

https://dspace.org/

Reading history in the present: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Natives' Land Act

Thwane, Boitsheko Seboba Thato

2017

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25509

Thwane, Boitsheko Seboba Thato (2017) Reading history in the present: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Natives' Land Act, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/25509>

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

DECLARATION

I Boitsheko Thwane hereby declare that this Research Report is my own work submitted under the supervision of Professor Bhekizizwe Peterson to the **Faculty of Humanities** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts in African Literature** at the **University of the Witwatersrand.**

Date: 31 October 2017

BST Thwane

Signature

Reading History in the Present: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Natives' Land Act.

Boitsheko Seboba Thato Thwane

Submitted in the partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts

To the Department of African Literature

University of the Witwatersrand

2017

Acknowledgements

Tsela kgopo ga e latse nageng. Montsamaisa bosigo ke mo leboga bo sele.

Papa, Mama-Kgaka kgolo ga kena mebala, mebala e dikgakaneng.

The Wits African literature Department for their endless support.

God for choosing Me.

Boresetse!

Abstract

Sol Plaatje's novel Mhudi revisits prominent events detailing the relationship between the various clans that occupied the South African Landscape in the 1800's. This story is a reflection of the conflict that arises between the different groups, how it is overcome and prospects of a new harmonious beginning. Plaatje writes his novel in the light of the occurrences in South Africa following the 1913 Natives Land Act. Plaatje uses various elements of culture and literary aesthetics to pose Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Natives Land Act. Literature is a carrier of culture and knowledge that can be used as a credible source to assess the past, the present and the future. Plaatje uses a story of love to elucidate how love conquers evil, the story of land and the knowledge and cultural significance it holds. Through this he highlights the wisdom that lies in the knowledge and application of culture through reverence.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION i

Reading History in the Present: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Natives' Land Act. ii

Acknowledgements iii

Abstract iv

Introduction 1

Research Background 1

Sol T Plaatje 2

Plaatje's Cultural Nationalism 4

Culture, Land and Gender as Thematic and Aesthetic Tools 7

Chapter 1: Mhudi and the Politics of its Aesthetics 11

Matebele Attack on the Barolong 11

Turmoil in Mzilikazi's Empire 12

Barolong Vengeance 13

Native Life in South Africa 14

Mhudi and its reception: the politics of its Aesthetics 14

Orature 21

Intertextuality: the effectiveness of a romance text 27

Romance as a story of hope 29

Chapter 2: Land, Migration and Exile 32

The loss of land as a Haunting. 35

Migration as loss 39

Exile as exclusionary 41

Chapter 3: Censorship, reception and gendered land. 43

Gendered Land 44

Conclusion 49

Bibliography 51

Introduction

Research Background

The purpose of this research report is to question, and to what extent, literature serves as an archival reference of the past. This will be achieved by exploring how Plaatje uses literature and its aesthetics to critique the political landscape of South Africa in the 1900's and to foreshadow the possibility of generational poverty and of political unrests due to the 1913 Land Act. I further propose that Plaatje achieves this by using a female protagonist who is portrayed as a metaphor for the land. I further explore the extent to which he does by considering the development of the Mother Africa Trope and what it has come to represent in later literary debates such as in the case of Leopold Senghor's popularisation of it.

I will therefore examine Sol Plaatje's Mhudi, first published in 1930, focussing on its treatment of social issues related to land and its import for culture. Focusing specifically on how Plaatje writes Mhudi as an allegory of the 1913 Land Act. Plaatje's Mhudi and Native Life in South Africa (1982), hereafter NLSA, have been hailed as pioneering texts in setting the templates for current debates around land and its ontological significance to those who dwell on it. Both texts are read as Sol Plaatje's response to the Native Land Act of 1913 (hereafter Land Act). I intend to read Mhudi as an allegory of the dispossession of land, displacement and forced migration experienced by Africans during the era of the Land Act. I refer to the black South Africans as "natives" in this Research Report. This use of the term contextualises the period which this research report speaks to.

Equally pertinent are the aesthetic tools Plaatje employs in portraying these affairs. For instance, how, through the character of Mhudi, Plaatje idealises the notion of land, in this instance as a symbolic presentation of the South African landscape as gendered. What effect does the treatment of woman as a metaphor of the land have? In this study, with the benefits of hindsight, I would like to question Plaatje's political intent in writing Mhudi, especially whether he may have written it as a prophetic warning of what would ensue in the future of South Africa following the Land Act. Before returning to my interests I would like to give a brief sketch of Plaatje's life, focussing on key issues that will manifest themselves in his books.

Sol T Plaatje

Sol Plaatje is one of the foundational writers and scholars from South Africa. He was born Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje on the 9th of October 1876[1]. He was born in the Boshof region of the Free State to Martha and Johannes Plaatje who had nine children of whom he was the sixth[2]. His family moved and settled at Pniel between the years 1878 and 1879 where he began his schooling at the Pniel mission school under the leadership of the Missionary Ernst Westphal and his wife Marie[3].

As a learner Plaatje showed great zeal and impeccable skill in reading and writing. He progressed so well and so quickly that Mrs Westphal indulged him in the skill of playing the organ and flute[4]. He was so talented that he was responsible for teaching the Westphals' son the alphabet[5] and also went on to become a pupil teacher and monitor at the mission school[6]. Plaatje read and studied Shakespeare reverently and grew as a believer while at the mission school. He later used his Christianity and its values and literatures as points of reference in his work. The influence of Shakespeare is quite prominent in his work as from quite early on, in his body of translation works, we find Julius Caesar (2000)[7], The Merchant of Venice (2003)[8] and A Comedy of Errors (1988)[9] amongst other works of interest by Shakespeare. Plaatje was a born leader and a self- established nationalist; who broke boundaries and set himself apart as a leader and non-conformist in many instances throughout his life, which I will give detail of below.

In The Souls of Black Folk WEB DuBois likens being black to being born within the veil which separates you from the privilege that is enjoyed by other races.

---

[1] Molema, Seetsele M. Lover of His People (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2012), p.18, 19.
[2] Ibid p.19.
[3] Ibid p. 20, 21.
[4] Ibid p.21.
[5] Coetzee, M. Gotthilf Ernst Westphal & Carl Theodore Gotthilf Gotthardt Westphal Papers 1884-1965. (Unisa Library German Africana Collection,2011) Hesse collection ACC 21. p.1.
[6] Molema, op.cit., 22.
[7] Shakespeare, William. Julius Caesar (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2000).
[8] Shakespeare, William. The Merchant of Venice (New York: Cambridge UP, 2003).
[9] Shakespeare, William. The Comedy of Errors (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988).

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and the Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (DuBois 1903:8,9)

This said veil constituted a black condition which left black people, according to DuBois, in a perpetual state of internal conflict. Furthermore it perpetuated feelings of being patronised all due to their skin colour which left them at a disadvantage. The accolades that Plaatje earned at Pniel and his life's achievements, which will be discussed later on in this study, prove that he never allowed his "black condition" to limit him and was constantly endeavouring to better himself through knowledge. Plaatje was proficient in many languages, these included Koranna, Xhosa, German, English, Afrikaans, French and his mother tongue Setswana[10]. It is because of this keen knowledge and ability to read and write so many languages that he succeeded as a telegraph messenger as well as in his clerical examinations in which he outdid all those he sat with to write it, both black and white.

Plaatje took to writing as though to him it was second nature. Having started out as a messenger with only about five_years of formal education, he continued to read and write independently[11]. Upon leaving the mission school he began work as a telegraph messenger for the Kimberly post office. He later went on to work as a court interpreter where he met his wife (Elizabeth) Lilith Mbelle who was his colleague's younger sister. The two eloped and got married by "special licence"[12] in 1898 and they had 6 children[13]. His family was important to him and although he missed out on a lot of time with them in his attempts to fight for his people's rights, he hoped to have his family freed in the process as well.

---

[10] Coetzee, M. Gotthilf Ernst Westphal & Carl Theodore Gotthilf Gotthardt Westphal Papers 1884-1965. (Unisa Library German Africana Collection,2011) Hesse collection ACC 21. P.1.

[11] Molema, op. cit.,22.

[12] Marriage Act, No 25 of 1961. 1961. *Available:* http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Act%2025%20of%201961.pdf
The Union Gazette Extraordinary: *Marriage act no 25 of 1961* states that: Parties desiring to marry without the publication of banns or Notice of intention to marry may personally apply to an officer or employee in the diplomatic or consular service of the Union authorized by the minister to issue special marriage licences or to a magistrate or native commissioner for a special licence to marry without the publication of banns or notice of intention to marry. P.57.

[13] Molema, op. cit., 31.

Plaatje's Cultural Nationalism

Plaatje earned himself the title "Morata Wabo" through being a consistent lover and servant of his people. Plaatje used the vantage point of being part of the educated elite in his time, to speak for and about the African people. Most of his written work attests to his pious work which speaks directly to his cultural nationalism. Plaatje's cultural nationalism stemmed from his inclination towards historical knowledge. He translated various Shakespearean texts into Setswana and put together a collection of Setswana proverbs[14]. Not only did this aid in preserving the language but it also helped capture and archive the culture.

His nationalism though, was not limited to Setswana culture but extended to his fellow Africans in South Africa. Through working as a court interpreter he represented many black people, which was contrary to the norm, being that black people could not occupy spaces of political and socio-economic influence, due to segregation and prejudice laws. Furthermore, when necessary, he stood in and spoke for black people from the vantage point of understanding and being of their culture, hence adequately representing their concerns.

Plaatje therefore played a huge role in rewriting black history and in actively participating in the "writing back"[15] process as did most black intellectuals of his time. Although there were endless constraints, Plaatje did an honourable job at presenting the formerly repressed and misrepresented side of black history and that of South Africa as opposed to what had been accepted and enforced as a national history by white segregationist rulers. Plaatje's access to different templates of literature i.e. the Bible; English literature and Scholarly work, thus aided him in his quest towards cultural nationalism.

He worked as a court interpreter in Mafikeng as well and also as a personal secretary to Magistrate GC Bell also known as "Morena Bell". Even then he often proved his allegiance to his culture and had a severe reverence to it that he would often go against Bell's orders if he believed they were in any way disrespectful or dishonourable. (Molema 2012:36);

> Magistrate Bell announced that the native affairs commissioner would call a public meeting to inform the tribe that he was removing their *kgosi*, Besele Montshiwa, from the chieftaincy because he, Bell, suspected that Montshiwa was not assisting the English war effort and was

[14] Molema, op. cit., 76.

[15] Ashcroft, Bill. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures (London: Routledge, 1989).

> preventing the Barolong from assisting it. A large public gathering took place at *kgotla* and Plaatje was asked to interpret, but he refused saying that he was an interpreter at the magistrate's court, not the *kgosi's kgotla*. He said he could not interpret words condemning the *kgosi*. And when the *kgosi* answered the magistrate, fuming with anger (for *kgosi* Besele was a fearless person), Plaatje refused to interpret his furious words to the magistrate. They tried every kind of trick to convince Plaatje to translate, but he refused and they ended up having to look for another translator.

This further proves that Plaatje was a strong-willed man who lived by unshaken principles. Molema (2012:76) shares how Plaatje's Mantra and life's prayer was "God help me never to surrender control of my thinking to another person, no matter who they may be." Willan (2015) also makes a good point to this effect where he argues that Plaatje stood by his opinions and was not easily influenced to change his mind or mollify his audiences by concealing his opinions through his writing[16]. Plaatje definitely found escape from the black condition through his knowledge and self-assuredness.

Plaatje was quite instrumental in documenting the Anglo-Boer War which occurred between 1899 to 1902[17]. Plaatje involved himself in the forefront of what most Africans imagined would be a great and beneficial alliance to have with the English by assisting them in the war against the Boers. Throughout the Anglo-Boer war Plaatje kept a personal diary in which recorded the war from his perspective. This record has been published under the title "The Boer War Diary of Sol T Plaatje: an African at Mafeking[18]". Furthermore this documentation of the Boer war, through his personal diary of the events, might have given him an edge in so far as his writing is concerned. Plaatje's involvement in politics and his awareness of the South African landscape is evident in, amongst other ventures, his decision to dedicate two newspapers to the enlightenment of the Africans, further making them aware of the nature of the social struggle they were under and what forms of agency were at their disposal.

After the war Plaatje started his career as a journalist and co-founded and edited his first newspaper, "Koranta ea Becuana" through which he informed the black working class and masses of various laws and events that affected them as Africans. The paper remained relevant and influential in the lives of the Africans it reached. When the production of

---

[16] Brian Willan *What 'Other Devils'? The Texts of Sol T. Plaatje's Mhudi Revisited* , Journal of Southern African Studies, 41:6, 1331-1347. (2015)

[17] Molema, op. Cit.,34,36.

[18] Comaroff, John L. The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking. (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1973).

"Koranta ea Becuana" ceased in 1909 he went on to become editor of the "Tsala ea Batho" Newspaper in Kimberly[19]. Plaatje also wrote NLSA in 1914 and Mhudi in 1920 which came to form an extremely significant part of his political career.

Another cause Plaatje strongly stood for, as will be discussed later, was that of the equality of women. He realised the manner in which women were subjugated in society, i.e not being allowed to vote, attend kgotlas or the SANNC convention. Plaatje recognised women as equally worthy of the freedom and liberation which he fought for. Plaatje recognized the skill and tenacity his daughter Olive possessed yet she was shackled by stereotypes and restrictions society imposed on her as a woman, so much so that the full breadth of her intellectual and social impact would never come to flourish[20]. Molema relates how Plaatje would often praise women and recognise their authority and knowledge even over that of a man if he had to. His wife Elizabeth is said to have been quite intelligent as well. She could have very well come to parallel her husband had she not been predisposed to being a mother and wife.

