.[17] No longer the disdainful self of Maupaneng ("one felt disgraced by having to stay at home with women and girls" (DSA 15)), Eseki at thirteen becomes the defiant women's accomplice in their illegal home industry of beer-brewing.[18] It is the women's beer business that is instrumental in the liberation from rural ignorance and township poverty. Mphahlele notes: "She [grandmother] did send three of her sons to high school and a teacher-training institution" (DSA 43). The narrator's flat tone here may be attributable to his later experiences under Bantu Education: the opportunities opened by the women's hard work, courage and defiance were summarily shut.

The author's re-membering in Down Second Avenue is an integral aspect of a painful

dismembering: neither the myth of the tribe (the "return"), nor of the father (genealogy), structures this narrative that seeks other ways to "tell" the self in an act of both literary and cultural reclamation. Mphahlele himself later claimed that formal education, the "peer group", as well as the collective and communal "wisdom of the people" in an urban environment contend with patriarchal and traditional authority (Manganyi 1983:42). Mphahlele's re-membering counters also the hegemonic myth of racial superiority and difference by deconstructing the ideology that interpellates the child's consciousness. It does this, first, by registering the psychological effects on Eseki of the power of the white police in the repetition of the word "big". The child conflates brute power and race, an experience that is repeated throughout the autobiography. Its final expression is just before Ezekiel leaves for Lagos: "And still the wings of the giant bird of power continued to beat about me" (DSA 209). In the same way as Eseki experiences the obliteration of his identity when he is named "bastard", and "son of a stinking Kaffir" (DSA 42), so, as a man, Ezekiel must suffer the arrogance of "*die groot baas*" (DSA 209). Compounded, these experiences of lack and loss result in sense of being "weak, inferior, ignorant, self-conscious" (DSA 46), feelings that persist into adulthood, when "[t]he feel of it hurt deep" (DSA 209).

The narrator's task is to reconstruct the metonymic identity of the protagonist: Eseki must bring to fulfilment the story that his mother begins about himself: "Mother says my child when you're grown up when you're big...." (DSA 46). However, his route is not, as already suggested, to be the traditional one. This is signalled in various ways, such as Eseki's realisation of the inefficacy of Mathebula's herbs in the location (DSA 46). The displacement of the master-narrative by the story of Ezekiel Mpahahlele and Marabastad

does not constitute an-"other" authoritative narrative that merely mirrors that of colonialism/apartheid.

Developing trends established in the opening chapters, Mphahlele's counter-narrative constructs a non-traditional heterogeneous commonalty in an urban slum that fosters the complex identity, the multiple selves that nullify the hegemonic myth of separate and single identities. Marabastad itself is a place of contradictions, of class and race differences: Ma-Janeware, who is "[b]lack as soot herself [and] ... claimed to be from Lourenço Marques and widow of a Portuguese trader" (DSA 30), distances herself from the community by referring to them as "you Blacks", producing them as her "other". There is also "the man who boasted a Coloured wife, Gertie, and a large brood of uppity children" (DSA 32), yet whose boast is nullified by the contempt of his own "uppity children" for their dark-complexioned father. The language of the people of Marabastad inscribes the dominant ethos of racial superiority in subtle ways, and so, despite the peoples' resentment of the "inevitable" white overseers, it is not all that surprising that the community confers the title, "Father", on a white superintendent (DSA 32).

The narrative constructs an urban community and individual identity that are characterised by intersecting and overlapping elements as disparate and different as the cultures from which they originate. The "backward child" develops, *inter alia*, through his contact with American screen heroes and his appetite for reading "any piece of printed paper ... whatever it was" (DSA 51). By reading English, he breaks through the linguistic and racial confines of the urban ghetto: entering other worlds, the child's consciousness reveals an ongoing process of (re)structuring as this language at once exerts its subtle

ideological influence, and structures the perceptions of the subject. The diverse history of Eseki's time and place inscribes his consciousness. Recollections of his childhood adventures are set in a rich context that includes not only the American movies of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, but also the culture around the Chinese and Indian shops, and their owners, Fung Prak (DSA 53), Abdool (DSA 52) and Moosa (DSA 54).

It is here that hybrid identities and hybrid languages evolve, as evidenced by the word "*kujavas*" (the township coinage incorporating elements of Afrikaans and English by combining *koejawels*/guavas (DSA 53). In this world of intersecting cultural traditions, the writing self records the narrative of Eseki, the child, amidst a *bricolage* of Old Testament stories, "Indian and Arabic characters", and Christmas decorations (DSA 54). Here, grandmother perhaps best demonstrates what Mphahlele pseudonymously described as "the enigma that emerges from contact between the Christian outlook and the non-Christian" (Naledi 1957:11). Combining the experience of a rigid "Berlin Lutheran missionary teaching" (DSA 143) with a defiant individualism, she exemplifies the fluid and complex coexistence of contradictory cultural strands of the hybrid consciousness: her staunch Christian faith co-exists with a traditional belief-system (DSA 55).

History/Our Story: Mphahlele's (M)other Selves

The relationship between time, place and consciousness established, Mphahlele proceeds to demonstrate the relationship between the self he narrates and the people around him. In an illustration of the belief that a person is a person because of other people, Eseki's self is constructed in such a manner that it cannot be separated, for example, from his peers in the township gang, The Foxes; nor, for that matter, does the narrative construct

Eseki as an entity separate from township characters such as Ma-Lebona, Big Eyes, Aunt Dora, Dinku Dikae and his daughter, Rebone, Eseki's first love. Eseki's "story" is one strand in a fabric, or text, and has no meaning or function in isolation from the other stories.

Mphahlele's privileging of minority voices constitutes a denial of the typical Western, monologic "master" narrative. According to Sidonie Smith, the latter defines the "speaking subject as always male, [and] is founded upon the repression of woman, the silence of the mother, the denial of 'femininity'" (1987a:2). The self of Mphahlele's autobiographical writing is ambivalent in a number of ways. Among these is its multivocality, its contestation of the centre, and privileging of a "multiplicity of positions on the margins" - a feature that typifies women's autobiography (Smith 1987a:3). Down Second Avenue gives voice to the marginal characters of South African society, from Saul and Rieta to the anonymous woman vendor from the north, caught in a web of laws and cruel circumstances that render both her and her dreams helpless. The woman cries over the corpse of her son, voicing the futile hopes of millions like herself:

> "He must be well and strong again. And when he's big he will go to school. And learn how to write his name and letter to me. But how can I read his letters? I must work very hard and add another ten shillings to that money to buy him a jersey. Then there'll be two. My man is out of work, he's so headstrong he quarrelled with the white man at work, and he should know you don't go far quarrelling with the white man because he is so strong and so rich. My son mustn't die. *Jo, Jo-weh! Me-weh!*"
>
> (DSA 72)

The narrative prominently features the voices of the women of the township. Foremost are those who, together with the small boys, draw water daily at the communal water tap. Here, Ma-Janeware and Ma-Legodi tell stories of resilience and endurance, stories of

people who wage a daily struggle for a resource as basic as that of water:

> "Tck, tck, so much water in the seas, but none in Marabastad," said someone. Another tightened her large jaws and clapped her hands and clasped them behind as if to say, "Wait and despair". And you knew she had a capacity for waiting.
> (DSA 29)

Where women occupy the outermost positions in an already marginal society, Mphahlele's assertion, "I say I must speak for a public, an oppressed public. My voice is their voice" (1974:82), assumes a peculiar significance. The voice of the narrator becomes a "feminised" "I/i", as his own story encompasses those of the women, the mothers of Marabastad. Ma-Lebona's narrative commences as follows:

> "She's there!" When Africans say a person "is there", they mean you cannot but feel she is alive; she allows you no room to forget she was born and is alive in flesh and spirit.
> (DSA 59)

The text powerfully establishes the "thereness" of this woman: "She's there!" it exclaims and simultaneously claims her being, declaring on her behalf, "I AM!".

The narrative inscribes ambivalence by centring this bold, indomitable woman who flouts the conventions of the very culture that she supports so strongly in her role as mother-in-law:

> One of her greatest boasts was that she always looked at a person - black or white - in the face after sizing him up. Now African women dare not look men in the face, let alone size them up.
> (DSA 59)

Patriarchy is conflated with racism in a passage that registers Ma-Lebona's defiance of racist and sexist oppression. In denying the basis of traditional African gender relations, and rejecting the ideology of racial superiority, Ma-Lebona asserts her self and provides an alternative role model to the children of the township.

And yet, Ma-Lebona exemplifies the ambivalence of the new township woman that challenges the old order in the "matricentric family [that] is ubiquitous in South Africa's African working class" (Meer 1991:274). She reinforces the subordinate, domestic role of the traditional daughter-in-law:

> "A good wife must be obedient to her mother-in law, she must be able to wash, clean, cook, clean the house and look after her children well," she always said. "But the young girls we have today for daughters-in-law, Phoh! They are thick-headed and stubborn."
>
> (DSA 59)

She goes on, however, to subvert the basis of the traditional role of women and their confinement to the domestic domain by advocating that they "go out and work". Given the prevailing circumstances, the work available to women was limited, and so, Ma-Lebona encourages the young woman to "do washing to help her husband earn money" (DSA 60). In her analysis of black women workers, Fatima Meer has observed the following (and what is true for the 1990s was surely doubly so in the 1930s):

> Women are prepared to accept lower wages because they do not see themselves as breadwinners and they are nurtured in the family to see themselves as less than men. As a generality, they cannot see their labour as supporting their families, only subsidizing them: "*I work*," states an interview [*sic*], "*because it brings in that little extra*."
>
> (Meer 1991:271)

Ma-Lebona's encouragement opens the way for women to step out of their immediate family environment in order to exchange their labour for a cash wage. There are contradictions in her advice, however. First, the domestic worker compounds her sense of enslavement and confinement to the domestic domain by taking on the washing and housework of a white family - most often for a pittance.[19] Worse still is the impact of racism on the identity of the employee and her family: "'John, you want Eva?' Eva was my mother, John was not my name" [20]; Eseki himself is referred to as "*die wasgoed-*

kaffir" (the "kaffir" who (fetches) the washing) (DSA 102). The second, related contradiction in Ma-Lebona's advice is that it reflects the perception women have of themselves as "less than men" (Meer 1991:271). Moreover, the end result of Eva's enforced going "out to work" in various places and capacities, eventually at the city Mint, is her premature death at the age of forty-five, too early for Ezekiel to gladden her heart by bringing his bride, Rebecca, home to her (DSA 156).

The women's narratives, those of Ma-Lebona, Eva, Grandmother and Aunt Dora, are interwoven to produce a text of people's lives in the township. Mphahlele was writing at a time when women's voices - indeed "thousands of dark voices" (DSA 194) - were reaching a crescendo: "[p]rotest movements drawn from African women were especially prominent in the popular resistance of the 1950s" (Lodge 1983:139). Down Second Avenue specifically mentions Lilian Ngoyi and the women's march on the Union Buildings in 1956 where 20 000 women proclaimed, "Strydom you have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock" (Lodge 1983:145). Mphahlele's narrative firmly situates these marginalised figures who are, in the manner of Ma-Lebona, "there".

Aunt Dora is a "tough thick-set woman" whose "hips were large" and whose "thick arms worked like pistons" (DSA 76) - strong enough "to beat up a man" (DSA 110). She is a figure of dynamic strength, one for whom "the past never seemed to hold any romantic memories; she never spoke about the future; she simply grappled with the present" (DSA 107). The figure of Grandmother, who ran her house by "a strict code" (DSA 77) runs like a strand of steel through the narrative. Eva's own tale is told in fragments throughout the narrative as her influence and suffering mark the course of Ezekiel's own story: her

influence is felt when he eschews political involvement at Adams College, "I mustn't fail, I mustn't fail" (DSA 148), and Ezekiel receives a letter of gratitude from her - "soaking wet with tears" (DSA 148) - for the scholarship money that finally enables her to divorce Moses. In relating this incident, Mphahlele documents, incidentally, the systemic subordination of the black urban woman caught in a web of Western and customary law. Eva's enforced poverty ties her to a situation where her legal husband can legally abandon his family in favour of another.

One voice is significantly silent among those of the women in Mphahlele's life: that of Rebecca, his wife. Later, in his biography, Mphahlele filled this gap, acknowledging her as "someone with a life story of her own" (Manganyi 1983:86). He recounts Rebecca's difficult years in Orlando, the sorrow of her still-births (1983:90), as well as the "confirmation of her own womanhood" when Anthony is born (1983:91). Collectively, these women represent a resilience born of the creative capacity to cope with the overlapping value-systems of the townships. Theirs is a powerful counter-narrative to official insistence on a reductive, contained "Bantu Culture" (DSA 168).

