

Alienation: The Perpetual Trauma

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Abstract – It has been a destiny that the African writers were devoid to express themselves freely with their spontaneous gust of feeling and devoid from literature. These writers have delved deep into the several reasons for alienation. In this arena Eskia Mphahlele, a freedom fighter for Africans posits a vantage point as how this concept of exile affects the individual as a whole even after the political independence and how they remain secluded in their home.

To project the real cause of alienation in Africa was the sole intention of Eskia Mphahlele. In this juncture the election of Nationalist caused a sense of release for this alienation in South Africa. Hence to understand South Africa it is necessary to know black writers. Apartheid led people into racial discrimination and segregation. The Population Registration Act (1950) provided a framework to portray racial category of every person, the Immortality Act (1950), made marriage and sexual relation between races illegal, the separate Amenities Act (1953), proved authenticity to segregation in public places, Bantu homelands legislation provided for the creation of black African reserves and authorized the government to grant homeland's independence.

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INTRODUCTION

Mphahlele's banning as he protested against the socio-political conditions led him to protest against the present political scenario, against apartheid. Finally he got success to combine cultural and political scenario to be tantamount to the Black Nationalism with the Black Consciousness movement led by Steve Biko and others. It was a bare fact that in Black Africa, there was alienation even in independent Africa. In Paris between 1961 and 1963 in a literary conference held in Africa and Europe it could be successful to make certain things to be focused like negritude by Senghor and West Indian poet, Aime Cesaire, Biko, Fanon and Mphahlele. For this they took steps to free African psychology from whites' humanism.

Many writers died during exile it was Mphahlele who could survive. The writers like Nat Nakasa, Themba, Arthur Nortje and black American poets also had deep rooted faith. It is humanism, the idea not bound in any theoretical definition but free from that periphery. Class and colour always remained a backdrop for imparting human rights. The economy after World War II led this black labour.

Mphahlele's novel *Chirundu* (1979) is based on the genuine issue of bigamy, staying in Zambia from 1968 to 1970, a Cabinet Minister who was being prosecuted for bigamy. In those Pan-African literatures, the description of such women as Tirenje has been rarely

projected. Mphahlele in that way projects the need to project the social scenario. These are the issues defining the variety of class, ethnicity, and socio-ideological voices for future development as the charge raised by Tirenja against her husband Chirundu. The debasement of South African refugees in neighboring African countries is also the focus of attention. Mphahlele takes spokespersons to project the scenario in his narrative techniques as Chieza from Zimbabwe and Pitso Mokae from South Africa. These two characters also endure the atrocity by white oppressors as they lacked official passport. Hence Chimba's bigamy is interpreted in political, social, religious and personal contexts. Chirundu finds himself to shun either of his two wives therefore he remains failure to assert his two marriages. It is an unconscious process of survival by the victim's homeland. There comes a time when this exile becomes unbearable in the mind simultaneously in the mechanics of living. This exile becomes a search for self-definition. So this post-colonialism teaches how to survive but it was not so much easy. A group of Nigerian Writers in 1960s like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nurapa, Nkem, Nwankwo, Onuorea Nzekwu have compounded African life with national togetherness. If we centralize the humanism in Eskia Mphahlele's writings where in one of his articles he writes:

It has been my fate to be a teacher and writer... I come from a country where for virtually two centuries

the people of colour have, as a deliberate policy, been denied the freedom of association, assembly, thought, inquiry, and self-expression. For this reason I have treasured and savored every moment when I could snatch any one of the freedom (Mphahlele, Education: The Imagination: 179)

At religious level Chirundu disgusts Christian values as he sees his own father who becomes despotic and tyrannical in his attitudes. The Bemba Law of getting married has also been highlighted against western law to assert his love for both. As Chirundu's father is driven not by a "Humanistic consciousness", but a "Superimposed kind of thing." (Mphahlele Remarks on Chirundu: 30)

Chirundu is a protagonist with open mindedness who respects all values of life but conscious of his own prestige and reputation and his own self-justification against imposed social laws and orders, moreover African cultures and tradition. At one hand where Tirenje symbolizes rural life, compassion, respect for social laws and order on the contrary the second wife Monde, stands for the urbanization, westernized blindness after prestige and reputation. Tirenje is a woman who "stands on strong legs", with breasts "you want to put your head between and listen to an ancient story with no ostentatiousness (C 51)" but she is exploited by her husband Chirundu.