Although it is not recorded anywhere, it is quite possible that in the confines of their own home Plaatje and Lilith worked as a formidable team mapping out the pillars of the social nationalism that would come to speak to and for the liberation of the black nation. It is quite evident that Plaatje had immense respect and reverence for women as his pious work follows him all throughout his political career where he never ceased to defend and fight for women's rights. Plaatje is quoted defending Charlotte Maxeke amidst his male compatriots who refused to admit women as delegates for their convention[21]. Plaatje denounces such backward thinking and praises Charlotte for her accolades and intimates that her presence at the convention would have been an intellectual pleasure (Molema 2012:92,93).

Plaatje was one of the founders of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, and was elected secretary general. Later the SANNC became the African National Congress (ANC) in 1922.[22] It was a pioneer in serving and empowering Africans. As part of the leadership of the SANNC, Plaatje fought for fair labour relations and the rights of black

[19] Molema, op, cit.,49.
[20] Molema, op. cit., xiv.
[21] Out of the gathering of 40 robust masculine men not one could boast of even a Kaffarian degree, while miss Charlotte Maxeke who was refused admittance on account of her sex is, besides other attainments a BA and BSc of an American University, and in a report covering more than nine columns of the Izwi, hers was the neatest and most sensible speech. Taken from Molema, op. cit.,92.
[22] Molema, op. cit.,53.

people. He was also quite active in petitioning against the Natives Land Act before and after it was passed. It was in this period that he led a delegation to England with the intention to try and persuade the British government to overturn the rule of the Union government on the Land Bill that was passed in 1913.

Plaatje further mobilised and aided the women's league of the SANNC to protest against pass laws in Free-State towns. As Peter Limb (Limb 2002:27) has commented, Plaatje was seen as a social liberator of the black race and also an "obstinate if at times timid fighter for the rights of all Africans, critical of empire if different to western legality and broadly sympathetic to the predicament of African toilers." His political genius was further displayed in his writing of Mhudi which then seemed nothing more than a historical novel whilst it was a treasure with embedded political knowledge and wealth.

Plaatje's ability to actively engage and impact national affairs was somewhat constricted by the fact that he was a black man living in a white-ruled colonial country. Literature thus proved to be a worthwhile tool in asserting cultural norms and principles, particularly where segregation and prejudice were hindrances to black people. Literature could be used to effect a positive validation of black culture and it also offered a space for agency and a platform to speak for oneself.

A close look at the aforementioned facets of Plaatje's life; his family structure, his upbringing, his missionary education and political escapades are a useful backdrop against which we can read his work and what he intended with them, in particular Mhudi and NLSA. His upbringing and education largely influenced his writing in terms of form and structure. As much as he was a voice of influence in his time, he continues to do so even now beyond the grave. NLSA has been a focal point of reference in debates about land and it has been an admissible historical document evidencing the effects of the Land Act.

Culture, Land and Gender as Thematic and Aesthetic Tools

Christian influences in Plaatje's work can be seen in the pronounced biblical intertextual templates that are present in NLSA as well as in Mhudi. Furthermore, a considerable amount of influence on the structure of his novel Mhudi, may be ascribed to the Shakespearean literature he was been exposed to in his early discovery of literature. This is in particular

relation to his choice of constructing a romance novel to depict and critique 18th century social relations through the love story of Mhudi and Ra-thaga.

Following the invocation of the novelist as a teacher in society[23], and literature as a tool for promoting black nationalism, I am also interested in the prominent and effective use of literary techniques by Plaatje in Mhudi, in particular, his recourse to allegory, orature, intertextuality and the romance genre. Allegory is deployed as a rhetorical device to suggest the parallels between the experience of Mhudi and black South Africans in the aftermath of the Land Act, a preoccupation that is explicitly explored in NLSA. The Mfecane, in a sense, is allegorical of the landlessness and disenfranchisement of Africans following the Union of South Africa in 1910.

The use of orature serves as an aesthetic strategy to capture Plaatje's central themes but orature is also symbolic of African senses of being and an immense archive of knowledge, experience and culture. Both Mhudi and NLSA are filled with the use of poetry, song and the proverbial use of language. Through these literary techniques, Plaatje also appeals to the sensibilities of his readers. The latter includes the use of intertextuality where Plaatje assumes that there is a common knowledge, amongst his readers, of the texts and situations that he refers to. For example, the constant references to the songs of Solomon, which is a poetic passage in itself, presupposes that the reader has some contextual knowledge of the latter text, which will allow him or her to understand the purpose and the effect to which it is used in Plaatje's work.

Plaatje's embrace of the conventions of romance may be attributed to his exposure to Shakespeare and Haggard. Mhudi is consistent with the Shakespearean model of romance, for example in Macbeth[24], the witches who bring forth prophecies and supernatural occurrences signaling a disruption in the natural order. It highlights the manners in which land and culture, as encapsulated in the ways and lives of people, may be rendered through the foregrounding of the politics of romance, where even the manner in which order and disorder unfold, is indicative of the attempts to bring forth resolution to people's experiences. It also elucidates the connectedness of people to their surroundings, beliefs and aspirations in the wake of industrialization and political turmoil.

[23] Chinua Achebe, "hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays (New York: Anchor books, 1989). P 40.
[24] Shakespeare, William. Macbeth (New York: Oxford UP, 1998).

(Peterson 2012:291) relates how historical novels written by the first two generations of African writers in South Africa between the years 1907-1948, were faced with three dominant concerns. The first is the depiction of the "large scale social upheaval, migration and dislocation that occurred across Southern Africa in the early decades of the nineteenth century." Next is "the final defeat of the last independent African polities and their replacement with neo-traditional forms of authority under the patronage of colonialism." The last is "reflections on the ways in which the African elite should construct its senses of group and class identity and aspirations, especially in relation to the chiefly classes and colonial administrators." This idea is concurrent with that of Chinua Achebe (1988:27) which suggests that the novelist should serve as a teacher within his or her community, a teacher in the sense that their texts bring to life prominent issues which may have previously been disregarded or unknown. Sol Plaatje's novel, Mhudi proves to be an important novel in African Literature not only because it addresses the aforementioned issues but because it has managed to transcend time and space in its influence. Furthermore, focussing on thematic rather than aesthetic literary techniques, the symbolic dimension of Mhudi will be elucidated in detail, focussing on how divisions amongst Africans facilitated colonialism and, moreover, the reinvention of "neo-traditional forms of authority under the patronage of colonialism" (Peterson 2012:291).

I will explore the abovementioned observations by Peterson, in Mhudi through, primarily analysing the depiction of the conflict between the different African inhabitants (essentially the Mfecane as unleashed by the rule of Shaka on the Ndebele) over the control of land and its precipitation of migration and the consequences thereof. Given the centrality of the Mfecane in my later discussion, it is important that I establish what my understanding of the Mfecane is, especially since it has a rather complex history.

According to (Wright 1995:1) the Mfecane is a historical phenomenon that occurred in the early 1800's. Debates and opinions on the facts of the cause of the Mfecane vary hence all the uncertainties insofar as what it really was about remain prominent. What can be agreed upon is that the Mfecane was characterised by rampant large scale migrations across the Southern African region. The reasons for the migrations on the other hand make for an array of opposing notions but we nonetheless know that the Mfecane resulted in wars and turmoil. Although the Mfecane was and is widely believed to be the result of Ndebele militancy against other smaller/less powerful African polities within the Southern African region, Wright suggests the importance of looking at the external factors that were in motion within

this region in the 1800's. He brings to light the presence of settlers in the Cape and the presence of slavery in the African region. The intrusion of a non-cooperative white community into the South African landscape left all the other communities within it vulnerable. During the highlighted time of the Mfecane nonetheless, the Zulu kingdom was a formidable force amongst other African tribes and reigned with terror in the land, making known their ferocity and dominion through declaring wars and causing smaller or less powerful tribes to flee.

This is depicted in Mhudi's reiteration of the dispossession of land which highlights the theme of migration. Migration implies not only the migration of people but also the migration of their culture which is then opened to the forces of change and adaptation. For instance, the Africans in Mhudi appear to have a more than divine relationship with their land. The Zulu's and the Bechuana's have a symbiotic relationship to the land in which they stay. The skyline and the galaxies above them are a guide and carry prophetic messages, the wild ravines provide shelter and sustenance, the land brings forth crops and food for their consumption and their familiarity with the land also offers them adequate protection from their enemies. This balanced ecological and political relationship with the land only remains useful if it is not disrupted. Once it is thrown into disequilibrium, as happens with the Ndebele raid, refered to as Ndebele in Mhudi, then sudden impending dangers; and the need for survival result in an urgent need to move. Migration, in essence, precipitates an estrangement from the land and the difficulties of peaceful coexistence.

This Research Report will therefore be structured in the following manner. A substantial part of the first chapter will elucidate the main literary techniques that Plaatje used in Mhudi and their importance in understanding the range of thematic interests of the text as well as Plaatje's cultural nationalism. In Chapter 2, the focus will be on the centrality of the 1913 Land Act in Plaatje's seminal texts, Mhudi and NLSA. Apart from its profound and long-lasting impact on life and political affairs in the country the Land Act also became, in a sense, a trope that influenced Plaatje's conceptualisation of history and politics, especially concerning his attitudes towards "the ethics of suffering violence and its consequences and his vision for a non-racial future", (Peterson 2008). Furthermore, I will look into the contemporary debates on land and discuss how they relate to Plaatje's texts. This chapter will also look at other literary works that have been inspired by and speak to Native Life in South Africa and Mhudi. The final focus of the Research Report, which will be in the third chapter, will be to explore Mhudi in the light of Florence Stratton's reasons behind and the limitations

that ensue from African Nationalist writers' tendency of configuring the politics of land in relation to the bodies and symbolisms associated with women. The conclusion will revisit the key points that are explored in each chapter and how they are interrelated. Furthermore, I will surmise how literature can and has been seen as a carrier of culture and knowledge that can be used as a credible source to assess the past, the present and the future.

Chapter 1: Mhudi and the Politics of its Aesthetics

Mhudi was written in 1920 but only got to be published in 1930 by Lovedale Press.[25] Some chapters of the novel were omitted and the manuscript underwent a lot of editing and censoring which some scholars, such as Couzens[26], suggest was mainly due to the censorship by the printers as well as the author not wanting any animosity from the ruling government. Willan[27] in his recent study disputes these claims. The novel is set in pre-colonial South Africa and it explores the lives and love story of two central characters, Mhudi and Ra-Thaga. The novel has twenty-four chapters through which the author takes us through various South African landscapes, cultures and times. In order to set the scene for my subsequent discussion, there is need to give a brief description of the chapters and the general context in which the story unfolds. I will start with the Mfecane as encapsulated in the Ndebele attack on the Barolong, the turmoil in Mzilikazi's empire and the Barolong vengeance.

Matebele Attack on the Barolong

Plaatje begins by depicting the Barolong's communal land and way of life as rather peaceful and harmonic. This manner of life continues until Mzilikazi's tax collectors are murdered by some Barolong men over disputes about the collection of taxes. Mzilikazi, upon receiving this news, is filled with fury and vows to avenge the blood of the Ndebele men which has been spilled by the Barolong. Mzilikazi then gives out a decree that his soldiers should raid Kunana, the city of the Barolong, and kill all the Barolong in sight without pardoning anyone,

[25] Willan, Brian. "What 'Other Devils'? The texts of Sol. T. Plaatje's Mhudi Revisited", Journal of Southern African Studies, 2015. p. 1334, 1335.
[26] Couzens, Tim, and Stephen Gray. *Printers' And Other Devils: The Texts Of Sol T. Plaatje's Mhudi*. Research in African Literatures 9.2 (1978): 198-215. Print.
[27] Willan, op. cit., 1331, 1347.

young or old, male or female. Thus the perilous onslaught of the Barolong tribe begins. Barely any of the Barolong from Kunana survive the raid. Mhudi manages to outrun the arrows of the furious Ndebele warriors, wandering off into the wilderness alone, willing to take a chance with the wild animals over facing her fate with the Ndebele. Ra-Thaga escapes death as well, though under far less dramatic circumstances. Plaatje (1995:27-29) writes, while out with other men hunting, Ra-Thaga returns home to Kunana, only to find it in ruins. They witness the aftermath of the Ndebele's ruthless act of manslaughter and demolition of their village. Mhudi and Rathaga end up meeting in a chance encounter in the wilderness as each one begins to make peace with the possibility of being the only surviving member of their tribe (31).

Mhudi and Rathaga stick together and live as husband and wife in a section of the wilderness they call Re-nosi which means we are alone. They endure a peaceful yet lonely life with only each other's company and that of the animals in the wilderness. They go on like that until they meet a group of Korana hunters who invite them to join them in their village and live amongst them. There one of the Korana men try to kill Rathaga so that he can claim Mhudi as his own. Mhudi has a premonition about this and gets to Rathaga, saving him just on time. They then move out to Moroka's Hoek in Thaba Ncho where they live amongst the people of Chief Sechele and there they are reunited with yet more subjects from Kunana who survived the raid. This union with a branch of the Batswana tribe serves as an alliance to work against Mzilikazi's plan to rule over and subdue all the tribes in the mainland.