Disintegration/Defiance

The narrative of the period that follows Ezekiel's marriage to Rebecca in 1945 signals an escalating sense of "slippage" in relation to the self. During this period, Ezekiel experiences his personality as a "whirlpool of currents and cross-currents of ambition and idealism mixed up with memories of my home life" (DSA 149); the water metaphor recurs when, in the ensuing Interlude, he muses on the fate of "the Black man" whose dislocated culture moves "in a stream that is dammed in shifting catchments" at the

demand of those who are "stronger" (DSA 157). The alienation Ezekiel experiences compels a redefinition of his "self" in a hostile context where the racist ideology of the day extends its hegemony through "the white press, the white radio, the white Parliament, the white employers [and] the white press" (DSA 163). This redefinition is an integral aspect of symbolic actions such as his abandonment of the Christian church in a moment of intense "hate"; this emotion is a powerful reconstitutive element in an identity previously the passive victim of superior forces (DSA 160). The reconstruction of the self occurs in a milieu charged with contradiction and conflict. The self tries to find equilibrium as the hatred engendered by oppressive forces is balanced against love and gratitude felt for certain whites, for example his unnamed white friend (Norah Taylor), who seems to assume Ezekiel's deceased mother's role of encouragement (DSA 166). She is, together with Rebecca, one of the "strong women" (Manganyi 1983:110) who sustain and shape his life. The gap in Down Second Avenue surrounding Taylor, his "literary mentor" (Manganyi 1983:81), is filled in Manganyi's biography, which includes correspondence between 1943-1944.[21]

The narrative records the details of lives lived across the colour bar, lives that overlap and interconnect in creative ways in the Syndicate of African Artists - "an exercise in non-racialism" (Manganyi 1983:112) in a community whose "multi-racial" nature Mphahlele insisted upon (1960c:11).[22] The "cultural cross-impacts" (1960c:11) occurred in defiance of the Nationalist government policy

> "to develop along our own lines". We couldn't see the lines and the footprints. They had got so mixed up with other footprints in the course of time, and the winds had been blowing away some, too.
>
> (DSA 166)

Colonialism failed to maintain the *cordon sanitaire*, the "lines" containing human

movement and change, the "mixing" of people in the postcolonial space; here, "alterities" and "differences" (Said 1993:15) signify cultural crossings and contaminations. However, these "lines" were soon to became all but impregnable walls supported by the iron laws of apartheid.

The re-membering self recalls the effects of laws that control, discipline and mercilessly punish during a period of increasing oppression and National Party hegemony - a hegemony that H F Verwoerd shamelessly defined, and that Mphahlele was to recollect:

> The Bantu teacher must be integrated as an active agent in the process of the development of the Bantu community. He must learn not to feel above his community, with a consequent desire to become integrated into the life of the European community.
>
> (Manganyi 1983:96)

Ezekiel's defiance of this hegemony culminated in his teaching ban in 1952 (DSA 171). This was the year of the Defiance Campaign that was waged in the wake of the "six 'unjust laws'" to which black people had been subjected by the Nationalist Party government (Lodge 1983:42) - including the Suppression of Communism Act that effectively silenced and marginalised Ezekiel, who was "dismissed for subversive activities" (DSA 169).

However, Mphahlele uses an effective narrative technique for re-centring the metonymic self, the "I/i". He does this by means of a textual deconstruction of the figure of white superiority that the text sets up elsewhere: the closing phase of the counter-narrative represents whites in control in the form of imbecilic post-office workers and liftmen (DSA 172), and a greedy, inhuman white professional male, "just another South African lawyer" (DSA 173). An ironically-named "tribe of white lady typists" is represented in

satirical language that establishes the "otherness" of these women: "dehydrated", "brittle", repressed (DSA 174) - an effect that is particularly powerful given the representation of black women such as Ma-Lebona and Aunt Dora.

Clearly, Mphahlele's narrative deploys a variety of strategies in its struggle against apartheid hegemony. Between 1949 and 1952 Mphahlele adopted the *nom-de-plume* Rabelais when writing for "The Voice" (Manganyi 1983:101). The self is defiantly constructed in terms of the "European" culture forbidden by apartheid, and so Shakespeare, Dickens (DSA 180) and Scarlatti (DSA 181) weave a hybrid culture that produces an ambivalent identity - a "thoroughly urbanized" self that cannot survive rural Basutoland (DSA 183). The shifting narrative constructs the counterhegemonic "double personality" of "colonized man", dramatising a fractured "dialogue between the two selves" (Mphahlele 1974:41). Its "meaning" is frequently to be found in *aporia* such as the image that evokes the representation of Africa in colonial discourse. Basutoland is a place of "solid, palpable darkness" (DSA 184) whose "static" quality is emphasised: "[e]very scene is complacently static, often annoyingly so. Even the faces of Basuto were static" (DSA 185). The ambivalent self emerges within a narrative where even African people and places are constructed as "other": the narrative act of defining the self - "I AM!" - necessitates asserting what the self is not. The corollary of Ezekiel's being "not white/not quite" is, of course, that he is "not black [African]/not quite". The ambivalence that the text inscribes produces, as Bhabha suggests, "its slippage, its excess, its *difference*" (1994:86, my emphasis).

This ambivalence is heightened as the narrative reaches closure. It is expressed most

painfully, most powerfully, perhaps, in Mphahlele's wrestlings with the policies of the ANC and AAC: the pragmatism of the former is juxtaposed with the principle of the latter that offers "a defence against feeling exclusively African. Instinctively I treasured the thought that I bore not [*sic*] real bitterness against Indians and Coloureds" (DSA 190). Time and again he expresses an inclusivist, non-racial credo, advocating unity between movements riven by ideological disputes and the sectarianism of the broader political formation, eventually pledging his allegiance in 1955 to an ANC that is, however, not without fault (DSA 191).

The closing chapter of the autobiography is a *bricolage* of event and opinion incorporating the journalistic venture on Drum, and a revealing summary of an MA thesis covering a range of writing that crosses racial boundaries. The autobiography documents a life that radically challenges the fixity of apartheid racial and cultural identity. The prior (and collective) identities that are Eseki/Ezekiel/Zeke represent the capacity of the self to resist the stasis of an officially imposed identity in a narrative of continual renewal. The legalism of apartheid ideology is powerless in the face of the carnivalesque: at Ezekiel's graduation party suburban whites, together with Bloke Modisane dressed in a cowboy outfit, a saxophonist and a tipsy township mama, form a symbolic "ring" where the disparities of an American "ranching song" are brought into harmony with an "*Imbube* chant and other African songs" (DSA 199).

The life that Ezekiel Mphahlele narrates is, on one level, a record of the victory of the "police state" (DSA 100) and the triumph of racism. Here, the self is the victim of the "other man" and his dehumanising, criminalising ideology that names, and then relegates,

according to a racial taxonomy: "He has driven me against the wall so that I never forget I am black" (DSA 219). On another, more profound level, however, Mphahlele's narrative inscribes an ideology that counters the hegemonic force of apartheid. Down Second Avenue deconstructs the notion that there can be racial and cultural purity in a postcolonial context. It does this by re-membering a self, an ambivalent entity that is the product of colonial collisions and convergences. This self is fragmented, shattered, and at the same time involved in a continual process of self-renewal that is "the search for Ezekiel Mphahlele" (Manganyi 2983:272).

The final image that Mphahlele constructs of himself is one of defiant ambivalence, the representation of a black man in Africa that mocks the hegemonic apartheid category, "Bantu". Ezekiel, whose "canoe" is impelled by the "momentum that launched it in Second Avenue, sits "in the spacious garden of a Lagos house". Basking in the dry Nigerian heat, he listens to "a recording of Vivaldi's '*Four Seasons*'", recalls a conversation with Nadine Gordimer in her Parktown, Johannesburg garden, and considers the relative merits of Western composers (DSA 220). The particular power of the scene depicted resides in the multiplicity of its overlapping images and in the sense of liminal cultures that collectively contradict theories of racial and cultural purity, theories held by those who would, if they could, make laws to stop blacks from "listening to or performing Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Tchaikowsky, Handel, Shostakovich, Mendelsshon [*sic*] and the like" (Mphahlele 1959b:223). The image of Ezekiel in the Lagos garden recalls an earlier moment of defiant appropriation, when the township "boys" declare "yena moshle stellek lo Scarlatti .... Scarlatti's very good" (DSA 182).

Mphahlele's autobiographical writing represents, like the poetry of Senghor that Mphahlele praised, a self that is "the meeting point of Europe and Africa .... an ambivalent continent" (1963:83). In short, writing that inscribes racial and cultural liminalities, re-members a marginalised community's history, and reconstructs the self in terms forbidden by the apartheid state, is an undeniable counter-force to the hegemonic ideology of the day.

Notes

1. Mphahlele defines his use of racial terminology as follows:

> I do not think of "African," "Colored," [*sic*] "Afrikaner," "Asian," necessarily as the people referred to prefer to be called...."African" will refer to all the people who are culturally natives of Africa. Whites still have to earn this affiliation, so I distinguish them as whites. I discard the silly name "colored" and talk of them as "Africans of mixed descent"....I use "Indian" to refer to all people who come of Indian stock as we know it on the Indian subcontinent....They too, one hopes, will one day find a common destiny among Africans. The term "black" refers to all people who are not of European descent. I have dropped the term "non-white." I speak of "Boers" instead of what they call themselves - "Afrikaners"....They have refused to be assimilated into African culture and believe that geography is all they need to justify the label "Afrikaner."

The African Image, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1974), p.14.

2. Even The African Image, a critical work, has been described as an "emotional autobiography" that "tells of his mental growth". See Ursula Barnett, Ezekiel Mphahlele (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p.117. The African Image does, indeed, contain many autobiographical snippets, for example, "I still dream about my childhood in those rugged mountains of the Northern Transvaal" (p.42).

3. The Tomlinson Report of 1954 argued against integration on the basis that it would lead to racial friction. It therefore recommended that the policy of separate development be adopted as the country's official policy. The Bantu Homelands were established as a result of the recommendations of the Commission when the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act was passed in 1959.

4. For an analysis of the origins and development of the discourse of racism, see Saul Dubow's "Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-war Years", in The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-century South Africa, eds Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido (London: Longman, 1987), pp.71-94, esp. pp.75-78.

5. See Saul Dubow, "Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-war Years", in The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth-century South Africa, eds Marks & Trapido. Dubow quotes from R F A Hoernlé's "Race Mixture", showing the interconnectedness in racist thinking and discourse of concepts of culture and race: "In short the basis of culture is biological: it varies with the innate qualities of human stocks. Culture is a function of race" (p.84).

6. See David Westley, "Choice of Language and African Literature: A Bibliographic Essay", Research in African Languages 23(1): 159-171, where, on the issue of the use of English by African writers, he relates the following incident:

> South African exiled writer Lewis Nkosi once showered Ngugi at a Conference with a burst of Zulu as the Kenyan harangued his audience to write in their own languages. The point, of course, was that Ngugi could not understand him (p.163).

7. In her biographical study, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Ursula Barnett asserts that the "theme" of Down Second Avenue is the "search for identity" (p.51), and that it is a "social record" and "historical document" (p.65).

8. While, at first glance, Nkosi's explanation assumes a Eurocentric "Self", it is unlikely that the intention behind his formulation is to decentre an African "other".

9. For example, "From Johannesburg to Lagos: An African Abroad", Fighting Talk 11(10): 10-11; "A Black Emigré Looks Back at the Union", Contact 1(19): 10.

10. Mphahlele rejected Addison Gayle's image of him as an "Afro-Saxon or Euro-African" (quoted in Barnett's Ezekiel Mphahlele, p. 133). Indeed, Mphahlele shared Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief, "[t]here are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile". Epigraph, The African Image.

11. See also Susan Anderson, "Something in Me Died; Autobiographies of South African Writers in Exile", Books Abroad 44: 398-403, which emphasises the documentary and *bildung* aspects of autobiography; Saunders Redding, "Out from Second Avenue", rev. of Down Second Avenue and The Wanderers, Africa Today 18(4): 78-79, focuses on the social function of the autobiography.

12. These phenomena are evident in Mphahlele's own autobiography; indeed, the terms in which Mphahlele praises his mother's beauty are revealing:

> [Dora's] black hair wasn't half as long as my mother's deep brown hair; her complexion was dark where my mother's was so light that she could have passed for a Coloured woman any time (DSA 76).

13. This form of his name is first used in the second half of Down Second Avenue, which was written in Nigeria. It is used by a tipsy woman at a party in Orlando during the latter half of the 1950s (DSA 199), a period when American influence was strong in the townships. "Zeke" is still used today by friends and colleagues, as is evident from various contributions in Footprints Along the Way: A Tribute to Es'kia Mphahlele, ed. Peter N Thuynsma (Yeoville: Justified/Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989).

14. Again, however, this self is inseparable from the community which, according to Mphahlele, gives it a context and a meaning: "the search for self was really a search for a community to which I could abandon myself in terms of what I could give as a writer and teacher". See N Chabani Manganyi, Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983), p.290.

15. Each of these terms reflects a shift in official ideology; as Afrikaners claimed "native" status for themselves, "Bantu" was used to denote the "otherness" of Africans and their division into tribal peoples; the short-lived, somewhat ridiculous "Plural" reflected the divisions of an officially-constructed plural society, while "Black" emphasised racial and cultural difference.

16. One of the best examples is the benign Gogo in the autobiographical Have you seen Zandile?, Gcina Mhlope *et al* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1988).

17. In Whispers From a Continent: The Literature of Contemporary Black Africa (New York: Random House, 1969) Wilfred Cartey points out that, while Mphahlele does not, like other "writers in their middle years treat [his] youth with nostalgia", he does "find in the mother image an emblem of strength and support" (p.4).

18. The relationship between urbanisation, poverty, unemployment and township beer-brewing by black women is documented in Paul la Hausse's Brewers, Beerhalls and Boycotts: A History of Liquor in South Africa (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1988). Beer-brewing was more than a question of economic survival - it had a political dimension as well, since the proceeds from official beerhalls were used not only for housing, but also for the administration and policing of blacks by whites.

19. See Jacklyn Cock, Maids and Madams: Domestic Workers under Apartheid (London: The Women's Press, 1989). Cock asserts:

> Poverty, labour controls and a lack of employment alternatives combine to "trap" many African women in domestic service. They are trapped in a condition of immobility within which they are subject to intense oppression. Such oppression is evident in their low wages and long working hours and in the demeaning treatment of them by the white women who are their employers (p.1).

20. This prefigures Mphahlele's later experiences in the city, where, as an employee, he is "'Jimmed' and 'boy-ed' and 'John-ed' by whites'" (DSA 170).