The novel deals with the experimental use of narration representing socio-ideological voices, diverse professions, classes, and generations. These elements emerge out with the protagonist Chirundu, minister of Transport and public works in an independent Central African country identifiable as Zambia. Tirenje who is the legal wife of Chirundu charges against him for bigamy as a crime. Actually it is an effort of Mphahlele to empower black resistance movements. Through his choral device the novelist presents a polyphonic resonance by the commentators like Southern African exiles Chieza from Zimbabwe and Pitso Makel from South Africa. It is the multi-layered expression of the novel that emerges out. The reasons have been given to solicit bigamy as valid in the form of legal, personal, religious, cultural and historical references. On such basis the character of the protagonist has been developed. After such explanations too Chimba Chirundu fails to prove his two marriages to be valid. It is his "symptomatic of his failure to operate between two levels of society, the rural masses and urban life." (Joyce 1984:109) It is the cultural isolation when he decides Bemba Law to prove his two marriages to be valid as manipulative and self-serving against Western Law in order to keep both a town and a country wife. He hates Christian morality as he already observed his own father who becomes tyrannical and disowns his own wives under its sway. On the basis of such humanism he chooses nationalism and his own ambitions to fulfill on account of his own humanism. He is stimulated by his motives of greed.

Tirenje is the symbolic figure of humanism, a desire to assert her aspirations is compassionate, loyal and authentic. She manifests African values from rural past which is totally different from Chirundu's mistress Monde who is superficial and sophisticated, a stereotype of urban life. Tirenje insists upon civil law for her preference for monogamy. She does not demand for her husband's property. She merely asks for the respect for her own aspirations and moral aesthetics. She takes her firm assertion in the statement by her teacher for which she discards the city house which Chirundu builds for her and Monde to occupy. In this way she recalls the words of Elena Mwansa, her admired teacher, who tells her students that a "man who wants a woman for a thing to kick about is himself very weak" (84). Tirenje proves finally to be bold enough as Mphahlele comments for her, "Tirenje is now a symbol of a new woman, who is not going to be in a polygamous situation." (C 22)

Like Mphahlele's *Chirundu* (1979), Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971); Senegalese writer Mariama Ba, also raised such issues like polygamy in African society very extensively. In Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971) the discrimination is projected by a Masarwa (bushman) teacher, Margaret Cadmore – an African woman should also protest against her oppression either on racism or sexism. Like Mphahlele, Heads also explores the layers of colonialism and imperialism. But it is made very much clear that Chirundu has two personalities, one that is his indigenous self where he is bound emotionally with his two wives and the second imposed personality where he is compelled to forsake either of them.

Hence it is focused as how post-colonial Africa will face or handle new political and economic system. Simultaneously the figure like Tirenje who is a black protagonist is a rarity. In such South African novels Mphahlele raises the requirement of post-colonial Africa to seek "viable structures of self-government from the lessons of Africa's own historical experience." (Davidson 1991:41) It is the need to write about black abuse of power with the dominant habit of patriarchal societies. Africa has got unfinished revaluation where debasement, dispossession and alienation are focused, where black women are "triple oppressed by virtue of belonging to a devalued race, class and gender." (Byrne 1994:24)

Chirundu is a protagonist holding the twin force of modernism and tradition, and track where he feels traumatic as which track to be adopted. Moyo his nephew on the contrary seems to put balance as a political activist involved in trade unions and modern enough to fulfill his own aspirations. He seems to have a very good chemistry with his grandfather old Mutiso, who maintains a mystic relationship with nsato, which symbolizes strength, where Chirundu himself pays a tribute:

Old age draws me to itself. You look at old age and you seem to be in the presence of an awful mystery. One that commands reverence and at the same time seems indifferent..... He is an ancestor now. Time has poured into this life all it could ever invest. This man, this woman you see in front of you in their seventies, eighties, nineties has earned that status. In Europe and America, I have been told they would be tucked away ... out of the concourse of general humanity. Moyo would be seen as having turned behind him wreckage for the scrap yard. To us, he would be walking behind a god. (C 53)

Moyo, being associated with old Mutiso has respect for tradition and modern African perception. It is the dichotomy of African and Western culture between Chimba and Tirenje, between Moyo and Tirenje. He builds a new order realistically. In this way he clings to the African humanistic values without any confliction. Moyo is closely tied with his grandfather old Mutiso and combines respect for the African past with a modern outlook. Consequently it serves a positive role model for how the posterity can assert black values while becoming too extensively modern.

Moyo is a character who does not consider other humanism and culture. She is the character who considers her own tradition to be followed of what the new woman can become. Simultaneously the clash for the sanctity of marriage reflects a rift between tribal assertion versus modern customs and laws. Even then it is the alienation that spurts out as something strange in the white man's school and church, in the white men's towns and we make loneliness in ourselves as the factory makes clothes. (Immanuel 1961) The novel in crux raises several issues like what one should try to retain when he encounters old and new values to be equally important?

It is the exploration of cultural values on the basis of aesthetic morals, depicting a dichotomy between tribal and Western law debating for cultural assertion. Hence if we compare *Chirundu* (1979) with Bessie Heads' *Maru* (1971), then we may find a clear dichotomy of such human values but that does not focus extensively on gender issues even then the bitter experiences of discriminations are always there by the characters like Masarwa (bushman) teacher, Margaret Cadmore, at the hands of Botswana villagers who historically had kept Masarwa people as slaves.

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