Turmoil in Mzilikazi's Empire

While celebrating their conquest over the Barolong one of Mzilikazi's war advisors named Dambuza warns the king against underestimating the Barolong just because they have conquered them once. Dambuza further warns against thinking that the Barolong will passively accept their defeat and that they will definitely want to avenge the dishonourable deaths of their women and children. Mzilikazi is not shaken by these rebukes but accepts them nonetheless. He continues to feast on and celebrate with his followers and the select Batswana and Basotho communities he has invited to come and witness his conquest. He does indeed gain respect from these groups and they understand all too well that the Ndebele are a force to be reckoned with, as is Mzilikazi's intention. The turn of events in their fortune occurs when the Ndebele try to invade a tribe of the Batswana called the Bangwaketse who

reside further north towards the desert plains. The Ndebele impis get trapped in the dessert after a long chase in a land they are unfamiliar with, they grow weary and thirsty and upon encountering their enemy they ask them for water but instead they get ambushed. As if that is not bad enough, when the remaining soldiers return home they meet with a furious king who has received news that spirits have invaded the Ndebele outposts and, at the sound of their thunder, a dozen Ndebele fall and die with blood gushing out from incomprehensible wounds which seem to miraculously appear. To Mzilikazi's dismay more bad news seem to have befallen his kingdom as he finds out that Umnandi, the love of his life, has disappeared from the kingdom without saying a word to anyone. This news disheartens the king as Umnandi is the most beloved of his three wives and he also considers her his kingdom's lucky charm.

When called to unravel the mysteries of these peculiar events, diviners of the Ndebele Kingdom all profess that a time of bad luck and misfortune is impending and the king's best defence would be to flee up north with his people. All these bad omens are said to be due to the wrath of the Barolong ancestors and as a fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the appearance of Hailey's comet above their land. King Mzilikazi sustains a steadfast spirit and refuses to heed the warnings due to his pride.

Barolong Vengeance

Meanwhile the reunited Batswana nations form an even more steadfast alliance against the Ndebele, with the common goal of putting Mzilikazi in his place. They decide to join forces with the Boers who also have enough motivation to detest the Ndebele. While the war against the Ndebele is waged, with the Boers as allies, Mhudi and Rathaga are once again separated. Mhudi meets queen Umnandi seeking refuge amongst her people and together they set out with the willingness to convince their husbands not to engage in wars of revenge on each other. Furthermore, when Umnandi hears of the fate of the Ndebele she resolves to return home to face her people's impending death and conquest at the side of her husband knowing that Mzilikazi would not surrender to his attackers. She travels with Mhudi to the battle field and upon their arrival Umnandi is received by the king and her people with great Joy. Her arrival signifies a turn of events in the Ndebele's fate and gives the king a new sense of hope and he finally agrees to take the remaining members of his Kingdom and flea up north before their enemies do away with them. Mhudi gets reunited with Rathaga, Umnandi with Mzilikazi, the death of the ancestors of the Barolong of Kunana has been avenged and the

Boers have also had their vengeance. The novel has an open-ended conclusion with Mhudi and Rathaga riding out into the sunset in their wagon which they had been gifted with by their friends Phil Jay and his wife Annetjie. Quite significant is that while these two cultures part as peaceful and functional allies, the Boers come to betray the African tribes later as NLSA will reveal. The African nations offer the Boers land, a sustainable and equally sustaining asset and the Africans are, in turn, offered a raggedy old wagon, which though thoughtful cannot sustain them forever. Such is part of the legacy of the gifts and seeds sown by the Boers in their relationship with the Africans of the region.

Native Life in South Africa

NLSA was written as a petition against the 1913 Natives Land Act and published in 1916. It is thus an important precursor to Mhudi and some details of its focus illuminate some of Plaatje's concerns in Mhudi. NLSA is divided into twenty-five chapters and with a very informative introduction which presents a mini biography of Plaatje. The first three chapters are entitled, "A retrospect"; "The Grim Struggle between Right and Wrong, and the Latter Carries the Day" and finally "The Natives' Land Act". These preliminary chapters set the tone for the petition. They introduce the law, its repercussions and the general pathos it carried. The first chapter entitled "A retrospect" introduces the Land Act and the conditions under which it was passed as well as how it was introduced. Chapter two generally states the reasons behind the law and some responses to it, by law makers and critics, before it was passed. Chapter 3 is entitled "the Land Act" and therein Plaatje gives a detailed account of the bill, its implications and the processes leading towards it being passed as an act. The following chapters then give various accounts of the repercussion of the Act and the Africans' reception of the horrid news. The book henceforth takes on a journalistic approach in giving an account of the experiences of the Africans who have been living and farming in various capacities on farms. Furthermore, Plaatje relates the opposition that those who objected to the Land Act received while trying to aid the Africans, and the disloyalty displayed towards Africans and African intellectuals in general.

Mhudi and its reception: the politics of its Aesthetics

A number of scholars have done extensive and pertinent work on the various aesthetic tools Plaatje uses in his writing. There is a considerable body of scholarship on Plaatje and Mhudi so I will confine myself to the texts that I regard as important in shaping the focus, approach and perspective of my study, I am drawn to Phaswane Mpe's analyses, particularly his ideas on reading Mhudi through the lens of orality. Mpe takes issue with various scholarly critiques of Mhudi, especially their reading of Mhudi without an in-depth consideration of its use of oral traditions. Mpe (1996) [28] reviews the different approaches to Sol Plaatje's use of orality in the works of Tim Couzens and Peter Esterhuyzen, amongst others. Mpe considers the earlier readings of Mhudi as an oral tale by other scholars as underestimating the effectiveness of the novel as an oral narrative. While appreciating Couzen's attempt to read Mhudi in a more positive light, as opposed to previous critics, Mpe suggests that Couzens offers a disarming yet progressive critique of Mhudi as an oral fable and a historic rendition of South Africa. While Mpe (1996:6) commends Couzens, Willan and Gray's rejection of the patronising Euro-centrism of earlier critics and praise of Mhudi for "its literary subtlety and its implicit embrace of democratic values", their assessments overlook the ambiguities that result from Plaatje's use of narrative techniques such as oral forms. Mpe (1996:11) suggests that scholars, as well as readers, should desist from reading Mhudi's use of oral traditions as self-evident and unproblematic. Furthermore, Mpe proposes that if the oral traditions in Mhudi are fully appreciated, then they should be used to read it as a text that transcends censorship and other factors that may limit the dissemination of an undiluted truth or opinion to his audiences.

Mpe supports the idea that the use of oral literary traditions in Mhudi as techniques fullfils a deeper aspiration. As a novel speaking for Plaatje within a European literary tradition, orality allows Plaatje to imbue a European literary form and tradition with African texture. More so, Mpe (1996:11) refers to how Esterhuysen disavows derogatory suggestions by Haggard that orality conforms, in African texts, to the barbaric backwardness of an illiterate people. Mpe suggests that Mhudi's use of oral traditions is more a critique than an endorsement of their negative use in Haggard's work. It is this proposal of orality as a critique and as a directive and non-literal tool that I intend to favour in appreciating Plaatje's use of aesthetics as a way of connoting a deeper political purpose and meaning than it appears. Mpe's opening

[28] Mpe, Phaswane. Mine is But a Sincere Narrative of a Melancholy Situation: Sol Plaatje Orality and the Politics of Culture. (Johannesburg: Wits University, MA Thesis, 1996).

epigraph, a citation from Willan Ray, articulates this embeddedness thus; "there is always something further, something more, to be understood in understanding" (Mpe 1996:1).

Brian Walter renders a noteworthy analysis of the use of literary techniques in Mhudi, reading it as a novel conforming to Shakespeare's romance model and, by means of a graph, he maps out the key conventions of romance narratives. According to (Walter 2000:57) these include the Pastoral Peak which is symbolic of a lost past; the Tragic Trough which represents the presence of confusion, and finally the Romance Peak which symbolises a promising future. Furthermore Walter, in a way similar to what I have suggested above, reads Mhudi as a "literature that responds to definable literary conventions, but also as literature produced from within influential historical and political contexts, which included the changing relations between imperial and colonial structures, and the definitive 1910 Union of South Africa", (Walter 2000:1).

Mhudi is a historical novel that chronologically depicts the historical and socio-political relations between the independent African polities in the early 19th century up to their encounters with the Afrikaner trekkers. These experiences foreshadow the developments that were to typify the relations between blacks and whites in the first three decades of the 20th century. The prevalent motifs can be described as the politics of memory and nostalgia, particularly with regard to Plaatje's remembering of the land. It is the battles for and over land that precipitate the theme of displacement, dispossession and war. In such a volatile context, the escapades of Mhudi and Rathaga encode the theme of hope in a hopeless situation. The couple's wanderings and separation from each other, which is followed by their heroic reunion, parallels the Bechuana's attachment to land because of its spiritual and cultural significances. Thus the novel is structured around the coupling of experiences such as hope and despair; love and hate; peace and violence. Plaatje's intent is to suggest ways in which these challenges can be overcome and for restoration to be achieved. These polarities and how they coincide are to be further discussed later in the chapter.

The three most pertinent techniques that Plaatje draws on – in exploring conflicts over land and identity – are allegory, orature and romance. I will discuss allegory first. I read Mhudi as an allegory of the state of affairs pertaining to the South African nation in the early 19th century. The quandary of Africans in South Africa– particularly in relation to the lack of land and political representation - is allegorical of the conflicts and tensions in the nation at large, especially following the passing of the Land Act. Mhudi establishes a parallel between the

Ndebele and the white ruling power in 1913. Both are presented as tyrannical forces that intrude and disrupt the peace, stability and integrity of communities, leaving people's pursuit of the means and needs of life in disarray.

It is imperative that we consider the roots and metamorphosis of allegory as a genre, paying close attention to how and for what purposes it was applied in literature. Madsen offers interesting insight on the history of allegory and its roots in religious practices both spoken and written:

> Allegory, in these early writings, is conceived as a hermeneutic style, a kind of interpretation, rather than as a narrative or literary genre. (Madsen 1994:2).

One of the uses of the term allegory, as (Madsen 1994:3) notes, was in reference to a style of interpretation that gave a text external and extrinsic meaning, that it "means one thing and says another." Furthermore, an even more interesting definition of allegory is said to have been developed by Christian interpreters of the Bible. (Madsen 1994:3) describes it thus;

> Allegory named those passages of Scripture that represent Christ's fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Allegorical meaning thus was transformed from an extrinsic and arbitrary significance imported to the text and became an intrinsic and mystical core of meaning embedded in the text by God and perceptible to divinely inspired readers.

The latter definition of allegory becomes of utmost importance when considering Plaatje's Christian upbringing from his childhood days right through his schooling career. Plaatje was undoubtedly exposed to the aesthetics of allegory and would later apply them in his own works.

The events related in Mhudi are allegorical of the events Plaatje relates in NLSA. Following the release of NLSA, which was a journalistic petition to the Union government and, as well as the British government, Plaatje wrote the novel Mhudi which, from the 1970's, received recognition for its historical significance. NLSA vividly articulates a plea on behalf of the Africans to be rescued from the wrath of the Union government and its harsh segregationist laws. Herein Plaatje recollects the events leading to the passing of the Land Act of 1913, the fateful day it was approved, and the repercussions thereof. Plaatje uses emotive language and descriptive journalism to bear witness to the suffering of the Africans after the aforementioned bill was passed. It is upon the evident failure of the petition that Plaatje

undertakes the quest to revisit history, drawing out stark similarities in the events which occurred in the 19th century to those that are unfolding in the 20th century.

Plaatje therefore begins his work on Mhudi, which can be read as both an allegory on the land act and a continuation of a petition aimed at social commentary and raising awareness of the plight of Africans, through a comparative reading of it in relation to NLSA. In 1920 Plaatje consequently begins an analysis of the South African social and economic landscape with the backdrop of the history of Black South Africans through Mhudi. NLSA and Mhudi share land as a common motif which Plaatje uses as a catalyst for discussing social issues such as displacement, exile and repression. Plaatje's work reveals that land has been an integral part of many societies on the South African landscape. Mhudi, thus subtly yet gnawingly, suggests that there will be no rest until the struggle for land is overcome on all levels. Mhudi is thus a journey into the past, looking at South African history in terms of the African scramble for land during the Mfecane which foreshadows the impending destruction of the land which is the result of the Native's Land act of 1913 as passed by the Union government of 1910.

It was undoubtedly quite strategic of Plaatje to begin the work of recollection and documenting, through Mhudi, shortly after attempts to appeal to the Union government to revoke their decision on passing the land act had failed. Although Mhudi has been widely read as a historical novel it remains quite relevant in the present when read against the backdrop of the state of affairs of the era in which it was written. Mhudi is also a prominent historical novel in the context of post-apartheid and segregationist South Africa because it is a response to the content of NLSA. Both Mhudi and NLSA convey a rich account of past injustices and the repercussions they had on the societies within which they occurred. Sol Plaatje's NLSA has been used as a reference in projects aimed at restitution and reform in South Africa. (Dlamini 2016:197, 198) states that;

> Plaatje's book offers readings of the relationship between 'natives' and the land that do not assume, as their starting point, an organic connection between Africans and the land… Plaatje did not write *Native Life* as a 'son of the soil', making atavistic claims to territorial South Africa on behalf of natives rendered pariahs in the land of their birth… I argue, his were political claims made as part of a broader demand for {equal citizenship}[29]… I argue that reading Native Life in South Africa, then and now (that is, reading it in its time and beyond as

[29] {} Parenthesis added for emphasis.

a book about cosmopolitan claims for full citizenship rights), allows us to counterpose Plaatje's argument to the nativist claims identified above.