21. Mphahlele's love and respect for Norah Taylor proved enduring. In Manganyi's Exiles and Homecomings, Mphahlele speaks of her "empathy" (p.118); moreover, while he acknowledges that a letter written by her in 1953 betrays "paternalism", he does not go on to discuss the ideological import of her writing which defends Britain's role in India, counsels him to heed Christ's imperative to "turn the other cheek", and remarks, "[y]our people are young in thought" (p.119).

22. Mphahlele records in Manganyi's Exiles and Homecomings that the SAA had a Latin motto, *ars gratia artis*, that its patrons included Africans and Europeans, and that the repertoire of its African artists included European works (pp.111-112).

Chapter Five

NONI JABAVU: "PERSON-OF-PEOPLE" BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

> The *mores* that I was used to were neither purely Western nor purely Bantu. We were not "black Europeans", yet I saw how we were not "white Bantu" either.
>
> Noni Jabavu

> I thought how with my people, you are not often left to be merely your private self; you represent others, or others represent you, so that you are ever conscious of relative status, classification, interdependent relationships.
>
> Noni Jabavu

Introduction

The autobiographical writing of Helen Nontando (Noni) Jabavu, Drawn in Colour (1960) and The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life (1963) has received scant critical attention. It occupies a marginal position not only within the broad category of black South African autobiographical writing, but also within the sub-category of women's autobiography. In a 1984 study, Jabavu received nothing more than a dismissive footnote: "[her works] are not very representative when one considers under what circumstances they were written and how unusually privileged Noni Jabavu was" (Bahn 1984:27).[1] Criteria employed in recent criticism are the writer's "struggle for a political voice and political visibility" (Driver 1991b:337), and the text's "relevance for the ... struggle" for "freedom" (Westley 1994:268);[2] these criteria have largely determined the emergent canon of women's autobiographical writing in South Africa, of which working class women's writing forms a significant part.[3] It is only very recently that Jabavu has been mentioned at all, and particularly as a "resistance" writer (Byrne 1994:22).

Like Abrahams and Mphahlele before her, Jabavu is something of a pioneer: her "chronicles" (Adey *et al* 1986:108) mark the beginning of a local tradition of women's autobiographical writing. Again, like Peter Abrahams and Es'kia Mphahlele, Jabavu is concerned with re-defining identity during the period of the 1950s, and therefore with re-membering a past[4] and those who peopled it. It will be the concern of this chapter to demonstrate the uniquely counterhegemonic character of Noni Jabavu's writing. This will be done during the course of a reading that focuses on the construction of a "representative" self within a discursive space characterised by liminality.

The context is one where the "[r]ace-dedicated Nationalists are in charge" (OP 63). The colonial pathology of separation, reflected in the practice of segregating the "native and the settler zones" (Bhabha 1986:xxi) by means of the colour bar is codified. Apartheid is contextualised as follows by Jabavu's "elders" during her 1955 visit to South Africa from England: "'Segregation' and 'Civilized Labour Policies' were thought up by General Smuts, later to be codified and hardened by 'this Verwoerd'" (OP iv).[5] As early as 1917 Smuts speaks of Africa in terms of "barbarism" (1942:21), of "Natives" as "almost animal-like" (1942:23), of the "axiom" that there should be "no intermixture of blood between the two colours" (1942:22), and the advantage of "a policy of keeping [black and white] apart as much as possible in our institutions" (1942:25).[6] Throughout Jabavu's writings, apartheid is seen as part of a process in which "sly Smuts", Verwoerd's predecessor (OP 193), removes "the Native Vote in the Cape" and institutes a "Segregation Policy" (OP 212). The eventual effect of these policies was the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and its aftermath: "*baya* defy*a*! *baya* boycott*a*!" (OP 115). The hegemonic doctrine of racial difference, devised to manipulate and manacle indigenous peoples, in fact imbued blacks

of all classes with "national consciousness; *u*Verwoerd was closing the ranks and divisions", for example between "school, [or] civilized people" and pagans or "ochre people" (OP 61).

Jabavu's text does not construct a homogeneous Africanness, however. Instead, difference is inscribed, a difference that is the effect of history and culture, between "School" people such as the writing self, and the pagan, or ochre people through whose eyes she is represented, somewhat parodically, as "the immaculate convert" (OP 63). Here and elsewhere, specifically in its slips ("the ochre ... was a menace to my white dress" (OP 63)), the text functions to occlude the binarism of fixed racial entities. Jabavu's counter-discourse embodies the Fanonian insight, "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man" (Fanon 1986:231), thus providing a discursive space whose liminality represents a remarkable liberatory potential.

In this context, Jabavu's personal genealogy takes on a particular significance. She is the descendant of a "net of people linked by professions, business, blood" with Lovedale the "cradle where they had shared a social and political background inherited from earlier generations of Bokwes, Jabavus, Makiwanes and others" (OP 20-21).[7] The eldest child of D D T Jabavu and granddaughter of John Tengo Jabavu, Helen Nontando was born in the Eastern Cape in 1920. Her mother (a Makiwane) was a teacher, who returned to England to continue her music studies when Noni was two, leaving her in the care of her aunt (OP 72). In 1933, at the age of thirteen, Noni went to school in England. She later married an English film-director, Michael Cadbury Crosfield (to whom her first book is dedicated), a person with whom her family shares "liberal attitudes" and "a certain

conservatism of feeling" (DC 158). They have a daughter, Tembi. Noni Jabavu claims (in the Author's Note to Drawn in Colour) to "belong to two worlds with two loyalties; South Africa where I was born and England where I was educated" (DC ix)[8]. The two texts record her visits to South Africa: first in 1955, to attend the funeral of her brother, and again in 1956, when she is "between seasons ... taking time out between continents" and school terms (Tembi, her daughter, is at school in England, and she and her husband are living temporarily in East Africa) (OP 12).

Jabavu's writing illuminates "the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes" that Homi Bhabha discerns in Frantz Fanon, a problem that relates to the predicament of being located in a space that is "in-between" the "Colonialist Self" and the "Colonized Other" (Bhabha 1986:xvi). It is, precisely, Jabavu's "in-betweenness", the "neither/nor" identity constructed in her discourse that constitutes a textual assault on the presuppositions of the racial ideologies of the day. She identifies liminality as the condition of existence of Africans in the 1950s, a condition that is sharpened in her own particular case: "the life 'between two worlds' in which everybody was caught up was physically dramatized in my case, living in Europe and in Africa" (OP 213). The fluidity of her position denies the fixity of apartheid categories. Contradicting official stereotypes of racial purity, Jabavu inscribes precisely that "'foreignness', 'mixedness', 'impurity'" that Bhabha identifies as "transgressive" where factors such as "*origin* and *unity*" (1994:68) are deployed to underpin notions of individual and national identity.

It is not only the hegemony of apartheid theories of race and culture that Jabavu's writing counters, however. The "in-betweenness" of her position has powerful textual

consequences relating to the position of women in society. While Drawn in Colour and The Ochre People chronicle Jabavu's life, they simultaneously recover the hidden, "occulted histories" (Lionnet 1989:94) of women, thus subverting certain assumptions and practices of patriarchy. This subversion occurs in the social as well as the literary domain, for Jabavu's unconventional narrative of herself incorporates heterogeneous stories of women, including those of her sister and her aunt, "Big Mother". The authorial voice expresses itself as a collective identity, an "I/we" in a narrative that does not conform to the linear pattern of the *bildung*, the conventional structuring device of autobiography. Liz Stanley's claim is apposite:

> feminist autobiographies challenge the boundaries of conventional autobiographical form, indeed play with some of its conventions such as the "autobiographical pact" of conventional truth-telling, a narrative that moves uni-directionally from birth/beginning to maturity/resolution/end, and the insistence on a unitary self.
>
> (1992:247)

Stanley's Western feminist insights should, however, be read against, and as complementary to, the kinds of assumptions relating to narrative, the self, and society that Jabavu inscribes in the following extract from The Ochre People:

> "I am *m*Mbo .... I may tell the truth about ourselves, eh?"
> ..... So he went on, talked about himself in order to
> "explain about *ama*Mpondo". As usual the impression was not of an inordinate egocentricity but that he was using a personal experience to illustrate the variety of life's circumstances. He was "representing" others like him to show how their ideas were tempered by the changing times.
>
> (OP 133)

The fundamental concerns of black writing in an apartheid context are the representative self that documents and simultaneously negates the impact of colonialism in the claim, "I AM!"; the countering of the colonial/apartheid lie; the establishment of an alternative self where Western "egocentricity" is displaced by a people-centredness that is rooted in

the ideology of "*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*. A person is a person (is what he is) because of and through other people" (OP 69).[9]

Stanley avers, "there are feminismS [*sic*] speaking to the multiple experiences and understandings of women's varied although overlapping conditions and oppressions" (1992:241). This particular "feminism" will negotiate the fluid discursive space constructed in simultaneous claims of identity ("I AM!"), those of a collective self ("I/we"), and the dismantling of the "egocentric", unitary, autonomous self ("I/i"). Like those of other marginal women writers, Jabavu's autobiography is structured by "relationships", thus "revealing complex modes of interaction between familial and social contexts, the personal and the political, the textual and the historical" (Lionnet 1989:94). It will be my concern to demonstrate the counterhegemonic force of Jabavu's autobiographical writings in terms of content as well as form. It may, finally, be claimed that Jabavu's writings subvert the hegemony of the category "Autobiography", demonstrating that the latter

> no longer makes sense culturally. Its structural, rhetorical and imagistic rigidities have been fractured by the heteroglossic possibilities inherent in new ideologies of selfhood.
>
> (Smith 1987b:175)

Jabavu's writing inscribes "hybridity", allowing "other 'denied' knowledges [to] enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority - its rules of recognition" (Bhabha 1994:114).

Situating the Self

In the preface to an autobiography written by a contemporary of Noni Jabavu (Phyllis Ntantala's A Life's Mosaic), the assertion is made: "while I am part of them [a New York opera audience] ... I am part of another world .... I come from Gqubeni .... That's where

my roots are. That's me" (1992:vii). Ntantala's claim to identity recalls that of Noni Jabavu, "I belong to two worlds" (South Africa and England) (DC ix), and her emphasis on her "Bantu background" (DC xi) in which her "Westernised Southern-ness" (DC 184) is rooted. The relationship between culture and identity has a particular significance in the case of the woman autobiographer:

> any discussion of woman's autobiography must situate her self-representational project in its cultural embeddedness. Most particularly, it must remain attentive to prevailing ideologies of woman's sexuality and textual possibilities.
> (Smith 1987b:26)

The cultural liminality that Jabavu's writing inscribes should be located within the broad context of colonialism in the Eastern Cape.

Jabavu establishes her "in-betweenness" by weaving into her texts the genealogy of both paternal and maternal forebears. She documents the mixed origins resultant upon the scattering and fragmentation of great movements of southern African peoples who encountered the cultures of others. These migrations precede and parallel the upheavals and diasporic movements of nineteenth-century colonialism. Jabavu's narrative registers the movements of her "Hamitic forefathers [who travelled from East Africa] with their cattle, always searching for grasslands, and mingling their blood with Bantu and Hottentot and Bushmen" (DC 29).[10] In a telling moment, Jabavu describes her father's relish in acknowledging, "*Ja*, We are Hottentots indeed! .... Yet what is wrong with being a Hottentot? What if some people despise that heritage?" (DC 58). Both the Jili (Jabavu) and Gambu (Makiwane) clans are Mfengu (Fingo), a "generic term for the fragmented peoples who settled among the Xhosa in the wake of the Mfecane" (Peires 1979:162). Jabavu makes the important point that the Mfengu had been "broken up by northern despots ... before Europeans came on the scene and [were] therefore already rootless"

(OP 72). Her writing firmly establishes this displacement and the consequent fluidity in the identity of the Mfengu: "We were not Xhosa even by descent. Our Jili and other Ntlangwini clans were Fingo, Zulu offshoots scattered by those *iinkcitakalo*" or "dispersals" (DC 192).

As a people whose "old world was irrevocably shattered ... and ... [who] wanted new tools to build a new one", the Mfengu "supplied the missionaries with their first mass conversions" (Peires 1981:75), which freed them from obligations to the Xhosa, and offered peace, prosperity and material salvation (1981:88-89). Indeed, Jabavu acknowledges the material advantage of collaboration: Confluence Farm was "inherited land in foreign tribal territory ... given by the British [to her Makiwane family] for fighting on their side during one of the regional wars" (DC 194)).[11] Jabavu's somewhat flippant reference to the "quisling" status of her Makiwane great-grandfather (DC 194) is a slip in her otherwise seamless narrative of the Mfengu.[12] The historical fact of Mfengu rejection of traditional Xhosa "incorporation of the alien group into the Xhosa nation" and their objection to being "bound ... by Xhosa law and custom" (Peires 1981:42) is submerged in her claim that "Jabavus and many other Fingos had long since absorbed Xhosa custom, *isiko*, to say nothing of language" (DC 192). Jabavu's account of Mfengu cultural miscegenation counters the dominant discourse of racial and ethnic purity.

This period in Eastern Cape history produced outstanding men such as Elijah Makiwane, J T Jabavu and his son, D D T Jabavu. Jabavu recounts that her mother, a Makiwane, was

> a member of the fourth generation of *ubugqoboka*, with all that implied to South African blacks in acceptance of the standards of an incoming culture and

repudiating "such things of Africa as were incompatible".

(DC 18)

However, Jabavu goes on to qualify their "acceptance": the earnest *amagqoboka* (literally, "pierced" (with the Christian faith)), were "pierced with something of the urge to triumph over the slough caused by the former way of African life being broken and made invalid in the present era" (DC 130).

The term *ubugqoboka* is used by Jabavu interchangeably with "Westernisation", a conscious, pragmatic adaptation that is a cause for pride in the clan. Her generation is "[i]n the fifth generation of Westernisation" (DC 18), descended from sixteen great-grandparents who had "decided to abandon the pagan life and become 'school people', Christians" (OP 10). Reversing common conceptions, the point is made that the ancestors who became Christianised were "radical revolutionaries", since it was "a ferocious step to take when you had been born and bred as pagans" (OP 72). The Mfengu are thus constructed as agents rather than victims in a historical process; indeed, the factor of Mfengu agency is reinforced when the process itself is described as one of "'Bantu-ised' Westernisation" (DC 149). In thus reinterpreting hegemonic perceptions, Jabavu's text demonstrates the entry of "other 'denied' knowledges ... upon the dominant discourse" (Bhabha 1994:114). In this way, the hierarchy of the colonial self and the other is subverted in a textual manoeuvre of empowerment. In a further reversal, Jabavu stands the "things fall apart" model of colonial analysis on its head. Her contrast of the condition of the Mfengu with that of the Xhosa is significant. The fact that the Mfengu were already "broken up" and "rootless" (the features, incidentally, of modernity), because of the *mfecane* gives them an advantage over the Xhosa whose dispossession and displacement came later, when "Europeans came on the scene" (OP 72). In going on to

describe the Xhosa as "conservative", Jabavu creates a contrast with Mfengu radicalism and resourcefulness (represented by her "revolutionary" cousin Mzimkhulu Makiwane's life of political awakening, imprisonment and exile (OP 73-76)).

Noni Jabavu is the granddaughter of J T Jabavu, a "professional who lived by writing" (OP 173) and a member of the new educated African elite.[13] A leading African politician of the 1880s and founder of the radical black newspaper, Imvo (Mostert 1992:1258), J T Jabavu refused an invitation by the Afrikaner Bond to stand as their parliamentary candidate (1992:1269) and was included in the delegation to London to protest the proposed 1910 Constitution (Mostert 1992:1271; Karis & Carter 1972:5-8). Noni is the daughter of D D T Jabavu, the first African to become a professor, a "New African" who was awake to "progressive thinking" (Dhlomo quoted in Couzens 1985:33). Among the "Congress" generation of the 1950s, however, in a context where "Jo'burg is on fire" (OP 212), he was criticised for his adherence to "the British principle of constitutionalism, gradualism" (OP 73).[14] Nevertheless, Noni documents her father's blend of pragmatic progressivism; a "new African", he is "no racialist", since "[i]ssues and values, not race and colour, are his prime concern" (Dhlomo quoted in Couzens 1985:36). He exhorts his fellows: "*Jy moet die Taal praat* [You must speak Afrikaans], or else English otherwise starve! Indisputably even the most conservative, dyed-in-the-wool Xhosa fellow knows that" (DC 59).

Noni herself acknowledges the strategic value of "learn[ing] what was to be learnt about these people [whites]" (OP 60). These attitudes run counter to the rigid sectionalism of the time, "these days of Verwoerd's ethnic grouping" (OP 105). Indeed, throughout the

two texts, Jabavu subverts notions of linguistic purity (OP 228 & 233). In an urban environment, the "ragged ... industrial worker" lives together with "young people who grow up speaking 'town English, town Afrikaans, town vernaculars'" - the latter, "slipshod hybrids" (DC 59). Subverting the negative cast of the latter phrase, Noni observes on a train journey through the "Boer province" (Orange Free State) (DC 64):

> I could hear the people speak much Afrikaans, the influence of that other dispersal, The Great Trek. "*Ons praat die taal, hierso*", I could imagine them saying gaily; a vivid hybrid slang ... my ear was tickled by it.
>
> (DC 66)

This linguistic and cultural hybridity is an effect also of the "modifications taking place in the cultural life" of Europeans who come into contact with Africans (OP 80), as is evident from the overlapping languages that Jabavu documents throughout: Mr Burl exclaims "*Yo!*" as he mops his forehead "just as an African might" (DC 43), and a Mr Stofelberg complains of the heat, "This place is getting a little bit *shushu*" (OP 80).

Jabavu's view of South African history as diasporic is signalled by the phrase, "that other dispersal, the Great Trek" (DC 66). The word "other" conjures the *mfecane* and also colonialism and its aftermath. Indeed, Noël Mostert contends that "the eastern seaboard of Africa ... offers [as nowhere else does] an amazing confluence of human venture and its many frontiers, across time, upon the oceans and between the continents", a "confluence" he traces to its origins "behind the rim of the Great Escarpment [where] human dispersion began from the cradleland of the species". This was the "first frontier" (1992:xv). The relationship that Jabavu draws between dispersals, cultural appropriations, and the production of hybrid languages prefigures the analytical models of postcolonial theorists such as Françoise Lionnet, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha. Even though, in the

latter half of the twentieth century, there is a "gathering awareness ... of the lines *between* cultures", Said emphasises the accompanying awareness "of how oddly hybrid historical and cultural experiences are, of how they partake of many often contradictory experiences and domains ...." (1993:15). This produces "massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences" (Said 1993:36). Jabavu's writing demonstrates that South African cultural history "is the history of cultural borrowings" (Said 1993:261). Formulated in Bhabha's terms, Jabavu's writing exemplifies the "hybridity" produced by colonial power in that her writing signals the "shifting forces and fixities" of the latter (Bhabha 1994:112). The gay, irreverent appropriation of Afrikaans, and the resultant production of a "vivid, hybrid slang" is an enactment of the "deformation and displacement of [a site] of discrimination and power" (Bhabha 1994:112). This was, in the 1970s, to represent a particularly iniquitous site of discrimination and power. Indeed, the events of 1976 may be ascribed to apartheid's peculiar obsessions with fixities (of racial identity) and force (the control of people).

The counterhegemonic power of Jabavu's writing emerges sharply when her writing is located within the "not 'black European' ... not 'white Bantu'" (DC 149) culture of her people; the indeterminacy of the "not ... not" construction, with its suggestion of fluidity and liminality contradicts the rigid exclusivity of the "either/or" logic of apartheid. Jabavu's textual construction of culture and identity exemplifies her contention (however idealised and generalised it may be) that "Xhosa people have no complex about 'miscegenation'" (OP 19). It is precisely this radical disregard for cultural and racial boundaries that posed the most profound threat to apartheid hegemony.

Representing the Self

In two separate instances, once in Drawn in Colour, and once in the Ochre People, Noni Jabavu cites the proverb "A person is a person because of and through other people". In the former, she argues that "[s]uch store is set on the value of the individual among the Southern Bantu, because he or she 'is a Person-of-People, *ungumntu wa bantu*'" (DC 55). In the latter instance, she avers:

> I was thankful that we were each brought up to feel ourselves a symbol, a "representative of a group" not of a family only, and not as a private person. "*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*. A person is a person (is what he is) because of and through other people."
>
> (OP 69)

Individual identity is conceived as integral to the collective identity of "other people", and as such cannot be regarded as separate. The "I" may thus be denoted as "I/we", and the meaning and significance of this entity is embedded in one that is larger than itself and includes itself, hence "a Person-of-People". However, this "I/we" (that is categorically "not a private person") has conferred on it the burden of meaning: it is a "symbol", a sign that represents the ideas, the thought-systems, the cosmology, perhaps, and the culture of a people. For example, at one point in her narrative, Jabavu is in the company of her father and old Cira, whom the former identifies as knowing "the history of every nook and cranny of this worn-out countryside" (OP 114). Jabavu then attempts (as many African autobiographical writers do) to "set down the world that has disappeared" (Soyinka 1987:65). Noni is the representative both of Cira, who in turn re-presents the past, and of her own generation. Her story-telling is the conduit between past, present and future:

> My father turned and they both looked at me so that once more, I realized that because I happened to be there, I was "representing my fellow young" in now listening to the things that my father hoped Cira might pass on to his descendants.
>
> (OP 114)

Put differently, the "I/we" that speaks is a site of layered discourses, and her text forms what Lionnet calls a "palimpsest" (1989:23). In Noni Jabavu's case the latter includes the discourses of the "Southern Bantu", the "ochre people", and the Mfengu, those "Westernised black Southerner[s]" of the Eastern Cape (DC 83).

Two factors need to be addressed in discussing Jabavu's representation of her "representative self", the entity that she describes as a "Person-of-People": first, there is the ideological context in which she writes, and second, the fact of her gender (which will be dealt with more fully at a later stage). The writing of a "Person-of-People" during the decades following 1948 occurs at the site of competing discourses, and it is discourse itself that is the very "precondition for both thinking and subjectivity" (D'Amico 1982:204).

Jabavu's writings document the impact of the discourse that has, by 1955 (the time of her first visit, recorded in Drawn in Colour), come to assert its dominance, namely, apartheid. African settlements are officially re-named "locations"[15] or, more euphemistically, "townships"; this political jargon asserts difference and inferiority, both of which are reflected in the architecture, demography and town planning of apartheid. The 1950s saw the start of dreary stretches of "stereotyped matchboxes" (DC 63) that cribbed both mind and body. Confinement and containment were the aims of the ideology of separation:

> Nowadays a wire fence surrounds the village for it is now an "enclosed location" as they will all be eventually, under *apartheid*, Dr. Verwoerd's policy of "good neighbourliness"; the better to police and control.
>
> (OP 29)

Jabavu contextualises apartheid, however, by giving voice to the "ancients and elders" who re-member the time of colonial conquest - the "olden days" - that predates the present apartheid era:

> "Yes indeed, I have eighty-seven years *as a man!*" ... and went back to the Hundred Years War, his people's struggle against displacement, dispossession, to their final conquest and subjugation, to the beginning of the removals from pillar to post, a review in which he contrasted the freedom and nobility of the cattle pastoral life, its splendid horizons physical and spiritual - with the present "bare existence" in fixed and enclosed villages.
>
> (OP 39)

It is a fundamental contention of the present thesis that neither the *cordon sanitaire* of colonialism, nor, later, the colour bar, nor even the walls and barriers of apartheid - whether demographic or psychic - are ever entirely impermeable. D D T Jabavu stated as much in 1933 at the National European-Bantu Conference:

> "Segregation" is a mere catchword, for segregation is no longer possible. There is not the land to accommodate the Natives, and they are now too much bound up with the general economic organisation of the country for separation.
>
> (Karis & Carter 1972:250-251)

D D T Jabavu also rejected the proto-Verwoerdian catch-phrase, "Develop along their own lines", a sly attempt at "divorcing the Native from those institutions of modern civilisation for which there are no substitutes in Native life" (Karis & Carter 1972:251). The permeability of apartheid is, as Jabavu's writing demonstrates, particularly perceptible in the Eastern Cape, a frontier territory, a "Border country" (DC 84), a "buffer state" (OP 183). The frontier is neither a boundary nor a line, but "a territory or zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies" (Lamar & Thompson 1981:7) where one or more societies intrude on the territory of others that are reasonably well established. A reference is made in Jabavu's narrative to the "black people, here-before-they-came" who "*ukuhlalisana*", "live-side-by-side" with "the new people [who] arrived in a locality during the great migrations" (OP 115). Consequently, among the people of the Eastern Cape, a multiplicity of discourses came to intersect in a space that came to be known as a frontier.

In Jabavu's writings there is a dynamic interpenetration - or overlapping - of Western, colonial and traditional discourses that collectively form a counter or "reverse-discourse" (a discourse that Michel Foucault discerns as one used by social "deviants" as a means of establishing their identity). Because these reverse or resistance discourses are always implicated in the very power that they attempt to resist, they are said to inscribe this power. Bhabha extracts a positive value from this phenomenon by formulating the notion of hybridity, whose "peculiar 'replication'" is said to "terrorize" power or authority "with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (1994:115). It is, thus, the mimicry to be discerned in Jabavu's discourse that constitutes its counterhegemonic quality.

This mimicry is discernible in terms both of content as well as form. Like much African autobiography, Jabavu's "peculiar 'replication'" of the genre deviates significantly from its norms. As one who "belong[s] to two worlds", she gives "a *personal* account of an *individual* African's experiences and impressions of the differences between East and South Africa in their contact with Westernisation" (DC ix, my emphases). Clearly, a crucial aspect of her aim is to explain her own self (an aim that is, she suggests at the end of her second work, unrealised, since "the picture ... remains out of focus and awry" (OP 260)). The story that gradually emerges of her self is neither linear, coherent, nor a *bildung*, since it is almost entirely submerged in the stories of the "struggles of the whole community" (Selepe 1991). Moreover, its structural pattern is determined by the influence of orality, or, as Jabavu describes Big Mother's story, "digression within digression" (OP 104). In its radical departure from linearity and chronology, Jabavu's writing of her self differs substantially from the autobiographies of Ellen Kuzwayo and Phyllis Ntantala, which replicate somewhat less "peculiarly" Western narratives of the self.

Jabavu demonstrates that "autobiography is a genre of the *having become*" [*sic*], representing "a subjective consideration of the past as shaped by the autobiographer's perception of him/herself at the moment of writing, a perception itself shaped by that past" (Shear 1989:41). However, the past that Jabavu constructs is only incidentally a narrative of childhood. It is up to the reader to reconstruct the fragments of a personal life embedded in her narratives. This past is re-membered in conventional terms as an idyllic "golden time" (Jingoes quoted in Shear 1989:47):

> I remembered how as children on our way to school at Lovedale we used to pick gazania petals and put them to our lips one at a time and make kazoos of them, then eat the stalks full of sweet creamy milk.
>
> (DC 24)

This early memory inscribes the (unfulfilled) promise of a long-ago rural time. However, the self that writes in the aftermath of apartheid acknowledges the fragility of that dream-time: "Jo'burg is on fire, Jili. You are far from the once-idyllic Native Reserves" (OP 212). Jabavu records:

> It was different now from when I was a child. But enough of it remained to make one's return seem like a journey back into the security and comforts of those days.
>
> (OP 9)

Nevertheless, Jabavu deliberately constructs her childhood as one of middle-class privilege. The "Georgian and Victorian articles" in her family home at Middledrift have been in the possession of the family since the time of her Christianised great-grandparents (OP 10). She is the daughter of a professional man, a university lecturer (OP 10), whose taste in Western classical music influences her own (OP 11). The "leisurely Arcadian" setting (OP 11) in which the writing self ("MaJili, *u*Nontando whom her English marriage-people overseas call 'Noni'" (OP 4)) finds herself on her return to Middledrift blurs into the idyll of her childhood as servants cheerfully set about their

chores, lit by sunlight in a dew-covered countryside that "flashed and glittered in brilliant colours like strewn diamonds" (OP 3). The effect of this is to establish the richness of a world threatened by the bleak reductiveness of the ideology of racial inferiority and segregation.