It can therefore also be read as a prophecy as it warns, through its comparison of the events of the Mfecane to those of the Land Act era and after, about the destruction of communities and their resultant participation in acts of resistance.

More specifically, Mhudi establishes a parallel between the Ndebele and the white ruling power of 1913 as tyrannical forces that intrude and disrupt the peace, stability and integrity of communities, leaving people's pursuit of the means and needs of life in disarray. The rule of the Ndebele is symbolic of unjust governance and one that is reliant on force rather than reason and peaceful coexistence. Just as the Ndebele subdue the tribes of the Basotho, Batswana, and the Khoisan, the trek inland by the Boers, who paradoxically are also escaping subjugation by the British, complicates the power relations and dynamics. The Boers also capture Africans as slaves and ultimately take their land, despite being greatly aided by the alliances that they formed with the Batswana. This scenario in the narrative is analogous to the historical one that played itself out when Africans joined forces with the British in the Anglo-Boer war against the Boers, only to find themselves entrapped in a snare of servitude to white oligarchic rule when the British and Afrikaners came together and formed the Union of South Africa in 1910.

All the while, hidden under the guise of a recollection of family history, narrated by a descendant of the said Mhudi and Rathaga, Mhudi brings to light the similarities between the events following the unjust seizing of land from different tribes by the Ndebele and the seizing of land by the Union government from Africans. The Mfecane drove fleeing tribes into haphazard migrations up north. The distress, disorientation and displacement Plaatje describes in Mhudi, following the invasion of the Ndebele in the Barolong's city, is similar to that of the Africans who were evicted from their land and restricted from staying there or owning any part of it. Just as the chief of the Ndebele allowed the other tribes to dwell on the seized land on the condition that they would work and pay taxes to him, the conditions of the Union government's Land Act objectified the Africans and ensured that they remained bound under white rule without the possibility of empowering themselves in a manner that would not only give them economic freedom but also the right to self-governance. The union government similarly only made an opportunity for Africans to work on white people's farms and further forbade them to rent land from white famers and settlers. The decision of how and

how much the Africans earned was solely in the hands of the farmers that were willing to employ them. Plaatje (1982:79) notes the response of the Africans upon this realisation; “The Africans were at first inclined to laugh at the idea of working for a master with their families and goods and chattels, and then to have the additional pleasure of paying their own small wages, besides bringing money to pay the "Baas" for employing them.” Furthermore, this money they would have to make by using their cattle in order for their employer to have the money to pay them. The decision to remain on a white person’s land with their livestock meant that they forfeited their right to their ownership of their stock.

The eviction and invasion of farms did more than disrupt the peace and stability of the various Africans nations affected, it also obliterated cultural norms and practices. Being uprooted from their land of birth and ancestry meant also a cultural uprooting. As the forthcoming section on orature extrapolates on the significance of land for cultural and spiritual cognisance and growth, the damage caused by an uprooting of a society from its ancestral place of worship and living can be deduced. The shrines built, the bodies buried, the blessings passed on generationally through land, are left behind, so are the spiritual covenants of prosperity, health and progression. In NLSA (Plaatje 1985:102-103) Mrs V is convinced her farm workers intend to leave and in an attempt to discourage the Africans from leaving she says, “I hope you idiotic Kaffirs are not going to be so foolhardy as to leave me, leave the Baas, and leave the farm upon which your fathers and mothers lie buried.” Being uprooted from their land meant more than taking away their ability to fend for themselves and taking away their sense of pride and agency, it was an act of dismantling their identities, both cultural and social. So while in Mhudi the Barolong were forced to live amongst foreign tribes by the Mfecane, causing them to worship foreign gods in lands just as foreign, the Land Act caused Africans to uproot their cultures, leaving behind their cultural inheritances, and the newly established spiritual ties and practices resonant to their land to find alternative areas of residence.

The last point that shows how Mhudi is an allegory of the Land Act is in its deployment of prophecy, especially considering how previous events in history had coincided. In the penultimate paragraph of Mhudi Plaatje writes of Rathaga’s intent to avenge the death of his people by Mzilikazi’s troops and also to restore the dignity and memory of his ancestors by restoring Kunana’s children back to it, (Plaatje 1995:124,170). The Barolong, having joined forces with other African tribes as well as the trek Boers, invade the Ndebele camps and seize their leader. The land is then returned to its rightful owners as far as it is possible and the

Boers are given land to stay amongst the Africans. This suggests a return to a natural order of life wherein people live in harmony and there are no squabbles over land ownership urged on by greed. In 1920, when Plaatje supposedly began his work on Mhudi, the Union government was still very much in power and there had not been any change in so far as the subjugation of Africans was concerned. In including this part of the Mfecane history Plaatje foreshadows, or suggests, in Mhudi, a prophetic end to the repercussions of the Land Act. A Hundred years on, following the passing of the infamous act, projects around the redistribution of land, as well as social discourse on fair opportunities with regards to land ownership and disposal, are at their peak. Gubuza's words in (Plaatje 1995:57) are further embedded with suggestions of dire repercussions as a result of the war and disruptions:

> When I reached the plateau and saw the swarms of Barolong cattle I felt a quiver on my breast as though it had been touched by a spear; for I am convinced that the owners of so many cattle will never rest until they recover them.

As much as land played a pivotal role in the survival of South Africans in the 19th century it continues to play such a role in 2013. The Africans who were removed from their ancestral land in 1913 by the Union government had more than a physical tie to that land. The inhabitants and acquirers of land sought it for many varied reasons; it was used for sustenance farming, for residential purposes, for cultural rituals as well as bartering. The effects of the passing of the Land act in 1913 remain evident in the state of South African politics in 2017. The land act has without a doubt had longstanding effects on the country, and the struggle for land remains a preoccupation in political affairs. That a need for land reform has been identified and structures have been put in place to administer this process, a hundred years on, proves Plaatje's implicit suggestion through Mhudi, that there will be no rest until land has been restored or peace over land obtained.

Orature

Orature plays a very significant role in helping the reader establish the importance of the land to those who dwell in it, a point that will be discussed in the later parts of the Report. Plaatje, essentially, wants readers to grasp that the significance of land surpasses its importance for agriculture or the economy. Firstly, the presence of land is registered in visual and textual terms: it is a *landscape*, best captured through poetry and proverbs and their attendant insights. It is through engaging the sensual aspects of thought – as captured in narratives (and

prophecies) that are passed on across generations, proverbs and poetry - that we are able to imagine and locate ourselves in the landscapes that Mhudi or Rathaga find themselves in. Orature in Mhudi proves effective in encapsulating, through sentimental language, the cosmological views of the characters, their artistic sensibilities and the politics of memory, amongst others. Pertinent examples are Mhudi's nostalgia as she recalls her time in Kunana before it was seized by the Ndebele; the admiration that is given to a person based on their ability to speak or to use language or words eloquently; and the many ways in which orature serves as an avenue of solace in/through which the characters celebrate, mourn, declare, remember, honour and praise and love their environments and genealogies.

Mpe (1996:14) says, "Plaatje's novel employs oral forms to serve various purposes, one of which is allegorically to suggest and position the implied reader, so that a multiplicity of readers is implied." So if the text is an allegory of the period of the 1900's then its ability to be paralleled with NLSA would suggest that while one may explicitly address a Western Reader, the latter would then come to include an African readership thus setting up a discourse about Land, the Land Act and the evident or probable outcomes thereof. Some readings still, as (Mpe 1996:19) notes, have dismissed Plaatje's use of oral traditions as facilitating African story telling suggesting that, "the originality of the African novel lies in its use of oral traditions." The beauty of performance culture evidenced through singing and dancing as well as praise poems and speeches appear quite regularly throughout Mhudi as common practice for men and women, young and old with no prohibition with regards to their rank so long as displayed respectfully and orderly. In Mhudi an example of such a spectacle is the jubilant song of praise for Langa, Son of Mzilikazi, who led the raid on Kunana. Whilst the women had lost their menfolk in the fight, their passions and jubilations exceeded their sorrow and mourning because the reward, in kind, was the Barolong bounty of beast and crop which ensured that, though the heads of their families may have fallen, they would never go hungry (51).

Orature, as evidenced by Rathaga, was not only espoused in situations of praise but also used when comfort was needed. When overwhelmed by the reality of the loneliness and unfamiliarity of the wilderness, while out hunting, Rathaga's oratory words displayed a desire for Re-Nosi and his wife Mhudi as well as a hope to soon return to them:

> I long For the Solitude of the woods,
>
> Far away from the quarrels of men,

Their intrigues and vicissitudes;

Away, where the air was clean

And the morning dew

Made all things new;

Where nobody was by

Save Mhudi and I.

To me speak not of the comforts of home;

Tell me but where the antelopes roam;

Give me my hunting sticks and snares;

In the glooming of the wilderness;

Give me the palmy days of our early felicity

Away from the hurly-burly of your city

And we'll be young again-Aye:

Sweet Mhudi and I.

(Plaatje 1995:72).

The many varied responses to Mhudi's use of oral traditions merely elucidate the depth of Plaatje's insight on literature and oral traditions. Plaatje's text and its form are so embedded with knowledge and information that in various lifetimes layers of content may still be unravelled. This embeddedness of the novel not only attests to Plaatje's craftsmanship but also to the efficacy of oral traditions as cultural norms and agents of Afro-civilization. These oral traditions have been archiving tools, working through memory and repetition, to carry the culture of African societies long before reading and writing were accepted as convention. My analysis of these oral traditions seeks to prove that they are espoused as strategic literary techniques and in concurring with Ndebele's observation, in (Mpe 1996:4) which states;

> What Plaatje recognised in language is the dialectic of ambiguity, of understatement, literary tradition, and subtle, highly suggestive allusion and other similar things. Such an awareness

> of dialectic in language shows in Plaatje a potential ability to recognise a similar dialectic in the material transformation of history.

This is also an observation made by Mpe when he suggests that these oral traditions require a deeper reading as they carry embedded meanings and messages which transcend the mere desire to preserve culture. I will look at the efficacy of addressing multiple audiences through these oral traditions and what they reveal about the artistic nature of the Africans.

Orature thus serves the purpose of a familiar language, not only through hearing but through expressing a culturally relatable idea. In Things Fall Apart, the primacy of the spoken word or one's ability to narrate is noted: "proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe 2008:7). Orature thus gives a self-expressive edge to the orator which asserts the efficacy of the spoken word as carrier of a cultural sensibility. While for a different audience a romance structure may suffice, for the Barolong and the Ndebele, the oral affirmation of place and self proves effective. Oral tales and praises often contain a lot of embedded meaning and emotion, appealing to their audiences and also their narrators. Language in this case comes to be very personal even in what it articulates. For example, while many abhor speaking in riddles it captivates the mind of the audience urging them to concentrate with undivided attention in order not to miss any words as the subject of the riddle is of utmost importance. Orature in this case would include linguistic techniques in the form of narrating, be they poetry, songs, proverbs, idioms, or storytelling. It is through this poetic and rhythmically construed cultural skill, delivered through repetition, that the knowledge and archive of culture, wisdom and history is passed down. It is through an appreciation of words that the Africans in Mhudi come to understand themselves and their being. The literary civilisation of African cultures is embodied by their extensive use of their memory and exploration of oral traditions.

Orature is and has been an admirable skill and trait amongst various African traditions. Orators in the text are looked upon with much reverence. And the ability to eloquently put proverbs together with prose in a praise song to the effect of appealing to the patriotic or nostalgic sensibilities of your audience is a mandatory skill. Plaatje has effectively orchestrated the use of orature in Mhudi to tell the story of land and its use. Praise poetry and story-telling have been and continue to be an extremely effective tool of disseminating information beyond African cultures. It is not so much the telling of the story than how it is

told that makes it effective. Plaatje writes the following about Chief Moroka's oratory skill; (Plaatje 1995:119),

> Chief Moroka was not as great an orator as most of the Native chiefs but he excelled in Philosophy. In that respect his witty expressions and dry humour were equal to those of Moshueshue, the Basotho King. He spoke in a staccato voice, with short sentences and a stop after each, as though composing the next sentence. His speeches abounded in allegories and proverbial sayings, some traditional and others original. His own maxims had about them the spice of originality which always provided his auditors with much food for thought.

In the above extract Plaatje makes an explicit suggestion about the role orature plays in presenting language in symbolic forms. Plaatje's comparison of Chief Moroka to King Moshueshue shows the reverence with which oration is held amongst Africans. The importance of being a grand orator is reemphasised through Chief Moroka and how he compensates for his lack in the skill. Plaatje's use of a text full with orature is further proof of his allegorical intentions through the text.

Story tellers, poets and announcers learn the rhetoric of emotive language, carefully sculpting images through words and sounds that embed an awareness of what is spoken of, that is irrevocable. These carefully planned words are meant to convince, lure and entice their audience's attention and trust. More than just telling a descriptive story Plaatje's characters use appreciative tones in speaking of the land through orature, particularly praise poetry. It is through this that the readers can relate to Mhudi and Rathaga's nostalgia and attachment to the land when they speak of it. Rathaga says the following in his assessment of the decimated Kunana, (Plaatje 1995: 37);

> Now do tell me how you left Kunana that used to be our home. Kunana, where we enjoyed a peace and prosperity that were unequalled anywhere; where our cattle waxed fat along the green valleys and bred like so many wild animals; where our flocks with the jocund lambs around their dams would frolic, while the she-goats fed from two to three kids each, till we were forced to increase and extend our outposts to give them more and still more space to roam about; Kunana, where maidens sang and danced in the moonlight and made life merry with their mirth; Kunana, our former home, but now, one of the Matebele outpost.