The lyricism of her recollection of the family camping-expedition in "the blue-looking Amatola Mountains" is juxtaposed with the surprising details of the children's games: "we played at being Dutch Voortrekkers". There is a significant slippage between the pedagogy of the history textbooks glorifying the Great Trek and the performance of the children. In what amounts to a parody, these descendants of an African intellectual elite - the "Bokwes, Jabavus, Makiwanes" - are at once the "savage natives" against whom the "brave Boers" (OP 21) defended themselves, and the Boers, whom they mime. A further effect of this recollection is to undermine the distinction between "self" and "other", the "*idée fixe*" that colonial discourse constructs of "barbarian" or savage (Bhabha 1994:101). The Jabavus camping in their tented waggons represent what Bhabha refers to elsewhere as an "*inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (Bhabha 1994:38). Here, it is "the 'inter' - the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space - that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha 1994:38). In what Bhabha might term the "Third Space" of Jabavu's re-membering, the possibility of becoming "the others of our selves" begins to emerge as a radical alternative to the hegemonic "politics of polarity" (Bhabha 1994:39) of the 1950s.

During her visit to Johannesburg, the writing self recalls an earlier visit with her mother

and sister to West Rand, a suburb "on the edge of a native location" outside the city (OP 184). This episode - a variant on the "Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg" theme - functions as a unique form of counter-discourse, and gives a different perspective to Bhabha's notion, "the others of our selves". Jabavu recalls: "I was forbidden to leave [the] yard and go into the location as I longed to do and play with the children", and continues, "I could see them swarming in its streets all day, never apparently going to school while I had to submit to morning lessons from my mother" (OP 184). In these passages, a clear distinction is drawn between Noni and her township peers, who inhabit a forbidden domain outside of and beyond the precariously-positioned suburban home of her aunt, on the "edge", so to speak, of a lawless territory of the newly-urbanised underclasses. The children of the latter are constructed as "other". The word "swarming" conjures a sub-human mass of undifferentiated creatures, an effect that is compounded by the "dirt, disease ... [and] squalor" of their surroundings. Apart from the physical dangers posed by their habitat, there is also "*the language*", an unspecified vulgar slumland patois, no doubt, (OP 184) that threatens to contaminate the innocent Noni, who hails from the "'the Colony' ... heaven, idyllic" with its "grass, veld, mountains" (OP 185).

Here, again, the instability of Jabavu's hybrid text is what Bhabha defines as "a split-space of enunciation" (1994:38). At the same time as the text inscribes colonial discourse (fear and revulsion of "the other"), it counters the stereotypes of the "Native", namely, the traditional savage, or its urban variant, the gangland criminal. It does this by inscribing the fears usually associated with the non-Native in Africa; in doing so, the "self" is located in the "other", and again, in Bhabha's terms, the possibility of discovering the "others of ourselves" emerges from the text. The self assimilates the European other at the same

time as it refuses the Native it has other-ed. There is a further significant ambivalence in the text: the fear that the adults have instilled in Noni is contradicted by her desire: "it seemed everybody was frightened of the very word 'location, *elokishini,*' and I trembled, dreading it yet wanting to go - for I had no playmates" (OP 184). Noni's tentative desire to transgress the boundaries set by her elders is shortlived, however. Indeed, her fears persist into adulthood when the narrator is, once again, appalled by the location's "[p]otholes, refuse, dirt, disease, squalor - and ... the '*language*' too" (OP 190).

Through the agency of her cousin, Tandi, and aunt, Daisy, her negative stereotype is dismantled and she sees that there are "*people* living here among thieves and gangsters, *people* like back home [in the Colony]" (OP 191)). The textual insistence on the difference between the privileged child from "the Colony" (OP 185) and the slumland children may, superficially, be read as nothing more than class consciousness. Yet the "in-betweenness" of the child constructed in Jabavu's text has profound implications. Neither rural innocent, nor street-wise urbanite, Jabavu lives in the overlapping worlds of ochre people, *ubugqoboka*, and urbanites; a "Westernised black Southerner" (DC 82), she lives in a culture of "Bantuised Westernisation" (DC 149), among people who are "not 'black Europeans' ... [or] 'white Bantu'" (DC 149). These fragmented incidents of Noni Jabavu's childhood deconstruct "the Native", the fixed, homogeneous category of official discourse that reinforces racial and cultural polarity. Jabavu's narrative constructs a fluid, indeterminate "other-ed self-among-others".

The *lacunae* and incidental references to her mother reveal another, "s(m)othered" self, one that struggles to be heard in a context where, Big Mother relates, "children *have to*

be trained to fear the male parent" (OP 241, my emphasis) by mothers who are the bearers of this patrilineal culture. Throughout Jabavu's writing, much mention is made of her father's influence, while her mother's presence is conjured largely by Noni's resentment of her "new mother", Betty Marambana, or Mam'Swazi (DC 41):

> I had felt startled and jealous at the thought of my mother's place being usurped, even though at the same time I fully recognised the need and approved of my father's marrying again; in the end, forcing myself to exercise common sense in this struggle between old and new, traditional and modern, instinctive and cerebral, I saw that I must accept.
>
> (DC 32)

Jabavu does not "accept", however, and her refusal of her "new mother" is symptomatic - as she implicitly comes to realise at the end of her second text - of her "in-betweenness", her incapacity to submerge her individual "emotion" in the "pattern" of tradition or custom (OP 260).

An equation may be drawn between individual emotion and the "female", and tradition and the "male", where the latter signifies restraint. According to J H Soga, custom exercises "a restraining influence, holding individuals back from acting in such a manner as to come in conflict with them." He goes on to quote a Chief Magistrate on Mfengu recalcitrance:

> [The Fingos] by reason of having been broken up and dispersed by the Tshaka upheavals, lost touch with unified tribal life, and thus with those customs which were a restraining, uplifting and binding element of the life. Consequently ... each man is in himself chief, people and customs.
>
> (Soga n.d.:129)

Jabavu's deeply troubled feelings about her "new mother" are probably rooted in the Mfengu history of dislocation. She receives no succour from custom, and her emotions remain unrestrained as her own identity asserts itself. Her resentment surfaces throughout both texts, blighting her return.

Jabavu's treatment of her own mother, Florence, in her writing is problematic. Her mother is represented as a lack: "[w]hatever my stepmother had done in our house seemed to reflect on my mother and the old order of our life". Her stepmother's "'banishment' of old family photographs", including that of Noni's "eldest [*sic*] sister (whom [she] had never known)" (OP 96) is a reminder of the passing, not only of her old life, but also of her mother. Noni's resentment of Mam'Swazi functions as a reminder of her mother's absence. This absence in the narrative is reinforced when, for example, rather than give a personal account of her mother, Noni recalls the funeral speeches of *isiko* or custom which "recount her achievements in helping 'rear the new women of our people', how she had 'built up and supported'" her husband (DC 18). Given the extensive personal detail in Jabavu's accounts of her father and aunts, this *aporia* is, at first glance, puzzling. However, the contradictoriness of re-membering is expressed thus: "[m]y mother now occupied a special place in my feelings. But I could only express all this in futile terms for it was a jumble in my mind" (OP 97).

An illuminating glimpse of Florence Thandiswa Jabavu, "daughter of the Rev Elijah Makiwane, an intellectual giant among Africans" (Ntantala 1992:69) is provided in Phyllis Ntantala's autobiography, A Life's Mosaic:

> Florence Thandiswa ... inherited [her father's] depth and breadth of intellect and outlook: a woman in a man's world! But as warden [at Fort Hare], she was a complete failure. She had no interest in us, her wards, nor in our welfare, and no faith in what she and her husband were doing at Fort Hare. Mrs Jabavu told us many times that we should not even imagine ourselves in the position she was in. (Ntantala 1992:69)

The passage suggests a woman's discontent with her assigned role of nurturing and support. It also explains Florence's extended educational visit to England during Noni's childhood. The "depth and breadth of intellect and outlook" that equipped her to

participate in a "man's world" probably resulted in frustration at the circumscribed role of warden she was permitted to play, and may account for her alleged neglect of the conventional maternal duties, and therefore Noni's subsequent silence. Her mother's apparent alienation from the efforts of her husband and others at Fort Hare may also be attributed to the constraints imposed by successive white governments. If, indeed, she discouraged her daughters in the way she discouraged her wards, it is scarcely surprising that Noni and Alexandra chose to live in other countries.

It is, furthermore, possible that Florence Jabavu's reputed refusal of "the position she was in" (Ntantala 1992:69) influenced Noni (who had been educated in England) to embrace what Mazrui terms "heteroraciality" (or "Black and White sexuality ... the beginning of racial decolonization" (1992:97)) in defiance of "enforced racial endogamy, love-making within the same group" (Mazrui 1992:96). While little mention is made of Jabavu's "phlegmatic, English" husband (DC 166) in her narrative, her marriage is an important signifier, for heteroraciality is, at its most profound level, a refusal of racial separateness and inferiority. Jabavu's barely-mentioned inter-racial marriage nevertheless signifies the frontier, the zone where interpenetration occurs; it is the sexual expression of cultural miscegenation - and, as D D T Jabavu recognised (though somewhat ironically), of "social equality" (Karis & Carter 1972:251).[16] There is little, finally, that conjures a sense of her mother's person in Jabavu's writing; present more through oblique suggestion and inference, she is largely subsumed in the "maternals", the Makiwane family and the "steady, civilised, refined" Gambu clan (DC 18), among whom Big Mother is, paradoxically, a uniquely representative figure.

Dis-membered Self/Re-membered Others: *Drawn in Colour*

Jabavu's writings represent a woman's attempt to "[put] together ... the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 1986:xxiii). As a woman and an African, the "I" of her "personal account" (DC ix) mimes rather than mirrors that of conventional Western autobiographical writings. In other words, the narrative of the self is "*almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha 1994:86) as its Western counterpart. Jabavu's writing may therefore be said to inscribe "in-betweenness" in a further sense: her narrative breaks what Sidonie Smith refers to as the "patrilineal" contract with its "culturally compelling plots, ideals of characterization, and speaking postures associated with male or 'human' selfhood" (1987b:52). The female self that speaks is not identical with the traditional self who, like *m*Mbo, can say, "I am"; unlike him, she cannot claim, "I am one of you" (OP 133), since she is explicitly and implicitly located in a space that is "between".

Accordingly, the form of Jabavu's first text, Drawn in Colour, approximates the traveller's account rather than the usual autobiographical *bildung* (though it reverses the journey of the white, male Reginald Reynolds, whose Beware of Africans (1955), subtitled "A Pilgrimage from Cairo to the Cape", is, incidentally, dedicated to "Nontando Jabavu Crosfield and the women of Emergent Africa"). Jabavu's text is "a personal account of an individual African's experiences and impressions of the differences between East and South Africa in their contact with Westernisation" (DC ix). Like other black women autobiographical writers, she does not focus on the events of her life, but rather on "how she has become what she is" (Lionnet: 1989:97). She may be said to write "autoethnography", or "a kind of 'figural anthropology' of the self" (Serres quoted in

Lionnet 1989:99). Her explicit intention is to "write it all [her reminiscences about her "Bantu background"] down in a book so that other people might share it" (DC xi).

However, the "I" that writes is not rooted; unlike Anthony Appiah's naive "nativist intellectual" who decides to "take his people as subject", Jabavu deliberately establishes her estrangement, thus obviating the reification of "imaginary identities to which Europe has subjected [the African]" (Appiah 1990:75). Because Jabavu's position is not that of *m*Mbo, she cannot merely announce who she is and proceed to "tell the truth about ourselves" (OP 133). Jabavu's writing inscribes a unique awareness of the self as being "culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription" (Friedman 1988:39). She is therefore "split in two, straddling silence", occupying a liminal position of "material dislocation": "We [women - though this is particularly true of a black woman living in a culture that is dominated by whites as well as patriarchy] were never all together in one place, were always in transit, immigrants into alien territory" (Rowbotham quoted in Friedman 1988:39).

Drawn in Colour opens with Jabavu's awareness, on her arrival in South Africa to attend her brother's funeral, of the "prison bars of 'race'", the "old South African hostility, cruelty, harshness" (DC 3), now signalled in "'Europeans Only' or 'Non-Europeans Only'" signs (DC 5). Yet this is not an entirely black and white world. Here, cruelty is juxtaposed with the "warm, human, womanly" sympathy of the "Boer" air-hostess (DC 3). "[H]uman feeling ... violate[s]" the "racial code" (DC 4). Jabavu is at pains to establish the failure of apartheid, as is evident, once again, from the humane actions of Mr van der Merwe, the "Boer" station-master (DC 7). In such moments of slippage identities are

forged: "*Ama-Bulu asingabantu kakade?* Are Boers not people after all?" (DC 7). Speaking from her in-between position, Jabavu again subverts the notion of racial fixity when she exposes the alienating, alienated behaviour of the black journalists - "every whit as impersonal, unfeeling as white" - who hound her on her arrival at the airport (DC 4).