Orature in Mhudi plays a really significant role in helping the reader establish the importance of the land to those who dwell in it. Plaatje, essentially, wants readers to grasp that the significance of land surpasses its importance for agriculture or the economy. Firstly, the

presence of land is registered in visual and textual terms: it is a landscape, best captured through poetry and their attendant insights. It is through engaging the sensual aspects of thought - as captured in narratives (and prophecies) that are passed on across generations, proverbs, story-telling and poetry - that we are able to imagine and locate ourselves in the landscapes that Mhudi or Rathaga find themselves in. The fourth chapter of Mhudi opens with Mhudi's account of her experience in the wilderness to Ra-thaga. This narration is descriptive enough for Ra-thaga to assume a state of empathy with Mhudi as it engages his senses of direction, emotion and understanding of the land and the animals found in it. (Plaatje 1995:40),

> At day-break I found myself at the bottom of a deep ravine, in which I crouched for the greater parts of the day- afraid of the crawling, venomous snakes, if I lay there long- and in fear of tigers, if I wandered out of it; but hunger and thirst forced me to get out eventually and find something to moisten my parched throat.

Orature in Mhudi has also proven effective in encapsulating, through sentimental language, the cosmological views of the characters, their artistic sensibilities, and the politics of memory, amongst others. Pertinent examples are Mhudi's nostalgia as she recalls her time in Kunana before it was invaded by the Ndebele impis, (Plaatje 1995:37);

> Where shall I begin, for who could have foretold in my childhood days, that the sweet life at Kunana would end like this?
>
> On that terrible day after the sun had risen and cleared the horizon, we girls took our water-pails as usual and fetched the sweet water from the spring near the valley. The flocks had left the fold and we separated the kids from their mothers in order to milk the goats on their return from the bush next afternoon. The summer sun shone overhead and the shades of the camelthorn trees were cool; so we took our wooden pestles, sat merrily in a circle under the shady branches busily pounding the corn to prepare porridge for the evening meal.

Furthermore, admiration is given to a person based on their ability to speak or to use language or words eloquently. There are many ways in which orature serves as an avenue of solace in/through which the characters celebrate, mourn, declare, remember, honour, praise and love their environments and genealogies. This is not to suggest however that the understanding of Plaatje's text is limited to an African readership. Plaatje employs the same oral traditions strategically, to address issues which due to censorship he cannot explicitly engage with. An example of such an instance is evident in the connotation the book makes

through the bone throwers' predictions (Plaatje 1995:104) "The Shadow of the massacre of Kunana has never really left our nation". The bone throwers being the custodians of the knowledge of the future and interpreting unusual occurrences come to suggest in the larger context of the novel and its insignia that the shadow of the massacre and displacement of Africans in 1913 will remain upon the land for years to come. Orature offers a platform which solicits research and an analytical reception, by the audience, of the ideas adorned by the graceful guise of words. The various forms of orature employed in Mhudi make reference to parallel stories and universes informing the present.

Intertextuality: the effectiveness of a romance text

The use of romance in creating the narrative of Mhudi and Rathaga is evidence of Shakespeare's influence. Brian Walter describes Mhudi as a novel which conforms to the romance model of writing famously used by Shakespeare and Haggard. This model is described as encompassing conventions of a tragedy and the epic. (Walter 2000:56) further describes epics as conforming to the style of the metaphor of romance through seasonal changes, this he illustrates through a graphic diagram with its peaks representing pastoral states of happiness and virtue while the trough signifies a decline in virtue and happiness. Through this structure the romance Mhudi offers hope even in the most desolate conditions.

Brian Walter makes the suggestion, which proves quite fitting, that Mhudi's structure coincides with that of Shakespeare's romance texts. Writing in societies whose values are religiously rooted and who believe in the supernatural, are drawn towards romance since this genre encapsulates various realms of existence and their contribution to social coherence. The structural outline of the romance genre for example sees life as seasonal or temporal. Herein seasons exist and coincide with social occurrences. However, as opposed to four seasons, this structure collapses two of the seasons into each other thus encompassing only three changes. This literary tact is, nonetheless, not restricted only to the idea of romance in its structural sense, a very literal idea of a romantic set up, unravelling the tale of two lovers. It is prevalent and equally as poignant as the structural romance foregrounding the narrative's romanticism.

According to (Walter 2000:56) the first season is representative of a pastoral peak in a text, wherein harmony is in abundance. The order of life is clear and uninterrupted creating an imagery of a bountiful summer's day. The next season is represented through the traits akin to a winter season which is pre-empted by fall or autumn which is symbolic of a decline in

the bountiful season of summer and its characteristics. The harsh weather of the winter comes to represent the stage called the tragic trough in the structure. In this tragic trough internal and external forces may clash creating chaos as there is an effort made to maintain the natural order of things. Lastly is the romance peak, which carries the promise of a budding future. This is represented through the spring season. Here the narrative offers a sense of hope and redemption from the tragic trough. These seasonal changes coincide with the age old idea that time heals all things. Furthermore, this structure is all-encompassing in that it features the social, cultural and spiritual aspects of life and the effects they have on situations. Shakespeare's Macbeth follows a similar structure and here, so does Mhudi.

The structure of the romance which Plaatje espouses in Mhudi occurs in three stages. If romance is about time as elucidated by Walter (2000:55), then it is fitting to assume that Mhudi alludes to the effects of time on a people having gone through a tragic event. To elaborate let us consider the three stages that structure this romance model. The first is the pastoral peak which symbolises harmony at its peak, this is followed by the tragic trough which introduces a turn of events ushering in disunity and the final stage is the romance peak wherein order is re-established and hope restored. This structure is illustrated in a graph showing time against harmonious occurrences. Walter (2000:56) writes,

> The understanding that comes through romance is, therefore, not the tragic catharsis, but a wisdom that looks beyond the present hour of suffering. It will, similarly look beyond the merely celebratory, recognizing the constant potential for lapses into the tragic, and the importance, then, of the human faith that sustains the vision.

The scope of Plaatje's reading and education has aided him in this instance to relate a narrative, as in the case of the petition in NLSA, to an audience both African and Non-African. This he achieves through borrowing from the Shakespearean and Haggardian conventions of the romance novel. This aspect of the novel clearly evidences the need to speak to or address an audience at a level they can relate to. As much as orature suffices in evidencing emotively the cultural relation of the Africans to their land, romance appealed to Plaatje's Western audiences wherein their cultural mythologies and beliefs would be tied in.

Therefore, if the structural efficacy of this genre is dependent on time, then Mhudi's recollection of the past not only comments on the past but also on the time and era within

which it is written. As with Othello[30] and Macbeth, the structures of Shakespearean romances are riddled with the coexistence of order and disorder with a restoration of the natural order of being attained. This structure reflects a leaning towards an order sustained by spiritual reverence and belief in supernatural intervention. In Mhudi, the pastoral peak is represented by the harmonious ways of life of the Barolong in Kunana. This one nation comes to represent many more which find themselves in a similar situation. The plot of the novel moves into its tragic trough when one of the Barolong men kills Mzilikazi's tax collectors hence unleashing his wrath. Mzilikazi's wrath continues as he and his army rampage through the Barolong's city of Kunana killing men, women and children alike. The tragic trough seems to have effects lasting longer than the peaks in this case as the Ndebele's reign of terror continues to rampage the land subduing the various clans it comes across. The romance peak is first introduced through the hope Mhudi and Rathaga have of finding their way back to each other's embrace. Their union is symbolic of Kunana, the land, as they both survive the terror imposed on it. Mhudi and Rathaga advance the plot towards a romantic peak wherein the romanticised idea of home is, as far as possible, revived.

Just as in Shakespeare's mysticism where a turn of events is orchestrated by supernatural entities, in Mhudi Haley's comet, which manifests towards the end of the novel, is nature's way of revealing, through myth, the end of Mzilikazi's tyrannical rule over the land. Although the various tribes overturned along the way cannot be fully restored to their cities and lands which bear their cultural ties, an order of sorts is definitely prophesied and, ultimately, restored.

Romance as a story of hope

Through the use of romance I would like to show how Mhudi presents itself as a story of hope. Gikandi's work on romance suggests that Plaatje, as one of the writers who is a product of colonial and mission education, would have believed that "Realism would be used to document the lived experiences of the colonized, while romance would be the vehicle through which a pre-colonial past and postcolonial future could be imagined", Gikandi (2012:320). Mhudi therefore fits comfortably in this bracket in its use of romance. Mhudi romantically historicises African culture and by virtue of paralleling the narrative to the Land

[30] Shakespeare, William. Othello. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2002).

Act and its consequences, manages to further use romance to suggest or imagine, as Gikandi puts it, a post-colonial future.

Romance in Mhudi subsequently portrays a society that respects women and their roles within society. In Mhudi, Plaatje romanticises and foregrounds the power of women. I will now, by looking at this romance, as a story of hope, discuss three levels on which romance is employed in the text. The first instance is through a nostalgic reconstruction of the past. The second is through the romantic implications of Mhudi and Ra-thaga's as well as Mzilikazi and Umnandi's love on the narrative. The third can be deduced from the declaration Ra-thaga makes to Mhudi concerning their future together at the end of the novel.

First and foremost, Plaatje uses romance to portray and dissect the memory of African societies through Ra-Thaga's nostalgia. Rathaga speaks fondly about Kunana and is quite biased in his rendition of the state of life in Kunana before the Ndebele invasion. Rathaga describes the way of life of the Barolong, the terrain of their homeland and the general culture of the people. All this is rendered as a peaceful land full of promise of a great future with great order which comes to be disrupted by the Ndebele.

The romance stories of Mzilikazi and Umnandi as well as those of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga signify a sense of hope in the novel. Mhudi and Rathaga's story is of two lovers chosen by fate to be together. Their predestined union follows a series of unprecedented events starting with the invasion of their city and the massacre of their people which they manage to escape. While out in the wilderness, all alone, Mhudi escapes being mauled by a lion and coincidentally runs into Rathaga's embrace while doing so. Rathaga, who has also been wandering in the wilderness in need of human company is very welcoming of Mhudi's arrival in his life. He protects her from the lion by scaring it off. When they realise that they are both fleeing from the relentless Ndebele impis in Kunana, they are overjoyed to be reunited with one of their own, as they had both feared, in passing days that all of their Kinsmen had been decimated by the Ndebele. This revelation draws them closer together and they fall in love. They continue their flight from Kunana believing that they are the sole survivors of the Ndebele raid upon their people.

They encamp themselves in the wilderness where they build themselves a home and call it Renosi. Here they begin to pick up the pieces of their disrupted lives and begin a healing process from their loss through starting new lives and carrying on their culture and tradition as best as they can together. Through them there is hope of saving the Tawana clan and

continuing, in part, the legacy that was established by their now gone forbearers. This restoration of the clan is symbolised in the union of this man and woman, two of the chosen from the Tawana clan. On his own, Ra-Thaga would not have been able to redeem his people's legacy, nor would Mhudi. Their Union thus represents a possibility of replenishing, replacing and resurrecting what had hitherto been accepted to have been ancient ruins.

The land and its people are reunited under circumstances that seem very bleak and offer no hope for the land in ruins and its massacred inhabitants. This union gives the hope of having what has been lost returned to its owner and people reuniting. There is a recurring motif of reunions that carries on between Mhudi and Ra-Thaga and all the forces of nature seem to cooperate in reuniting the two lovers, hence symbolically redeeming the lineage of the Tawana clan.

The first time Mhudi and Rathaga are separated following their initial union occurs when Ra-Thaga is out hunting with the Korana men. Mhudi has a premonition in the form of a dream and goes out in search of the party of men sent out hunting to save Rathaga, which she manages to do. Mhudi and Umnandi also convey a romanticised idea of womenfolk through which the love story of Umnandi and Mzilikazi is woven in and juxtaposed to that of Mhudi and Rathaga. Both Mhudi and Umnandi come to represent the pinnacle of the saving grace of their respective clans. The kind of influence and insight they are able to give their husbands on overlooked social differences and issues within their clans and it is thus important in shaping their husbands' lives.

Mzilikazi's kingdom falls apart and suffers the threat of annihilation following the disappearance of his wife Umnandi. Umnandi's presence as the Ndebele queen is directly related to the clan's progressiveness. Her disappearance is symbolic of a loss of insight for the king and an absence of a mother figure for the Ndebele nation. For the king she is not only a love lost, she plays the role of muse and joy-bringer to her king who affectionately refers to her as his "sweet one". Both Rathaga and Mzilikazi appear powerless or lacking in power in the absence of their "symbolic lands". While Rathaga naively trusts the Korana man who sets a wild beast upon him just so he can seize his wife, Mzilikazi is befallen by a similar plight when his yearning for his missing wife almost causes him his kingdom. Umnandi and Mhudi also meet by chance and commune with each other despite their irrevocable clan differences. They become the pillars upon which peace and order are restored within the land as they cause their husbands to lay down the hatchets and resume a

peaceful existence.

The third instance of romance in the novel is Rathaga's declaration of his love and commitment to his epitome of strength which is entrenched in Mhudi's character, which is, furthermore, an embodiment of land. Rathaga foreshadows a romantic life characterised by the absence of war. Peace and love are attained and balance and nature are reinstated to their former glory. The loving couple is reunited with their people, and their children, will hopefully carry on the family name and customs, enjoying the benefits and fruits of the land they can call theirs, and one that will present a cultured home for their children.