Having established the ambivalent context of her returning self, Jabavu proceeds to introduce the "big people (heads of families, elders)" who make up her Makiwane and Jabavu genealogy (DC 8) - she is a person only because of the existence and influence of these people. Chapter Two is headed "The Family", and here the mourners sing the praises of the Jabavus, whose name (meaning "warrior-like" (DC 14)) goes back four generations to the arrival of the "white man's law" (DC 14), and whom "God gave ... to us black South Africans" (DC 13). This world where custom overlaps with Victorian middle-class value systems (DC 16-17) is, however, part of a larger one, and so, woven into Jabavu's text is the inevitable tale of apartheid South Africa. A mourner, Xola ("Be-at-peace") Makiwane, confronts and is arrested by the police, with their granite-hard, sun-tanned faces ... [and] glittering blue eyes" (DC 10); it is a "bitter cold South African night", and his relatives experience a "shared humiliation". They resort to the "trickster" discourse of mimicry, the survival strategy of an oppressed people who speak the language expected of them, giving "the *'baas'* a Boer wants!" (DC 11) in order, paradoxically, to "drag [his] humanity out of [him]" (DC 12).

Typical of the autobiographical writing of black women, Jabavu's narrative "eschews the confessional mode - the examinations of personal motives, the searchings of the soul - that white women autobiographers so frequently adopt" (Fox-Genovese 1988:71).

Jabavu's text leans, instead, towards the "secrecy ... and self-concealment" that is claimed as characterising much black women's autobiographical writing (Fox-Genovese 1988:71). Again, like other women's autobiographical narratives, "the relationship of self to others" is emphasised (Stanley 1992:93) as Jabavu adopts a narrative strategy that displaces the autobiographical "I" and centres such marginalised figures as an elderly aunt, a pagan woman, and her sister, Alexandra, who is trapped in a suffocating traditional East African marriage.

The first of these figures on the margins is the pagan woman vendor. As one of the ochre people, she is and is not part of the world of the "house-of-Jili" (DC 25) which intersects with her own and thus contradicts the missionaries' separation of the people into "pagans and converts" (DC 26). Nevertheless, the text inscribes the woman's difference, and the authority that is vested therein. "At last the woman spoke. She was calm and at peace .... She said, 'After all, our pagan dress *was* our first dress, when we were a NATION!'" (OP 27).[17] This passage establishes the woman as the authentic voice of historical memory, as she triumphantly recalls the precolonial moment of common identity that the Jabavu uncle attempts to recapture in a postcolonial period of scattering and division when he claims, "We are one people now here in South Africa" (OP 25). She is a living source for Professor Jabavu's research into the genealogy of the Xhosa, a record that establishes the "nationhood ... traditions ... and background" that inform a people's identity:

> Here, I am working on a further edition [of his historical study, *Imbumba yama Nyama*] and will incorporate the masses of fresh news I have received from 'people like *these*! here lifting his hand and pointing to the pagan. Everyone looked at her as if for the first time ....
>
> (DC 29)

This re-membering establishes the authority of the pagan woman as a transmitter of "the splendour of her lineage, her *i-mvelapi*, her *where-from*" (DC 30), and so functions to counter the effects of colonial conquest. The power of the woman's voice is reinforced by her lineage; she speaks as a representative, and through her agency, "decimated though they might be and almost vanished, yet there was that recorded knack of her stock that it might-reappear-for-no-apparent-reason" (DC 30). Jabavu's textual insertion of the pagan woman is a powerful act of discursive resistance.

However, the narrative proceeds to demythologise the notion of a nostalgic return to a precolonial past, or to the homeliness of a world governed by custom. There can, moreover, be no harmonious "symbiosis of custom and modernity" (OP 34) (as Jabavu comes fully to realise at the end of The Ochre People). Her condition is the "unhomely" one of the modern world (Bhabha 1994:11). It is when Jabavu has to contend with the full implications of her father's new marriage, inwardly refusing the status of her new siblings, that custom and modernity collide. She realises that her generation would "disintegrate, since ... the inroads of Western modernity" corrode and change custom (DC 61). In the "disjunctive space" of modernity (Bhabha 1994:238), the self is split and identity eroded. Jabavu provides a telling woman's slant to the ontology of blackness, the sense that "one's colour was wrong" (DC 89). In Salisbury, (then) Rhodesia, en route to her sister in Uganda, she tries to purchase sanitary towels. In an incident that recalls the "Dirty Nigger!" experience of Fanon (Fanon 1986:109), she meets with refusal as "verbal bricks" are thrown at her head (DC 77): "Fine thing when *Natives* wan' things like that. They'll be sayin' they're Europeans next .... Go'n get whatever you people use in yer own native shops, go on, get out" (DC 77). What compounds the shocking effect of these

words is that they are uttered by a woman, whose implicit conflation of "European" with human, occludes not only "brotherhood" but also sisterhood. Jabavu's simple declaration, "I was depressed" (DC 78), echoes Fanon's "I burst apart" (1986:109); both register the nullifying effect of colonialism on the self.

Jabavu's narrative of her experiences in Uganda entirely erodes the residue of the "homely" detectable in Fanon's declaration, "As long as the black man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (Fanon 1986:109). A woman, Jabavu, unpicks the seamless category, "black", of male theorist, Fanon, and her father's more specific "Bantu like us .... Westernised Africans .... Christians and ... Chief[s]" (DC 82). Jabavu's narrative of her visit to her sister demonstrates that gender difference disturbs the hypothetical harmony of racial sameness. Here, Bhabha's *apologia* is instructive, if only because it - ironically - highlights the limitations of Fanon's study: "Fanon's use of the word 'man' usually connotes a phenomenological quality of humanness, inclusive of man and woman" (Fanon 1986:xxvi).

The liminality of Jabavu's position is a function both of race and gender. On the one hand, her disclaimer, "I'm no feminist", may be qualified, in the manner of Miriam Tlali, to mean "not in the narrow, Western kind of way" (Tlali 1989:74). Jabavu's story of Alexandra's marriage interrogates the traditional notion of "a woman's place" and behaviour, subordinate and submissive, like that of her sister (DC 158); Alexandra's identity contrasts with her own, which is constructed in terms of the "Jili type, an ox-goring-with-horns" (DC 82). Located in the split space "between" custom and modernity,

between the traditional woman's place and "feminism", Jabavu destabilises the fixity of categories both of race ("the black man"; "Bantu"), and gender ("woman" and her "place").

However, Jabavu's narrative reveals the ambivalence typical of colonial discourse by inscribing the hierarchy of colour, for example, the "black-as-sin" East Africans (DC 85), who are "othered" in her discourse. Later, the "other" of her own self is heard to speak when she refers to the Ugandans as "the natives" (DC 109).[18] This discursive "othering" functions, however, as an integral aspect of Jabavu's narrative of a Southern Bantu woman's liberation from an oppressive marriage to a Ugandan barrister. Alexandra is first presented as "thin as a rake", the "baby she held ... too heavy for her" (DC 91) in a classic pose of female subjugation. This wife of a professional man suffers emotional and material neglect and deprivation, relegated to the traditional woman's status (DC 105) of a "[t]iller of the soil" (a particularly humiliating fate for one who comes from a "cattle-keeping background") (DC 113). Alexandra's predicament clearly demonstrates that the oppression that women in Africa suffer, particularly in being exploited as agricultural labour, persists beyond the precolonial era.[19]

Uganda is "a man's country" (DC 112), as Jabavu discovers when she accompanies her brother-in-law and his companions on safari. At the home of their host she encounters "subdued", "obedient" wives, malnourished women who are summoned and dismissed at whim (DC 125). Their numerous children wear dirty clothes, and have the "pinkish coloured hair, rather wet noses and prominent stomachs" typical of Ugandan children (DC 125). Later, she remarks that "the price of that Western commodity [a car] would

keep ... infants supplied till puberty with the proteins that ... stave off the widespread deficiency disease called *kwashiokor*" (DC 143). Corroborating Jabavu's experiences in Uganda, Christine Obbo observes:

> A well-known Ugandan joke depicts a large house with a car, usually a Mercedes Benz, parked in front while at the back the children suffer from kwashiokor. It in fact illustrates the misplaced priorities that lead men to engage in conspicuous consumption at the expense of their family's health.
>
> (1981:8)

When she herself is offered bread rather than chicken to eat, Jabavu pointedly "note[s] the contrast with the equivalent class of my own people at home in South Africa, in the social position of women" (DC 127). The Ganda custom is that women "are expected and themselves expect to be silent while the man speaks on their behalf. The background of concubinage and serfdom has its ways of bequeathing a sense of 'woman's place'" (DC 136). Jabavu's rejection of her sister's marriage, as well as the practice of concubinage, may be attributed to her background as a Mfengu woman, particularly in view of Cherryl Walker's assertion that

> the Christian message to African women was ... "polysemic". Threaded through the dominant ideology of female subservience was a message of personal autonomy, rooted in Western individualism....
>
> (1990:16)

This individualism collides with the "overriding value in the African family", namely,

> the *non-individual nature of marriage* [which] .... embodies the idea of marriage as an alliance between two kinship groups for purposes of realising goals beyond the immediate interests of the particular husband and wife.[20]
>
> (Nhlapo 1991:113)

Jabavu's intervention in her sister's marriage goes beyond her traditional duty as an older sister. As a woman whose identity is one of "Westernised Southern-ness" (DC 184), her

consciousness is one where ideas "handed down from [the] past .... are undergoing a qualitative change" in their encounter with an "incoming culture" (DC 149). She scornfully rejects the Ugandan notion of "taint" with regard to Western influence on Bantu culture (DC 157). Indeed, her intervention results in her sister's entry into the public domain. Alexandra weans her child, takes a job at a hospital, and the process of healing is under way: "it did her good to work, meet people, fill her days this way" (DC 166). She is also freed of the expectations of a husband in a context where clitoral disfigurement signifies subjugation, and where women are trapped into cynical resignation (DC 183). We are told that Alexandra's "story ended" with her divorce and return to "South Africa for good, back to our own" (DC 186).

Jabavu's story of her sister is a reversal of the typical autobiographical narrative of the period, which ends in enforced exile and "release" to freedom beyond South Africa. It demonstrates, instead, the political dimension of the personal in a woman's life, and her woman's perspective unveils "the significant details" that "the fact of being a man" might otherwise obscure (DC 185). Alexandra's liberation occurs, moreover, in the broader context of the "co-operation and cohesion" born of

> steel tempering ordeals of Treason accusations, women's anti-Pass campaigns, bus-boycotts, banishings, imprisonments, [and] floggings for political "offences". (DC 188)

As suggested, Jabavu counters the essentialism of hegemonic notions of "'Africa' and the 'African'" (DC 188), hereby recalling Mphahlele. Her narrative goes further than this, however, in its contestation of the hegemonic notion of woman and women's place in traditional societies.

Re-membering the "Others" of Her Self: *The Ochre People*

The Ochre People resembles its predecessor in its formal structure, since it, too, follows the pattern of a journey. The first of its three parts, "Middledrift", has as its setting Noni's parental home; Part Two, "Confluence Farm", is where her maternal uncle Cecil lives with his family "in the depths of the country" in Transkei (OP 123), while the final part, "Johannesburg", focuses on Noni's stay with her Makiwane "Big Mother", Aunt Daisy.

Jabavu's return visit to South Africa occurs a year after her brother's death. The "Middledrift" section is a form of *bricolage*, where fragments from the lives of the writing self, her Mfengu relatives, and the ochre people collide, converge and collapse into each other to form a "local history" (OP 101). Amid various relatives there is the old chief and his "ancient, very frail" wife (OP 38), dignified in their tawdry surroundings, where an impassive young woman suckles a child, and a youth pores over his exercise books (OP 41). Like her old school mate, now "thin, forlorn", these are the "flotsam and jetsam" of harsh, unaccommodating social change (OP 33). In this context, the "ochre people" live; the "serenity, positiveness, the 'lack of *doubts*'" of the "Red people" (OP 129) perform an essential contrastive function in Jabavu's narrative of modernity, with its disquiet and doubt. This contrast is evident also in her relations with her Mfengu relatives (OP 52), bound as they are by a custom, which she, who lives across-the-water, has left behind. A further contrast is presented when Noni spends a few days at Fort Hare. Here, *Sis'* Nompumelelo Mzamane describes the "dead end" that faces the children, and the "iron that begins to enter their little souls" (OP 57).[21] This is juxtaposed with Jabavu's joyous observation that "at Fort Hare you saw tribes welding into a new nation" (OP 90). It is here, too, that she meets a "leading college feminist" (OP 91) - about whom she says

nothing besides. This *aporia* is, however, later filled when the narrative focuses on her "Big Mother", "the last surviving individual who has authority" in the family, and the term "feminist" is thus given substance (an issue that will be dealt with more fully below). References to tennis and dances function to subvert the notion that European culture was not for Africans.

The "Middledrift" section of the narrative ends with the elderly Cira's[22] oral account of a "senior Xhosa clan" (OP 112), an account of "we black people, here-before-they-came, [who] made an art of how tribes should 'live-side-by-side, *ukuhlalisana*'" (OP 115); of Xhosa hospitality towards "enterers" such as the Mfengu, and the selfishness of white "refugees" in the border area, with their laws that separate and exclude (OP 115). The oral narrative is the site of postcolonial overlappings, as is the identity of the narrator. In learning to read Xhosa, old Cira had entered the frontier where Xhosa culture meets that of the West, a meeting which produces a hybrid consciousness, as he enters other times, other places, as distant from his own as the Roman Empire two millenia before. Here, he discovers, lived *abantu*, people who, like himself, ate mealie grains. In representing Cira, Jabavu once again destabilises fixed notions of race and culture. She observes: "Once again I saw how the outlook of ordinary people was moulded not only by the myths and legends of our pagan background but by Old and New Testament, however unconsciously, imperfectly" (OP 109-110).