Chapter 2: Land, Migration and Exile

Mhudi, as a historical novel, collapses the divides between the past and the present, time and space. As discussed, Mhudi's treatment of land suggests that land or space is the most important aspect of human survival or living. It alludes to the tradition, amongst Africans, of the coexistence of tribes and cultures. This coexistence carries on peacefully until an incessant urge of greed infiltrates one of the societies. The raid of the Ndebele on Kunana causes other African tribes to flee away from their homes. The suffering unleashed by the Ndebele causes their victims to migrate from their lands of birth to new territories which they would need to acquaint themselves with. This does not only disrupt their peace but their lives and cultures suffer a great loss as well because they have been uprooted and need to re-establish new lives in unfamiliar territory. Some go to Moshoeshoe for refuge, some Thabanchu and others die in the wilderness trying to survive. This is not to suggest that one can have a sustainable claim to land as years have passed and the "restoration of a supposedly customary system of tenure", as Dlamini (2015:197) puts it, cannot be fully attained. How can we claim to evenly and accurately re-distribute the land, to its cultural owners, and to what effect as most supposed 'rightful owners' have no "organic connection" (197) to the land?

In NLSA we have seen the consequences of the Union Government's desire to subdue all Africans by seizing their land and restricting them ownership of such land. With their right to the ownership of land revoked, the way of life formerly known to Africans of farming and

breeding livestock cannot be effectively carried out. The Africans therefore have to depend on whatever jobs and wages the white farmers, who now own their land, are willing to offer. In this case the only way the Africans could then sustain himself would be by accepting employment as a cheap labourer for the Union government. Since the Act was fashioned to retain the African in a perpetual state of servitude, such is the psychology that continues to bear fruit on the economic landscape of the country even after attempts to restore and liberate the affected proletariat. Plaatje (1982: *x*) writes that the Land Act was introduced for two reasons: "Black farming was proving to be too competitively successful against white farming and there was a demand for a flow of cheap labour to the gold mines." Therefore, just as the Ndebele did in Mhudi, the Union government sought to control the productivity of the Africans under means that would ensure that the Africans would never surpass them in progress. Control over land was without doubt a sure marker of who held the utmost power because if your subjects have no land to work on they have nothing to produce for the sustenance of their families.

Plaatje emotively construed these words which would come to define the suffering of the Africans in 1913: "Awaking on Friday morning, June 20, 1913, the South African native found himself not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth." This excerpt comes to signify the reason of the Africans' migration and exile from their land and the exclusion from land ownership. Though, at the time, most Africans assumed the role of squatters on the land, they still had a form of control over their lives as they could rent land to farm and produce food for themselves and their livestock. The Land Act took this right away from them as it prohibited any form of sole curatorship over land by an African as this would give them economic and social freedom from the white ruling party and thus give them an edge over their supposed white superiors. I refer here, back to Dlamini's (2015:197) assertions; Plaatje is arguing, through his writing, that everyone should be given a fair chance. Africans should not be excluded from equal political rights and the "broader demand for equal citizenship", i.e. voting, access to land and fair trade and economic inclusion, like their white counterparts

Plaatje describes, in NLSA, the relocation and forced migration undertaken by Africans across the country following the passing of the law. Fleeing from the wrath of the union government, Plaatje portrays an image of Africans young and old, male and female, all trapped in a country which they once owned and now owned them. Plaatje makes reference to cruelty in both his descriptions of the Ndebele warriors and the agents of the Union

Government. As much as the Ndebele were relentless in pursuing unarmed women and children, the Native's Land Act left them in quite a similar predicament wherein they had to travel long distances trying to find places to stay as they had been evicted from their homes, land and work quarters where they would reside. The continuity between Plaatje's two texts is evident in the following description of dispersal in (Plaatje 1995:38):

> We were ordered to prepare to leave with the children at nightfall, and while we were tying up some provisions, a hideous cry rent the air to the north end of the town as the enemy attacked, and we had to flee before sunset…. The bushes on the Southern outskirts of the town were swarming with a moving mass of women and children; while the tramp, tramp of the march of many pairs of feet was drowned by the wild screams of thousands of people at the far end of town, as they received the thrusts of the Matebele spears.

This accounts for the displacement of the Barolong in Kunana following the attack by the Ndebele. The following excerpt if from NLSA portraying the struggles of the Africans upon having to abruptly move heeding the decrees of the Land Act. Plaatje (1982: 92,104) writes;

> It was cold that afternoon as we cycled into the "Free" State from Transvaal, and towards evening the Southern winds rose. A cutting Blizzard raged during the night, and native mothers evicted from their homes shivered with their babies by their sides. When we saw on that night the teeth of the little children clattering through the cold, we thought of our own little ones in their Kimberley home of an evening after Gambolling in their winter frocks with their schoolmates, and we wondered what these little mites had done that a home should suddenly become to them a thing of the past.

These two occurrences took place about 100 years apart yet the outcomes look all the same and too familiar. There is upheaval, displacement, death, pain and suffering on both occasions and also a desire to take back what was once forcefully taken. The quest for freedom, both socially and financially, is accompanied by an even stronger move to gain psychological healing from the wounds caused by the displacement. The same anxieties and discussions that took place in Mhudi are taking place now.

Through Gubuza's words of warning (Plaatje 1995:57) foreshadows a perilous desire for vengeance and restoration by the owners of the demolished land. If the Ndebele bounty upon their conquest of the Barolong city may be likened to the conquest of the Union government over the Africans, then there are undertones of the promise of vengeance that may be read in this similarity. Mhudi prophesies the willful desire to avenge the loss of their forebears in

land and livestock and also to create equilibrium if not a complete restoration of displaced Africans to their ancestral lands.

The issue of land, its ownership and its use is one which cannot be ignored in both Mhudi and in NLSA. Land was and continues to be an important aspect in either bringing people together or separating them. National patriotism is quite often brought about by a kindred sense towards land. Disagreements on the ownership and distribution of land and its minerals have caused animosity between societies, families and nations. The acquisition of land is thus a very fragile and detailed process which means more than just allotting a piece of land to a single party over another. The basic development of communities lies in their ability to use their land effectively so that it yields good returns for its present occupants and for future generations. The Land Act put a halt on the African community's ability to invest in the wellbeing of their offspring and future generations. The Act fashioned the acquisition and ownership of land by Africans to be a principle foreign to African culture under the rule of the Union government. Likewise, Mzilikazi's ploy to hinder the various African groups access to their holistic rights to their land, was a step in ensuring that the Ndebele remain the most economically, socially and politically prominent and feared nation of all African nations. In writing about land in Mhudi, as a comparative crisis continuation from NLSA, Plaatje illustrates the resurgent importance of land and good stewardship over it.

The loss of land as a Haunting.

If the loss of land haunted Plaatje from ~~NLSA~~ to Mhudi it is very telling that the predicament continued to preoccupy the consciousness and imaginations of black writers. This is evident in that Mhudi itself became an intertextual template for Peter Abrahams who revises the novel in his Wild Conquest (1971) and Tell Freedom (1991).

As mentioned numerous times before, Plaatje's work has managed to transcend space and time exerting undeniable influence on people's thoughts and perceptions of land. The most undeniable factor we can read through Plaatje's career is the influence literature has when it comes to enlightening, archiving and bringing about change within societies. Apart from NLSA now being regarded as a seminal text in considering the effects of the Native Land Act, Plaatje's work also set precedence for the writers that followed after him. Peter Abrahams's books Wild Conquest and Tell Freedom were first published in 1950 and 1954 respectively. At this time both NLSA and Mhudi had been published and had a continuous

impact on South African politics of the time. While Plaatje's texts placed him as part of the first generation of African writers, Abrahams followed suit in his generation and drew knowledge from Plaatje. NLSA and Mhudi reflect the trend by first and second generation writers whose work focussed on "large scale social upheaval, migration and dislocation that occurred across Southern Africa in the early decades of the nineteenth century." (Peterson 2012:291) Wild Conquest has a focus on "the final defeat of the last independent African polities and their replacement with neo-traditional forms of authority under the patronage of colonialism." (Peterson 2012:291). It reflects on an earlier time, wherein slavery was rife on the South African landscape.

A hundred years after the Act was passed land remains a topic of concern in South Africa. With just over 22 years of having to lessen the impact of the 1913 Native Land Act, South African political parties after 1994 are still communicating and deliberating on which ways will best ease the threats of vengeance as seemingly prophesied in Plaatje's Mhudi. This is apparent in the political manifestos of the most prominent political parties in South Africa, the African National Congress, the Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters. With the ANC and the DA having had prominence for over two decades and the ANC having been at the forefront of the petition against the Land act in 1913, through its then General secretary Plaatje, it is interesting to see how the attitudes towards the act translate a century later. The opinions of the DA, the official opposition to the governing of the ANC, as well recently formed EFF, make for loaded discourses on the current land affairs of South Africa.

Firstly, the (ANC 2014:8) states, their intentions thus:

- Implement rural development focussing on meeting basic needs, land reform and rural enterprise development, supported by localised markets, credit facilities and economic infrastructure.
- Increase investment in agricultural infrastructure in support of small-holder farmer development, prioritising former homeland communal areas.
- Continue to improve the tenure security and administration of people living in communal areas with emphasis on women's tenure security.
- Strengthen support for co-operatives in marketing and supply activities to enable small scale producers to enter formal value chains and take advantage of economies of scale. This will

include targeting public institutions as primary buyers of agricultural goods and support for small scale producers' access to municipal markets.

- Expand the food for all programme as part of the national integrated food and nutrition policy for procuring and distributing affordable essential foodstuffs directly to poor communities.
- Accelerate the settlement of remaining land claims submitted before the cut-off date of 1998.
- Re-open the period for the lodgement of claims for restitution of land for a period of five years, commencing in 2014.
- Codify the exceptions to the 1913 cut-off date for the descendants of the Khoi and San, and identify affected heritage sites and historical landmarks.

Turning to the DA's manifesto we find that it is lodged as a response to the ANC's manifesto with regards to land. The points made by the DA are in constant reference to the methods presently employed by the current ruling party and what they believe would be a more worthwhile approach to the redistribution of land and what methods they believe are more feasible. These are some of the examples of the ideas brought forth by the DA insofar as the land act and retribution are concerned: firstly,

- Wherever possible, state-owned land must be released for reform purposes. We must get the Department of Land Reform properly staffed, corruption free and working efficiently.
- At Present large tracts of South Africa's most fertile agricultural land produces very little food and hardly any jobs. Approximately 21 million South Africans live on more than 17 million hectares of communal land. State-owned land in communal areas must be released immediately for reform purposes and its citizens must receive legal title to the land on which they live and farm.
- Research shows that collaborative reform models are more likely to succeed. Around 80% of farm equity schemes introduced by the provincial government in the Western Cape have succeeded. We must put more money and effort behind these kinds of programmes.
- We must focus on increasing the percentage of projects that become self-sustaining and provide reasonable incomes for those involved (rather than only the number of hectares transferred). (DA 2014:31)

Furthermore, the DA espouses to employ the willing buyer willing seller principle in their redistribution of land. According to the DA the process of land reform and redistribution has not been approached holistically in such a way that it tends merely to focus on the prospects of redistributing rural and communal land, while ignoring the mass-migration from the countryside to urban areas. Land reform thus has to include city spaces and city dwellers and not only rural settlements and communal land. These two manifestos prove that the redistribution of land in a country with a history as complex as South Africa can never be a straight forward affair. The EFF's Manifesto further elucidates these complexities.

The EFF's (2013:5) manifesto states that they firmly believe that economic freedom, which is the mission of their party, will be attained through implementation of 7 cardinal pillars, the first of which being; "Expropriation of South Africa's land without compensation for equal redistribution and use." The use, distribution and ownership of land takes top priority in their agenda to restore South Africa from the ills of apartheid. Furthermore, on their agenda of Rural Development, Land and Agrarian Reform the EFF (2013:20) Manifesto states:

- The EFF Government's ideological, political and programmatic approach to rural development is inspired by the notion that there should be "Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of all the distinction between town and country by a more equable distribution of the populace over the country."

This is in many ways similar to the DA's approach to land reform which I mentioned previously as one that tries to adopt a holistic approach to land usage and distribution covering all spaces urban and rural alike in an attempt to effectively rehabilitate the country's land issues.

The public has also not been silent about land issues. With movements for land redistribution growing, there is a community of people who believe land and resources should be re-appropriated to allow the majority of citizens the ability to participate competitively once again with groups that were unfairly given an edge by white supremacy. The #FeesMustFall movement echoes these inconsistencies and foregrounds the long-lasting effects of an imbalanced economy and financial bondage. The calls for financial liberation by the different parties may be likened to Gubuza's concerns in (Plaatje 1995:57):

> When I reached the plateau and saw the swarms of Barolong cattle I felt a quiver on my breast as though it had been hit by a spear; for I am convinced that the owners of so many cattle will not rest until they recover them.

Cattle to the Bechuana was the equivalent of wealth, they used them for trade and sustenance and the amount of cattle one had was a direct reflection of how wealthy they were. The cattle were quite instrumental in toiling the land, they were used to till the land when farming and also to transport the crop and also for milk. It is unsurprising that Gubuza would be so concerned about the repercussions of the Ndebele's actions and that the owners of the cattle the Ndebele had seized will come back with their wrath to reclaim what was taken from them.