In Part Two, the narrative device of the bus-ride from Middledrift to Confluence Farm functions, first, to dismantle the assumption that Africans belong to homogeneous ethnic groups, and second, to set up a polyphonic site where the "I" of the narrative dissolves

into a series of speaking selves that form a collective "I/we", as marginal voices usually absent from literary texts are centred. The first effect is achieved by means of a discourse that establishes difference between Jabavu and the "yokels anointed with fat", "pagan braves" with "knobkerries and fighting sticks", who come from "primitive" parts of the country, beyond "The Border". These people are not "of [her] own kind", namely, educated, middle-class "school people" (OP 123).

Second, this polyphonic discourse functions as a device that leads the reader, who is probably in terms of class, if not race, of Jabavu's "kind", beyond the colour bar; in this transgressive space (that denies reservations such as "second-class" and "Europeans Only" (OP 123-124)), "an education and a pleasure" awaits those whose "ears are open" (OP 123). On closer inspection, it is clear that the knobkerries are but one item among a variety that include Western commodities such as gramophones, mechanical tools, and pillow-cases whose legends, "'Beloved', 'Persevere', 'The Time is Nigh'" signify the hybrid legacy of colonial history. Located between the joyless white passengers and the "ebullient" blacks, Jabavu, in her "uncrushable suit of man-made fibre" (OP 125) boards the bus, enjoying the sun "in the customary way" with people she soon regards as her "fellow southerners" (OP 126).

The narrative then gives voice to the diverse passengers. "People delved into the archives that they carry in their heads" (OP 130), producing a diverse discourse that constitutes a documentation, *inter alia*, of the history of the area, whose first nation, the Hottentots, named places that German settlers re-named or whites corrupted (OP 128). "Analphabetic" speakers discuss their history of migrations, (a topic that includes "politics,

land reform, property, sociology") - a history, Jabavu points out, shaped by a "patriarchal family system, based inflexibly on primogeniture" (OP 130).

Jabavu goes on to demonstrate the destabilisation of the patrilineal system in the story of the "'New Woman', partly broken away from the society that bred her; independent, fierce, unabashed" (OP 134). She tells her tale of abandonment by a suitor and reveals a "life's plan" that exploits the patriarchal society that has betrayed her:

> *Every time I conceive a boy, I will let the father produce the fine in cattle to my people - which will entitle him to take the child into his lineage group!* But I will conceal each girl, whisk her away to the home of my birth. These are my gold. (OP 137)

This plan constitutes a reclamation of woman's body in a patriarchal order at a moment of social change, though this is not overtly acknowledged in Jabavu's narrative, whose concern for the implications for a community of abandoning "the symbols of [its] self-respect" (OP 138) masks the brave defiance of the New Woman. What appears to be an evasion in Jabavu's text - "I would have liked to say what I thought but didn't. It would have been out of place for me to comment" (OP 138) - is the effect of collapsing the self into the collective voices of the community. Smith's insight has a particular resonance in this instance:

> every subject, every author, every self is the articulation of an intersubjectivity structured within and around the discourses available to it any moment in time. (1987b:47)

Following the bus-ride, life at Confluence Farm is described in a manner that parallels Jabavu's depictions of her parental home at Middledrift, with details such as the "old roll-top desk", bookshelves, rocking chair, orchard and garden (OP 141). These details of the house at Tsolo, deep in rural Transkei, together with Jabavu's overt reference to the

architecture, that "[m]any black and white South Africans" had come to see as an "intrinsically 'South African style'" (OP 141) contradicts the assumptions that underpin the Verwoerdian dream of "a separate African ethnic group area [or] ... Bantustan", and the idea that "each race would enjoy self-rule" (OP 142). The confluence of culture is evident again in her cousin's names: Cecilia, Nonqaba, and Maisie, a transformed version of the Afrikaans *meidtjie* (OP 149). It is not surprising that Jabavu's uncles at Tsolo, who threatened apartheid's "granite wall to defend White Christian Civilisation" (OP 154), were among those accused of treason in the infamous trial of 1956.

The "Johannesburg" section of Jabavu's journey is a continuation of Jabavu's autobiographical strategy of emphasising "the relationship of self to others" that Stanley identifies as characterising women's autobiographical writing (1992:93). Once again, Jabavu's narrative displaces the autobiographical "I" by centring the marginalised figure of Aunt Daisy, or "Big Mother", who becomes the subject of discourse and history through an enabling process of collective representation. It is Noni's father who begins the story of "*u*Mrs. Daisy Majombozi" (OP 103). She has the distinction of being "the first African girl in this country to sit for the matriculation", passing mathematics with distinction. Her desire was to "train and be a mathematician", in defiance of the restricted career opportunities for blacks, and the fact that there was "no such career for a black woman". In the 1880s, Daisy fought the prejudice that "thought it a miracle that a woman of her race should sit for any examination" (OP 103) - let alone in a domain dominated by the white male.

In a narrative that progresses from her father's house to that of her Big Mother, the

voice of the father is displaced, as Jabavu takes up the tale of Big Mother, who eventually tells her own story, seeming indeed to "speak from the pages" of Jabavu's text (Byrne 1994:23). Big Mother, a representative figure (DC 239), "stood for much that had gone, was going, for ever" (OP 188), and is "the anchor of all those linked through the Makiwane navel" (OP 189). Here again, Jabavu emphasises such middle-class accoutrements as "rocking-chairs, roll-top desks, things that seemed to have been always with us", indicating that her genteel, "conservative" family did not succumb to the flashy temptations of store catalogues as, perhaps, the new rich did. It is, again, such signs of the stability of the Jabavu family that accentuate the destabilising effects of policies of removals and migrant labour on property owners like Dr Xuma in Sophiatown (OP 194).

Big Mother introduces Mrs R, whose resourcefulness in the face of forced removal is striking. She adapts the interior of her "Tank" house, and again, the symbols of a Westernised life-style, the Five Roses Tea, the crotcheted doily, the cretonne curtaining (OP 209) counter not only the "overseas" stereotype of "how [the] savages live" (OP 210), but also, once again, that of separate racial and cultural identity. Indeed, Mrs R's hybrid language, signified by the insertion of a word such as "*i*jongspan" (the young people) - an "alignment of Afrikaans words attached to suitable Xhosa noun-class initial letter" as Jabavu pointedly observes (OP 210) - into a lively creolised English, reinforces the subversive force of a "heterogeneous and heteronomous" postcolonial identity (Lionnet 1989:8). The discursive impact of such details of ordinary people's lives is to personalise Jabavu's documentation of the resistance offered by a "red-hot African National Congress" to a policy of race and ethnic division with its "caged" locations, the threat of being endorsed "out into the wilderness", and the prospect of being reduced to

"propertyless serfs" (OP 211-215).

Jabavu's textual manoeuvre of centring a figure such as Big Mother, the living repository of a past where "the old ran into the new" (OP 220), corrects the balance in her patriarchal society. A woman-voice is privileged in what Bhabha describes as the "synchronous cross-time of modernity" (1994:250); this is an "intermediary" space where the temporal "boundaries become effaced" (Lionnet 1989:18) and the "different 'ethnic groups'" (OP 224) of apartheid collapse into each other. Such a moment and a space occur in the description of Big Mother's dinner party, where disparate details such as formal white table linen and the mine-workers' song (OP 229) converge and collide. Big Mother declares:

> We are conservatives, we; and cling to custom; but at the same time learn and adapt. No longer do we *cling like a grasshopper to the barbed wire fence on which it is impaled in flight, and remaining static only because dead!*
>
> (OP 236)

She represents the mixed and fluid "South-Africanness" that was - and still is - in the process of being forged. Hence, the claim is made, "all of us are South Africans" (OP 235).

Big Mother tells her own story:

> my Big Mother "spoke with me" and reminisced. "You are my captive audience," she said wistfully, but smiling. Her voice flowed, a gentle *continuo* like a harpsichord, performing endless variations and turns. I did not mind, for I wanted to hear her account of when she was a fresh young woman living as one of the family in my other grandfather's household.
>
> (OP 238)

Her "reminiscences ... created a pattern", a "framework" (OP 239) of family as well as national history, a text that weaves together the story of J T Jabavu and that of Jameson

(OP 243-244), as she fills "the gaps in the young people's knowledge" (OP 243). Big Mother demystifies, too, the father-figure, "Don" (D D T Jabavu). She gives a personal, woman's version of the great man's story in the context of the Boer War (OP 249-251) and later, revealing to Noni, the narrator-turned-listener, that he had a "truly vile" temper (OP 247). The final tribute in this woman's narrative is to Noni's maternal grandmother, MaBiyashe, a "vibrant" woman, who is permitted no more than an "elementary education" (OP 255), and whose eventual fate is that of all women in her time and place: "*constant* childbirth". Significantly, Big Mother here speaks the very words of rebuke that Olive Schreiner, "that feminist", addressed to MaBiyashe's husband (OP 255). Again, the woman's perspective offered by Big Mother demystifies a patriarchal figure, this time the "haughty", "selfish" John Tengo. Because of his demands and lack of consideration, MaBiyashe "in the manner of women in her position ... died young". The narrative exposes the irony of women becoming victims of "[s]ons who are made by mothers" (OP 256).

Jabavu's narrative of Big Mother finally reveals the source of her own deep disturbance as a woman in Africa, a disturbance that is expressed most sharply in her rejection of her new stepmother: "I began to see what I thought was a qualitative difference between her [Big Mother] and my two new stepmothers. Could their kind of woman, I wondered, examine concepts as she did?" (OP 259). Big Mother represents "a stage farther in the status of women in the patriarchal society"; because of the "training to which she had submitted her mind", she develops a "realism" that contrasts with the traditionalism of women who accept "the framework without questioning" (OP 259). Notwithstanding her apparent resolution of the conflicts produced in the postcolonial space, and her

recognition of

> the rightful status of the male element in [their] social fabric, nevertheless her right hand continually gripped, as it were, the pommel of her fighting stick.
> (OP 259)

Big Mother's granddaughter has gone a stage further than Big Mother, however. Dislocated, occupying the precarious space of the postcolonial, Noni cannot, as Big Mother suggests "steadily" gaze. She does not see, in the way that Big Mother does, "the framework" and its "linking parts" (OP 259). Living between two worlds, the "new and traditional" (OP 260), the writing self looks onto a "chasm" (OP 261). The "pattern" and "framework" that "produced" her (OP 261) and that constitute her "background", struggle against the "emotions" of the writing self, and so, "the picture that emerges remains out of focus and awry" (OP 260). She laments the lack of closure, of symmetry and of resolution (OP 260) at the conclusion of what she describes as "the survey I have written" (OP 261); she regrets the persistence of "hesitations, prevarications, obduracies, steps forward, steps backwards" (OP 261) in her life.

Noni Jabavu's narrative ends with a kind of afterword that is tantamount to a disclaimer. Her life is characterised by fissure, by an abiding sense of homelessness:

> On personal levels, hearts are now bewildered by a variety of affections as the result of individualism. The group used not to be divided; its loyalties were hierarchical; "constancy" was its praise name. Choices and caprices that destroy were not tolerated.
> (OP 261)

An African living far away from "home", her sense of alienation is compounded by her gender. She exists in a state of in-betweenness, where neither her "home-of-marriage" (traditionally, not a true home) nor "the paternal and lineal" (no longer her "real home")

offers a sense of "home"; and so, "it ended, as all things must" through time and change (OP 261). Jabavu does not retreat into the false comfort of nostalgia in a world where her father and all that he represents have vanished. Her narratives inscribe the condition of postcoloniality, the "unhomely" (Bhabha 1994:9). The fixed and the familiar are absent from this time and place where the indeterminate, intersticial self is caught in an ongoing process of personal struggle "within the systems that now exist" (OP 261).

Notes

1. This criticism echoes the views of Ursula Barnett, as well as those of an earlier reviewer, which Barnett endorses:

> Noni Jabavu, as the British-educated daughter of Professor D D T Jabavu and wife of a member of the prominent British Cadbury family, writes as a Westerner to the point of understanding the white man's attitude towards the black as "fear of the unknown", a prejudice which she herself felt when visiting the more primitive Ghanda of the north. As a result she aroused the ire of her fellow black writers. A reviewer in The New African describes her as "the new Un-African".

A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980) (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983), p.219.

2. Jabavu's writing is, accordingly, not mentioned in David Westley's "A Select Bibliography of South African Autobiography". biography 17(3): 268-280.

3. See, for example, Emma Mashinini, Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography (London: Women's Press, 1989). Before this, Working Women, ed. Helene Perold (Braamfontein: Ravan, 1985), and Vukani Makhosikazi: South African Women Speak, ed. J Barrett *et al* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1985) appeared. Though not a "working class" autobiography, Ellen Kuzwayo's acclaimed Call Me Woman (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1985) appeared in the same year as the latter works, during a period of mass resistance where women played a significant role - as they did during the 1950s.

4. Jabavu counters the "official propaganda" of white settlement, claiming her peoples' prior occupation of the land, and disclosing the settler invasions and cattle raids that constituted the real story behind the official myth of "'pacification' we all had to read about in history lessons at school" (OP 26). During a visit to a chief's house, the story of "vanished nationhood" is outlined by the elders: "the Hundred Years War, his people's struggle against displacement, dispossession, to their final conquest and subjugation, to the beginning of the removals from pillar to post ... and the present 'bare existence' in fixed and enclosed villages" (OP 39).

5. Since the Author's Preface to the 1982 edition of The Ochre People has no page numbers, I have numbered them i-vii.

6. See J C Smuts, Plans for a Better World (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1942). Smuts views Africans as belonging to a race "unique, and ... different in its mentality and cultures from those of Europe", therefore requiring unique policies (p.55). Describing them as "[c]hildren of nature" (p.55), Smuts saw Africans as "child-like .... good-tempered [and] ... care-free" (p.54). Jabavu is, clearly, familiar with the writings of Smuts, as she demonstrates in her reference to his comments on the African temperament. Ironically, she echoes Smuts's comments in her unfavourable description of the "dark-skinned ... alarming" Baganda, who "did not look gay" (DC 98).

7. Jabavu's contemporaries, Phyllis Ntantala (A Life's Mosaic: The Autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992)) and Ellen Kuzwayo (Call Me Woman), both of whom had links to Lovedale, similarly establish in their autobiographies

their middle-class, educated origins; this documentation is an integral aspect of reconstructing identities that have been eroded by racism.

8. She later modifies this position in her 1982 Preface to The Ochre People where she claims South Africa as "home", telling of her thwarted attempt "to end my days in my own country". Recalling the predicament of Sol Plaatje, she is declared a "foreigner in the land of [her] birth" because of the apartheid state's withdrawal from the Commonwealth, to which she now makes a somewhat sarcastic reference, disclaiming loyalty (p.ii). The shift in Jabavu's position may well be the consequence of the rise of Black Consciousness and the post-1976 surge in political resistance, an issue that lies beyond the scope of this critique, however.

9. This is the Xhosa version of the seTswana "*Motho ke motho ka motho yo mongoe*", translated by Ellen Kuzwayo in Call Me Woman as "No man is an island", a saying upon which "the communal way of life of the black people" is based (p.16). It is significant that this proverb emphasising the relationship between self and community should feature in both women's autobiographies.

10. It is likely that Jabavu was familiar with J H Soga's The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, n.d.). Soga speculates about the "origin of the Ama-Xosa", suggesting their Hamitic and "east coastal" origins (p.9).

11. In The House of Phalo (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981), J B Peires documents the collaboration of the Mfengu with the British army against the Xhosa (see esp. pp.110-111) and the resultant Xhosa resentment of Mfengu "thieves and traitors" (p.131).

12. The role of the Mfengu among the Xhosa should not be romanticised, nor should their absorption be regarded as part of a seamless history. In The Ama-Xosa: Life and Customs, J H Soga points out that the hospitality of the Xhosa towards refugees was conditional on the refugees' acceptance of the jurisdiction of the chief of the tribe who had given them sanctuary. Noël Mostert identifies the fissures in Mfengu/Xhosa relations in Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa's Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992). The Mfengu played a "controversial role" in the "contest between colony and Xhosa during the frontier wars towards the middle of the nineteenth century. They allied themselves first with the Wesleyan missionaries because they "began to regard themselves as held in bondage by the Gcaleka" and Hintsa (p.608), and later to the British (p.714). To this day, the Mfengu are regarded with suspicion by other Xhosa groups. While presented positively by Noni Jabavu, *Ubugqoboka* (conversion) and Westernisation (DC 68) are not without negative ideological consequences in the history of black struggle in South Africa.

13. The colonial government ignored and feared this elite, and had no plans to develop or integrate the African population. The policy to under-educate Africans was condemned by the South African Native Congress in 1903 when it quoted from an official Education Report of 1900: "I [Sir Langham Dale, Superintendent-General of Education] do not consider it my business to enforce education on all the aborigines, it would ruin South Africa. If I could produce 60,000 educated Tembus or Fingoes tomorrow, what could you do with them?" From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1964, 1, Protest and Hope 1882-1934, eds Thomas Karis

& Gwendolen M Carter, (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1972), p.19.

14. For example, as President of the Cape Native Voters' Convention, D D T Jabavu "rejected arguments often made against the common voters' roll and defended its retention as an important sign of African progress within a common Western civilization". From Protest to Challenge, eds Karis & Carter, 1, p.149. Also, the strategies adopted by the Non-European Conferences, in which Jabavu was centrally involved, did not include the establishment of "mass-based political organization" (p.152).

15. The term in fact predates apartheid. A statement made by the South African Native Congress in 1903 refers to the "location system" which discourages workers from migrating "with their families to the labouring centres"; there is no "security of tenure"; taxes are not used to "improve the sanitary condition of the locations" with a resultant "spread of diseases, [a] high death-rate, and ... depraved moral status." From Protest to Challenge, eds Karis & Carter, 1, p.26.

16. In a speech at the National European-Bantu Conference of July 1933, D D T Jabavu asserted (perhaps somewhat too reassuringly):

> "Social equality" brings to the mind the dangers of miscegenation, and the civilisation and advancement of the Native are feared because they may involve the "social equality" of marriage with White women. Of the thousands of educated Natives and of the large number educated in Europe, I know only one who has married a White woman. Miscegenation takes place in those ranks where there is least self-respect -among the very poor and ignorant and rarely among the educated.

From Protest to Challenge, eds Karis & Carter, 1, p.251.

17. J B Peires uses the term "Xhosa nation" in The House of Phalo. The Xhosa were "all persons or groups who accepted the rule of the Tshawe" (p.19) from the time of the precolonial period (p.17).

18. This voice re-emerges when Jabavu encounters the foreign practices (including despotism (DC 175-176)), attitudes and behaviour of the Ugandans: "I was chastened again to catch myself giving the man and his ragged, high-smelling assistants that cold glittering look of hostility that a settler gives 'a native'" (DC 186). This voice eventually degenerates into the verbal abuse of "you Interlacustrine Savage!" (DC 187). However, Jabavu recognises the basis of her anger, namely her disillusionment concerning the existence of "ethnic links" between Southern Bantu and other anglophone Africans (DC 187).

19. In her study of women in East Africa, Christine Obbo concludes that women continue to be "valued in their traditional and 'proper place' - in the rural areas and cultivating food crops for their families ....". African Women: Their Struggle for Economic Independence (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981), p.143.

20. Indeed, D D T Jabavu had a professional association with Alexandra's father-in-law, "a dignitary of the Church of England" (DC 147). The hope had been that "the marriage of an East African with a South African, especially the daughter of a so great man, Professor Jabavu, would be like gold and show how people could educate their children

together to raise up [*sic*]" (DC 184).

21. The phrase anticipates J M Coetzee's Age of Iron (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990), with its "children of iron" about whom Mrs Curren wonders: "What kind of parents will they become who were taught that the time of parents is over?" (p.46); these children are "the new puritans", closed and suspicious (p.75). For them, violent resistance is the only alternative where state violence has destroyed the rich texture of a life of gentle custom that Noni Jabavu re-members, and whose passing she laments. Indeed, in paying tribute in 1982 to a post-1976 generation who "see things clearly" and act decisively (Preface, OP vii), Jabavu reveals a singular ignorance of the terrible realities that the "lost" generation endured.

22. The Cira were a "senior Xhosa clan" (OP 112). Cira was the earliest-known principal chief of the Xhosa people who were later united under his conqueror, Tshawe. See Peires, The House of Phalo, pp.13-15.

Conclusion

> I have a vision of the Songlines stretching across the continents and ages; that wherever men have trodden they have left a trail of song (of which we may, now and then, catch an echo); and that these trails must reach back, in time and space, to an isolated pocket in the African savannah, where the First Man opening his mouth in defiance of the terrors that surrounded him, shouted the opening stanza of the World Song, "I AM!"
>
> Bruce Chatwin

> "He was a new kind of man, not a white man, but not quite a black man, either: a kind of flash in the pan produced by the surface of the two societies of friction."
>
> Nadine Gordimer

The autobiographies of Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Noni Jabavu, written during the period 1954 to 1963, are powerful counternarratives. These writings are palimpsests, each a multilayered record that registers traces of the impacts and contacts of the colonial experience. As histories of "contaminations", of the meeting and mingling of peoples, the autobiographies function in profoundly subversive ways to counter the myth of racial and cultural purity.

These complex narratives are multivocalic; their various voices representing what Njabulo Ndebele refers to as "genuine polemical debate", these autobiographies counter, also, the discourse of the pamphlet and the platitude - a tyranny that replicates that of hegemonic deception, with its lack of knowledge and information (Ndebele 1988a:19-20). As products of the vast social text that is South African society, these complex and fluid narratives provide enabling possibilities for South Africans "to re-enter the contest for power in history with both their *minds* and their hands" (Ndebele 1988a:19-20).

From writing that exemplifies the "cultural hybrid in which African and European concerns are inextricably mixed through the twine and woof of a common language" (Nkosi 1981:2), a new theory of the self emerges. Within the liminal spaces and in-between moments of the 1950s, spaces and moments beset by the logic and laws of apartheid, hybrid selves are born. Writing in English, South Africa's first black autobiographers envisioned alternative modes of identity. While each employs a version of the "I-am-Us formula" (Thuynsma 1992:228), the heterogeneity of the "Us" subverts conventional notions of who it is that constitutes the collective self. The racially and culturally inclusive self of each narrative is born in a space that neither the *cordon* of colonialism nor the barriers of apartheid could contain.

In each of these narratives, different factors influence the process of renaming and reclaiming the self. In the case of Peter Abrahams, a profound sense of lack, of deprivation, accompanies the "Coloured" identity foist upon him. The autobiography rewrites this neither/nor identity, however, transforming its very indeterminacy. In its place is set up a migrant self, a re-envisioned hybrid identity that dissolves the very notion of racial categorisation.

As one who is categorised black, Mphahlele is influenced by the strictures of a racial ideology that forces identity into a static either/or mould. He knows his "tribe", and so does not experience lack in quite the same way as Abrahams does. Different reasons therefore underpin his rejection of race and his construction of an ambivalent identity that similarly mocks the basis of race categorisation. Mphahlele writes, so to speak, from the edge of the ghetto, the shifting site where black and white meet, where seepage

results in irreversible contaminations.

In a class of her own, Noni Jabavu occupies, in many ways, a privileged position. Her life is one where Europe and Africa richly overlap, in a material as well as cultural sense, with few of the tensions perceptible in the narratives of Abrahams and Mphahlele, and with a different sense of dislocation. Jabavu establishes a strong sense of her own place, family and history, in the process constructing an identity that is deeply influenced by her peoples' migrant status. Her identity may, like those of Abrahams and Mphahlele, be described in terms of hybridity and ambivalence - at once the same as, and different from, that of her people in the Eastern Cape. Her resultant sense of estrangement and homelessness is realised in a manner that differs from that of the other two autobiographers, and the self that is constructed is, paradoxically, more powerful and more precarious. Just as the impact of class may be said to overshadow race in the construction of Jabavu's "I/i", so her gender gives a particularly privileged position to the various women's voices that contribute to this collective self.

Products of the friction-point, the frontier that was South African society at the time, these narratives provide early expressions of a newly-envisioned South African identity. The neither/nor identities forged in the "flash in the pan" moment of the 1950s provide, today, a creative alternative to those prescribed and produced by the colonial/apartheid past. It is an alternative particularly appropriate to the present, since the indeterminacy of the interregnum produces conditions where identities are inchoate and transitional. Re-read in accordance with the imperatives of the current historic moment, the writings of Abrahams and Mphahlele are charged with fresh cogency, while Jabavu's neglected

narratives demand due attention.

It needs to be acknowledged that the logic of race is deeply embedded in our national psyche. Because of this, the patterns of South Africa's terrible past are likely to re-emerge in mirror-images of racial and ethnic identity, and one racist hegemony may be replaced by another. As contesting discourses of race, ethnicity and narrow nationalism - whether these privilege the "African people", the "Zulu", or the "*volk*" - struggle to gain or to regain ground, the notion of hybridity (*métissage*) seems to offer the only responsible and practical critical option. While the effect of the black/white binarism of racist ideology is stasis and silence, Fanon's aphorism, "The Negro is not. Any more than the white man", opens the way to agency and transformation, to "authentic communication" (1986:231).

In a delicate moment of national and cultural rebirth, cries of *amandla* are overtaken by those of *masakhane*, as resistance gives way to the historic task of reconstruction. It is suggested that the energies of past struggles may most fruitfully express themselves in accordance with the re-envisioned humanism of the autobiographical writings that have formed the focus of this study. This humanism defines the self anew. It recognises in the self a procession of "others", ignoring the limits of race and gender.

Embracing the notion of a broadly inclusive South Africanness[1], this humanism breaks free from the tyrannies of its time and place, and offers a liberatory way forward. For indeed, "true liberation" can only arise from a recognition of the "mutual inclusiveness in which the various cultures of South Africa overlap".[2] The multiple selves constructed

in the first black South African autobiographies written in English constitute a collective assault on this country's most virulent expression of what may be a universal, persistent tendency to assert difference and inferiority - whether this be expressed in terms of race, culture or gender.

These autobiographies, with their claims to identity and historic being expressed as "I AM!", challenge many aspects of the disbelief that is the legacy of late twentieth-century critical activity. Indeed, the claims of the writing, coupled with the responsibilities of criticism in a crucial postcolonial period demand the suspension of those postmodern doubts discussed in previous chapters. Here, now, in this cross-over place, in this in-between time, the intertwined histories and interlinked identities gain new power. The antihegemonic purpose of postmodernism is modified by the moral force of the individual and collective vision of Mphahlele, Abrahams and Jabavu, whose discursive selves propose the possibility of new ways not only of being, but also of doing. Accordingly, we may leave behind our world of strangers, and, like Toby in Gordimer's novel of the period, recognise the others of our selves: "he was me, and I was him" (Gordimer 1976:240).

Notes

1. A shift in the conceptualisation of South Africa's people from a narrowly-conceived "us" to an inclusive "all" is signified by the pronominal "all" that runs like a refrain through the historic document of the time, the Freedom Charter.

2. Attributed to Andries Oliphant in an article publicising the New Nation Conference of 1991, "Reconstructing Culture", New Nation, Sept. 6 1991 to Sept. 12 1991, p.8.

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