Migration as loss

Mhudi's echo of the dispossession of land highlights the theme of migration. Migration implies not only the migration of people but also the migration of their culture which is then opened to the force of change and adaptation. The core of migration in this text is thus entrenched in a sense of loss the characters feel towards the land they have left behind. For instance, the Barolong in Mhudi appear to have a more than divine relationship to their land. The Zulu's and the Bechuana have a symbiotic relationship to the land in which they stay so much so that even the animals feel the discord that has befallen the land:

> After much singing and dancing, beef eating and beer drinking, the male portion of the revellers surged up the hillside to the top of the plateau where they inspected and captured Barolong herds. The animals were not chewing the cud after the manner of kine. They, too, seemed to feel a disturbance and marvelled at the commotion. They had never seen so vast an assembly of man and beast, and they wondered what was in course that today these proverbial hunters should pay no heed to them. (Plaatje 1995: 56)

A similar relation exists in relation to nature. The skyline and the galaxies above them are a guide and carry prophetic messages, the wild ravines provide shelter and sustenance, the land brings forth crops and food for their consumption and their familiarity with the land also offers adequate protection from their enemies. This balanced ecological and political relationship with the land only remains useful if it is not disrupted. Once it is thrown into disequilibrium, as happens with the Ndebele raid, then the sudden impending dangers, the

need to survive results in an urgent desire to move. Forced migration, in essence, precipitates estrangement from the land and the difficulties of peaceful coexistence.

Both the Land Act and the Mfecane created a growing sense of migrant culture amongst the Africans subject to their laws. With regards to the Land Act a large number of Africans were forced to migrate into areas decided upon by the union government, under conditions which were unfavourable to sustainable production. This resulted in many men having to resort to seeking jobs at mines as was the plan of the union government. The groups then migrated to mining towns to provide cheap labour for the benefit of the union government. The deplorable effects of the Mfecane caused Mhudi and Rathaga to be separated a lot of times following their initial migration from their beloved city of birth Kunana. All those who survived the Ndebele raid ran to neighbouring villages and sought refuge amongst other nations with the hope that they would not be turned in to the Ndebele if they came seeking out fugitives. Cultures merge due to migration and this ends up diluting the authenticity and the identity of the migrated cultures. These migrant societies also lose their sense of connectedness to their land as they cannot physically occupy it for various reasons. For the Bechuana nation in Mhudi, Kunana is a dilapidated site of ruins and they thus have to seek refuge amongst other nations such as they did in Thaba Nchu amongst the people of Chief Moroka-a-Sehunelo (85).

Migration in NLSA and Mhudi is not portrayed in a joyful light. Mhudi and Rathaga's migration from Kunana is filled with loneliness and an anxiety of an impending harm. Both the characters are weary from travel upon their encounter of each other's presence and are surprised yet delighted to see yet another clansman as themselves who has managed to escape Mzilikazi's men. They journey on for many nights not knowing what lies ahead, merely trying to get as far away from the Ndebele as possible. Upon their journey food is sparse as they have entered into unknown territory, danger lurks everywhere as they are vulnerable and exposed to the beasts of the foreign land they are travelling through. Their better judgement is also jeopardised by their lack of sufficient sleep as it cannot be easy to fully rest in unknown territory. The same is evident of the effects of the Land Act on the Africans. Many African families undertook uncertain journeys trying to escape the deplorable effects of the act newly placed upon their heads. Plaatje in NLSA writes of families moving in the middle of the winter night consisting of mothers with babies and children who were cold and hungry. An unprecedented migration such as the one explained here has inevitable consequences on the mortality of uprooted Africans.

Both texts offer detailed accounts of the effects of untimely migratory processes to unconfirmed locations. These texts bear testament to the suffering of the migrant African who on both accounts is forced off his/her native land having to fend for themselves elsewhere. The victims of such circumstances suffer not only the physical traumas their moves encompass but also an emotional and psychological imbalance in their psyche. In Mhudi the surviving residents of Kunana suffer a psychological unrest at the thought of who else might have made it and whether their family members whose deaths they could not confirm lived or were eventually captured and killed by the Ndebele. Furthermore, they suffer emotionally at the thought of the cause of their migration, being seized and killed by the Ndebele warriors. Their thoughts of Kunana bring back nostalgic memories of a home to which they belonged and felt safe.

On the other hand, the Land Act took away the African's sense of entitlement to their own land. Where families had been bequeathed with and resources in the form of livestock the Union government's act stripped them of such rights. The psychological repercussions created a sense of subservience and even inferiority to the white minority for whom they had to work. This left them emotionally displaced as well and without a sense of belonging. Moving away from their land meant accepting defeat and forfeiting their land regardless of the fact that they were bound by a foreign law which proved unbending and impenetrable. This unabashed law exiled many from their land, uprooting them only to cast them into a deplorable state of a diasporic longing of things left behind.

Exile as exclusionary

Plaatje states in the opening paragraph of NLSA that "the morning of June 16th 1913 was one that left the native a pariah in his own land". Here Plaatje alludes to a sense of exclusion the land act caused upon the Africans of South Africa. This act deliberately excluded them from various forms of economic gain as well as social progression. Furthermore, as migration into mining towns increased the Africans were further excluded from establishing and retaining their sense of family, kinship and identity. With sparse livestock and minimal land to execute cultural rituals, effectively cut them from their culture and resulted in various forms of alienation. The union government laws essentially forbade Africans to enjoy and utilise the products of their Africans land for their gain. In NLSA families had no place to bury their loved ones while on the run. The homes in which their ancestors had been buried and those

homes they would have desired to be laid to rest at themselves were taken away. This excluded them from cultural practices which could only be affirmed by the use of specific ancestral spaces and rituals. (Rall 2003:123)

Plaatje (1982:89-90) describes one such excruciating incidence:

> Mrs Kgobadi carried a sick baby when the eviction took place, and she had to transfer her darling from the cottage to the jolting ox-wagon in which they left the farm. Two days out and the little one began to sink as the result of privation and exposure on the road, and the night before we met them its little soul was released from its earthly bonds. The death of the child added a fresh perplexity to the stricken parents. They had no right or title to the farmlands through which they trekked: they must keep to the public roads- the only places in the country open to the outcasts if they are possessed of travelling permit. The deceased child had to be buried but where, when, and how?

Having been exiled from their land the groups fleeing from the Ndebele became excluded from their cultural practises and this limited their senses of self-identity. For instance, Rathaga complains to his friend Sarel Siljay that the Ndebele warriors have robbed him of the relationship he would have had with his mother in law:

> Then Rathaga would exclaim: 'whether I visit the homes of other men and see the beautiful dishes that their mothers-in –law prepare and send over to them, and find no one near my dwelling to mind the babies when Mhudi goes a-faggotting, I think of her and say: "this faithful child of my mother, so lonely and forlorn, is without help, because without a mother's advice! Shall I ever forgive the Matebele! And when I see a sheepmaster select the fattest wether in his sheep kraal and proudly send it to his mother-in-law, I grieve and wish she were alive, for then my cattle-fold would hold no kine, my sheep-pen no fat tailed mutton and my hunting snares would catch no venison too good for her. The plains would feed no game, the silver jackals grow no furs and no eland falling to my musket would have fore-quarters so fat and tasty but would be all hers.' (Plaatje 1995:122)

Not only does Plaatje highlight the importance and reverence with which Barolong women are held, he also brings to mind the importance of women in every society. The kind of appreciation he dedicates to his fallen mother in law signifies the void left by her absence in his life and the ever increasing desire to have if filled or avenge her death. Therefore, besides making Mhudi the protagonist of the story of historical wars which would otherwise be associated with men, the '{her}story' in the novel takes precedence and I suggest that Plaatje writes this to show how he considered women as the heroines and that their positivity is the

saving grace of communities despite being constantly side-lined in historical and political discourses. The next chapter will further elucidate this point.

Chapter 3: Censorship, reception and gendered land.

In this chapter I explore Plaatje's work and contribution towards feminist discourse as well as to the cause of feminism itself. I explore here, his support for the betterment and liberation of the black women of South Africa. Writing within a canon and as part of a generation of male writers that Stratton has criticised for objectifying and subduing women in their use of the 'mother Africa' trope, it is interesting to see how different or similar Plaatje's work is, especially in relation to subsequent writers such as Leopold Senghor who is associated with the trope. My focus in this chapter is on the gendered representation of land in Mhudi. I would like to discuss how this further aids Plaatje in his portrayal of a South Africa bound by its past and how these shackles come to manifest in the present.

In my analysis of the gendered depiction of land I employ Florence Stratton's ideas concerning the postcolonial notions of likening the land to a woman. Leopold Senghor is widely accepted as one of the founding fathers of negritude and the Pan-Africanist school of thought (Stratton 1994:39). In Senghor's writing, depicting the embodiment of Africa is in the figure of a Woman. This trope, according to Stratton, is deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition. It has been read as rather sexist and privileging patriarchal perceptions based on the objectification of the female. In Stratton's reading of the mother Africa trope, she challenges its adoption by canonical writers such as Leopold Senghor. I want to compare Senghor's usage to that of Plaatje and his stance on the foregrounding of female characters in literary works.

As Stratton points out, the 'mother Africa' trope was a male birthed ideology of reading or symbolically comparing the existence and experiences of women as metaphors for the history of the continent and its land. Notwithstanding the critique it has aroused, it is pertinent that Plaatje's input in such a canon be assessed and revised. This is especially because Plaatje's writings precede the later texts and this raises the question whether Plaatje's work also falls under the patriarchal and Manichean premises favoured by subsequent generations. I want to suggest that while the character of Mhudi is presented as signifying the South African

landscape and valorising it through portraying her as the heroine in the novel, Plaatje does so without 'othering' women.

Accordingly, my interest is in exploring Plaatje's employment of a female protagonist as a more radical undertaking which may be read as yielding pro-feminist results. Chimamanda Adichie states that a feminist is "a person who believes in the social, political and cultural liberation of women… a man or a woman who says; 'yes there is a problem with gender as it is today, and we must fix it, we must do better' "[31]. This reading will be a holistic analysis of the core female characters in the novel, disavowing the Senghorian patriarchal idea which (Stratton 1994:50) suggests continues to subdue the psyche of the woman to the liberties of men in their writing. In (Limb's 2007:27) article, we see how Plaatje is praised for championing the fight for women's rights. Therefore, considering Mhudi as a novel about a heroine can be seen as an affirmation of Plaatje's contribution to feminism/feminist writing. It is thus pertinent to consider Plaatje's contribution to the up-liftment of women through a reading of Mhudi as a heroine text.

Although Mhudi has been read as a feminist text, focussing richly on the foregrounding of the woman in the text, the undertones of the significance of a female protagonist and what her (Mhudi) prowess signifies in the larger schema of the narrative has been grossly overlooked. Above all, the knowledge imbedded in Plaatje's construction of this novel, his appreciation of women creates a seminal path that integrates women into the nation's narrative as the core catalyst for change, hope and sustainability. The Mother Africa trope in this case offers a mirage/reflection of how, like a mother would, the women of South Africa held the fort and availed themselves to fighting for their country and sustaining it. The trope idealises the strength of the nation as encapsulated by the female protagonist.

Gendered Land

To say that Plaatje speaks for women would be to suggest that they were feeble and powerless. Quite the contrary is true, Plaatje portrays women who are daring and bold both in Mhudi and in NLSA. I propose that not only was Plaatje a humanist he was by and large quite a feminist in his thinking. Being the first black person to have a novel published in South Africa, he set a trend and became a point of reference and the scale with which to

[31] Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's talk on: TedEx, "We Should All Be Feminist". 2013. https://youtu.be/hg3umXU_qWc. Web. 19 May 2014.

measure writing and an achievement to aspire to. Although Plaatje's work seems to be consistent with Leopold Senghor's conceptualisation of the "Mother Africa Trope", Plaatje espouses a more liberal and admiring take on the role of the woman in society. The Female characters Plaatje espouses in his narratives go against all stereotypes associated with women, and especially those that depict women as being weak. The power and valour of women is foregrounded in Mhudi and their use of mental power, where physical strength is compromised, is celebrated. These women, Mhudi, Umnandi and Mhudi's mother amongst others, need no speaking for, they are opinionated, brave, decisive and through all this retain their nurturing spirits. Mhudi can be seen as an ode to women, particularly South African women who encountered suffering due to the wars over land. The amount of valour and perseverance displayed by women after the passing of the 1913 Land act and the narrative presented in Mhudi is astounding. Umnandi runs away from her people, risking her life to live amongst the Bechuana despite being Mzilikazi's, the villain's, wife. (Plaatje 1995:176-177). Mhudi has a premonition about what would happen at the siege between the Ndebele and the other nations. She resolves to go and convince her husband against it, (Plaatje 1995:164-165).

Plaatje's choice of employing a female protagonist whose name comes to be the title of the book may be read as a metaphoric comparison. If the novel's main preoccupation is revealed to be land and the main character is female, the title Mhudi may very well come to signify land. It is quite symbolic that the protagonist's name, Mhudi, translates as harvester or grazer because the women are said to be nurturers. This symbolism allegorises the significance of the women in society. As men hunt, women sow, nurture and harvest the land. Women are portrayed as seeing and holding the inner most secrets of the earth. The idea of grazing or being a grazer illuminates Mhudi's incessant need to find, detect and discover through exploring, which I shall discuss at a later stage.

Although this is in many ways synonymous to Leopold Senghor's use of the female character for the Mother Africa trope, Plaatje presents an interesting case for the agency and power of the woman as the core of any society. This representation, more than being what Florence Stratton dismisses as a male ploy to use the patriarchal idea of woman to their benefit, instead entrenches a deep sense of hope in the female character.

The character of Mhudi in the novel is valorised as a woman who is fearless and sober-minded at all times. If Mhudi is read as the land then her toil and suffering when running

away from the literal land of Kunana may be seen as akin to Kunana's suffering when it is invaded by the Ndebele. Mhudi's ability to get away and survive the wrath of the Ndebele offers a sense of hope that the land can and will be saved despite the bleak possibility of redemption in the midst of a war. Mhudi has a resilient attitude and even in her solitary migration she remains steadfast that she will one day again be in the company of other humans. If Mhudi's character embodies hope through fecundity and resilience, she is the model of a land which refuses to be forgotten. After her displacement Mhudi wonders about aimlessly until she meets Rathaga and their union symbolises the start of restoration of the clan and the nation.

Mhudi and Rathaga's separation and reunion over the course of the narrative is also suggestive of the return to order that nature orchestrates. Regardless of how many times Rathaga is separated from Mhudi, who is symbolic of the land, the two always end up reunited. Mhudi's courage and resilience is consistent with the Setswana proverb that describe mothers which says "mma ngwana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogaleng", which means that a mother would go as far as handling the sharp end of a knife to protect her children. Mhudi does indeed grab the knife by its sharp end when she follows the group of hunting men to find Rathaga. (Plaatje 1995:75-76). And also in all the other times that she faces danger to warn Rathaga of impending danger. (Plaatje 1995:64-165).

Women are given seminal roles by Plaatje in the novel, they play important roles such as being the guarantors of the land, the bearers of knowledge, the hope of the people as well as being the restorers of peace. All these roles are captured in Mhudi and Umnandi and their encounter is a symbolic event in the novel which marks the end of the Barolong and Ndebele feud over land. Mhudi meets Umnandi, who has fled her home and position as queen of the Ndebele, when she goes out looking for her husband again. Despite the rivalry of their husbands, they embrace each other and with the serenity and pure-nurtured nature of women, they become the symbols of peace and harmony for their respective tribes. Through this, Plaatje proposes that nations will come together and their union will bring about peace. The women, with their ability to bear children, representative of the future, are symbolic of the land bringing forth good fruit which will feed and sustain future generations. Thus these two women become the heroines.

The description of Umnandi is particularly interesting because of the manner in which it employs characteristics associated with the Senghorian trope, that is, likening her appearance

as an embodiment of the form and fullness of a cornfield. Umnandi is described thus, (Plaatje 1995:96):

> I am black but comely O ye daughters of Solomon
>
> As the tents of Kedar and the curtains of Solomon.
>
> Look not upon me because I am black
>
> For the sun hath looked upon me:
>
> My mother's children were angry with me;
>
> They made me the keeper of the vineyards;
>
> But my own vineyard have I not kept.

With the vineyard changed to cornfield he hoped to accurately relate his mind's visual concept of her.

(Rall 2003:266) notes the importance of seeing the character of Mhudi in its complexities suggesting that Mhudi, like Umnandi, comes to stand for and represent all types of women and their abilities. Therein she highlights the bravery of the various women in the novel as well as their open-mindedness when patriarchy stands in the way of clear judgement. Interestingly Eskia Mphahlele notes this trend in Mhudi and comments, as cited in (Rall 2003:266), that Plaatje "had compassion, and this balanced the historian's detachment in him; his love for human beings was profound, and for this reason Mhudi comes alive even in the midst of epoch-making clashes, even if we consider her dialogue stilted."

The characterisation of women as valiant speaks to the various issues associated with land such as it possibilities of renewal. Land possesses the ability to regenerate itself after being misused or after experiences of droughts and floods. Land can thus be seen as having an eternal beauty and one that is able to replenish itself. The strength and valour of the women Plaatje describes in NLSA and Mhudi are reflective of South Africa as a land physically as well as socially. By the physical strength of the land I refer to the ravines, the mountains and the minerals which sustain it and those who live and seek refuge in it. The social attributes reflected include the social struggles such as poverty, racism, xenophobia and homophobia to name a few.

Through his novel Mhudi, Plaatje tells the story of unsung South African heroines that are constantly effaced by socio-political as well as cultural beliefs. Plaatje saw and began to correct a social ill – the disregard and undermining of the influence and contribution of women. The lack of recognition and marginalisation of women is a continental and worldwide phenomenon albeit better in some nations. Nurrudin Farah states, "Like all good Somali poets I used women as a symbol for Somalia. Because, when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia". (Kitchener 1981:70).

The freedom and recognition of women becomes particularly important when we take into consideration the state of South Africa right now. South Africa has overcome a lot of social difficulties in the past and also set a standard for the world in Human Rights laws and in presenting a fair constitution. However, even as a democracy it has never seen a female president. In the whole of Africa, only a few women have performed the highest roles in governance such as being a president or vice-president. Malawi, Liberia, Burundi and Mauritius are amongst the few States that have had a female assume a leading role within the state. One would wonders if this is a reflection of a lack of skill on the women or an evidence of non-confidence in women, by the public. Whatever the case may be, Plaatje has demonstrated in Mhudi the ability of women to lead and reconcile.

Plaatje essentially uses the founding principles of the Mother Africa Trope as a means to negate the implied negative notions women that are often the result of the use of the trope. While it is used to foreground women's vulnerabilities and illuminate moments and sites of possible disempowerment, Plaatje's work uses the same qualities to show how women can and continue to represent power, wisdom and victory or conquest over oppressors. Mhudi more than anything foregrounds how women have the capacity to take the baton and lead with wisdom; they have the kindness to forgive and restore; and the warmth and tenacity to grow and nurture even within the hardest circumstances imaginable.

Mhudi is a multi-faceted character who embodies through her strength and courage the resilience of the land and the nation. In Mhudi, women do not just assume the background role, they are active in shaping their futures and those of their families as well. This is evident in Umnandi's relationship to Mzilikazi and how her absence indirectly offsets other tragedies for the Ndebele. The fact that Umnandi and Mhudi had the wisdom to bring peace and tolerance between their husbands and nations speaks to their ability to lead and speak with

authority. As much as their voices are portrayed as advisory I would like to highlight that it is their opinion and advice that resolves the conflict. This can be likened to a call for female leaders as opposed to reading the female body as helpless and being at the mercy of the patriarchal male figure, hoping for redemption for them. The woman in Plaatje's texts is not a helpless bystander, vulnerable to the exploitation of men with no sense of agency.

Conclusion

Mhudi proves to be a worthwhile and multi-dimensional archive of history. Plaatje's use of the aesthetics of literature proves that a text is always multi-layered, it can be likened to a shelf carefully packed with the intention to retain, until needed, invaluable items and knowledge. Drawing from various sources of knowledge such as European literary traditions in the form of romance, Plaatje renders an all-inclusive narrative through NLSA and Mhudi.

Plaatje effectively positions himself as a pioneer in the canon of, later, post-colonial writers who have actively engaged in writing and shaping the history of formerly colonised nations from a point of view other than that of the colony. His body or work is useful as it provides alternative narratives and concurrently filling in gaps in the history of South Africa. Although his work does not offer any solutions to the social ills it highlights, it provides very notable evidences of how South African history has followed a very clear pattern of events and it is also an accessible platform to discuss these.

Plaatje foregrounds, through his writing, the ability to foreshadow and predict possibilities of the future through knowledge of the past. This is similar to behavioural studies. What is most intriguing is the inclination to supporting the empowerment of women amongst race and class struggles. The reasons as to why Plaatje decided on a female protagonist in Mhudi are all speculations on our part. His decision to dedicate this epic to his daughter Olive, a woman who worked with him and died young before having fulfilled much of what I believe a father would hope to see a daughter achieve, was a petition of sorts to society to allow women to occupy spaces of influence, on merit, and be allowed to compete and have the same rights as their male counterparts in social spaces.

This Research Report has provided evidence of the indelible role of literature in modern day discourse. Through Mhudi, Plaatje manages to skillfully craft a story of an African woman, allowing it to take precedence over a political agenda and serve the political agenda of self-

awareness. More so it allows us to move past “nativist claims” and it enables us to engage Mhudi as a potential and useful starting point in unravelling current debates around various social issues. The novel reveals the efficacy of literature as an instrument in “writing back”, as informative and as providing a starting point and platform from where societies may tackle the most pressing issues they are faced with. As (Achebe 2008:7) implied when he wrote “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”, so is literature in the task of dissecting social discourse. Literature reaches where words dare not be uttered, suggesting, proposing and even imposing.

In conclusion, Plaatje as an artist believed and lived out the importance of cultural preservation. He encouraged and took it upon himself to have, not only, his home language, Setswana, recorded in history books, but also the history of South Africa. From the words found in his diary of the Mafikeng siege, the petition he wrote requesting intervention from the British government against the passing of the Land Act, and in Mhudi, Plaatje effectively foreshadows the future through the invocation of prophecy. This is evidence of the amount of faith Plaatje had in the power of literature.

Bibliography

Abrahams, P. Wild Conquest. New York, Anchor Books. 1971.

Abrahams, P. Tell Freedom. London, Faber and Faber. 1990.

Achebe, C. Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays. New York, Anchor books. 1989.

Achebe, C. Things Fall Apart. Oxford: Heinemann. 2008.

Ashcroft, Bill. The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. London: Routledge. 1989.

Comaroff, John L. The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: An African at Mafeking. Johannesburg: Macmillan. 1973.

Chennells, A. *Plotting South African History: Narrative in Sol Plaatje's Mhudi.* English in Africa. Vol. 24, No. 1 (May), pp.37-58. 1997.

Couzens, T & Gray, S. *Printers' and Other Devils: The texts of Sol. T. Plaatje's "Mhudi"* Research in African Literatures. Vol.9, No.2 (Autumn), pp. 198-215. 1978.

Coetzee, M. *Westphal Inventory*. UNISA Library German Africana Collection. Hesse Collection ACC 21. 2011.

Dlamini, Jacob. "Land and Belonging On the Tomb Ya Ga Solomon Plaatje". *Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa: Past and Present*. Bhekizizwe Peterson, Brian Willan and Janet Remmington. 1st ed. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2016. Print.DuBois, WEB. The Souls of Black Folk. Cambridge: A.C McClurg & Co, 1903. Print.

Gikandi, S. *Realism, Romance, and the Problem of African Literary History*. Modern Language Quarterly. 73:3 (September), pp. 309-328. 2012.

Kitchener, J. *Author in Search of an Identity*. New African. (December) pp.61. 1981.

Limb, P. *Rethinking Sol Plaatje's Attitudes to Class, Empire, and Gender.* Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies. 16:1, 23-40. 2002.

Madsen, D. Rereading Allegory: A narrative approach to genre. New York: St Martin's Press. 1994.

Mpe, Phashwane. Mine Is But A Sincere Narrative Of A Melancholy Situation: Sol Plaatje, Orality And The Politics Of Culture. MA. Wits University, 1996. Print.

Molema, Seetsele Modiri. Lover of His People. Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2012. Print.

Peterson, B. *Black Writers and the Historical Novel.* The Cambridge History of South African Literature. Eds. D, Atwell and D, Attridge. Cambridge University Press. 2012.

Peterson, B. *Sol Plaatje's Native Life in South Africa: Melancholy Narratives, Petitioning Selves and the ethics of Suffering*. Journal of Common Wealth Literature. 2008 43:69. pp 79-95. 2008.

Phaswane, Mpe. Mine is But a Sincere Narrative of a Melancholy Situation": Sol Plaatje Orality and the Politics of Culture. MA Thesis University of the Witwatersrand. 1996.

Plaatje, S. Native Life in South Africa. Johannesburg: Raven Press. 1982.

Plaatje, Solomon. Mhudi. Jeppestown: Ad Donker, 1995. Print.

Rall, Maureen. Peaceable Warrior: The Life and Times of Sol T. Plaatje. Kimberly: Sol Plaatje Educational Trust. 2003.

Shakespeare, William. Julius Caesar. New York: Penguin Putnum, 2000. Print.

Shakespeare, William. Macbeth. New York: Oxford UP, 1998. Print.

Shakespeare, William. Othello. New York: Cambridge UP, 2002. Print

Shakespeare, William. The Comedy of Errors. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Print.

Shakespeare, William. The Merchant of Venice. New York: Cambridge, 2003. Print.

Stratton, F. *The Mother Africa Trope*. Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender. London: Routledge. 1994.

Walter, Brian. Plaatje's African Romance: The Translation of Tragedy in Mhudi and Other Writings. PhD. Rhodes University, 2000.

Willan, Brian. *What 'Other Devils'? The texts of Sol. T. Plaatje's Mhudi Revisited*, Journal of Southern African Studies, 2015. p. 1331, 1347.

Wright, John. *Beyond the Concept of the 'Zulu Explosion'*. The Mfecane aftermath: reconstructive debates in southern African history. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand UP. 1995.

University of the Witwatersrand. 2012. *Silas T Molema and Solomon T Plaatje Paper*. Historical Papers Collection A979. Johannesburg.

Marriage Act, No 25 of 1961. 1961. *Available:* http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/Act%2025%20of%201961.pdf

DA. *DA Manifesto Election 2014*. 2017. Web. 18 Nov. 2014. http://www.da.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/DA-Manifesto-2014.pdf

ANC. *2014 Election Manifesto*. 2017. Web. 18 Nov. 2014. http://www.anc.org.za/docs/manifesto/2014/anc-manifesto.pdf

EFF. 2013. Founding Manifesto of the Economic Freedom Fighters. 2017. Web. http://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/founding-manifesto-of-the-economic-freedom-fighter