



# Deculturation: an Afrocentric critique of B.M. Khaketla's *Mosali a nkhola*

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## Abstract

### Deculturation: an Afrocentric critique of B.M. Khaketla's *Mosali a nkhola*

*B.M. Khaketla claims, in the preface of his novel, "Mosali a nkhola", that his motivation to write the story was an increase in the incidents of ritual murder among the Basotho in the early years of the British colonial occupation of Lesotho. However, Khaketla's novel focuses more on other effects of colonialism on the Basotho social fabric than on "diretlo" (ritual murder). The only incident of ritual murder in the novel comes quite late in the story. Therefore, by employing an Afrocentric critical tool, the article argues that current perspectives promote skewed critical methods and that Khaketla's novel is more about deculturation, i.e. the annihilation of the Basotho cultural identity, than it is about "diretlo". To that effect the article will embark on a substantive analysis of Khaketla's novel in order to clear misperceptions that have consigned African languages and literatures to the intellectual periphery and to re-locate them to the centre of academic discourse by advocating Afrocentricity as one of the primary African oriented methods of analysis.*

## Opsomming

### Dekulturasie: 'n Afrosentriese kritiek op B.M. Khaketla se *Mosali a nkhola*

*B.M. Khaketla stel in die voorwoord van sy roman, "Mosali a nkhola", dat sy motivering om die storie te skryf 'n toename was in voorvalle van rituele moord onder Basotho's in die vroeë jare van die Britse koloniale besetting van Lesotho. Khaketla se*

roman fokus egter meer op ander uitwerkings van kolonialisme op die Basotho se maatskaplike stelsel as op rituele moord. Die enigste voorval van "diretlo" (rituele moord) in die roman vind redelik laat in die verhaal plaas. Deur gebruik te maak van Afro-sentrisisme as kritiese werktuig, betoog die artikel dat bestaande perspektiewe skewe, kritiese metodes bevorder en dat Khaketla se roman meer oor dekultrasie gaan, dit wil sê oor die uitwissing van die Basotho's se kulturele identiteit, as wat dit oor "diretlo" gaan. In hierdie artikel word derhalwe 'n deeglike ontleding van Khaketla se roman onderneem. Die doel is om wanopvattinge uit die weg te ruim wat Afrikatale en -literatuur tot die intellektuele periferie gedryf het en om hulle eerder weer in die middelpunt van akademiese diskoers te hervestig. Afro-sentrisiteit word as een van die primêre Afrika-georiënteerde metodes van ontleding aanbeveel.

## 1. Introduction

B.M. Khaketla's *Mosali a nkholo* (1960) (*A woman lends into trouble*) is one of the early Sesotho novels and has enjoyed the attention of both scholars and casual readers. Some scholars and casual readers seem to have endorsed the claim made by the author that his aim in writing the novel was to expose the evil of *diretlo* (ritual murder). While these views are not necessarily wrong, this article seeks to argue that there is more in *Mosali a nkholo* than just *diretlo*, and this becomes clear if we analyse the novel from the theoretical perspective of Afrocentricity.

Much has changed in African literary theoretical approaches from appraisal and structuralism to modernism and globalisation, for instance. In the same vein there has in recent years been a significant shift from Eurocentric to Afrocentric approaches to African literary study – especially in the wake of globalisation, multiculturalism and African Renaissance at the turn of the 21st century.

## 2. Why an Afrocentric approach

Since the onset of African nationalism in the early to mid-twentieth century, African intelligentsia and nationalists have sought to re-establish an African perspective of the world. This led from anti-colonial sentiments, through neo-colonialism to African nationalism, Pan Africanism, Black Consciousness, et cetera. It is possibly from a similar background that Molefi Kete Asante (2005b:6) argues as follows:

We have finally arrived at a cultural junction where several critical avenues present themselves to the serious textual reader. Any fair estimate of the road that got us to this point must conclude that it has been a difficult one, filled with intellectual potholes and myopic cultural roadblocks, but at last there is an Afrocentric viewpoint on texts.

In another essay Asante (2005a:1) asserts that the purpose of Afrocentricity is to seek “to re-locate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes”. The fringes Asante is referring to here are social formations such as cultural, economic, religious, political and social frameworks, which have for centuries consigned Africa and Africanism to the periphery of Europe and European thought.

This being the case, an Afrocentric literary study – *Mosali a nkholo* in this instance – could serve as an important window through which one could get a fair glimpse of the brutalising dialectic of the Africa-Europe syndrome, because “African literature should be of a particularistic, African nature. It should resist the temptation to deal with universal problems” (Simonse, 1982:452).

This scenario, therefore, challenges African scholars and students to become agents of change. Simonse further appeals to the author and scholar of African literature, to be vigilant to the fact that the legacy of colonial history should spur African communities to collectively reclaim their languages and cultures, principally because:

[i]t is my contention that the confrontation between the capitalist and the precapitalist modes of production constitutes the rock bottom that the African writer’s creative imagination cannot help but touch when giving a literary shape to his vision of society. It is immaterial whether or not the writer is aware of this confrontation. (Simonse, 1982:455.)

This realisation calls for an African literary approach that would inter alia focus incisively on the culture from which the texts emanate. Such an approach would create vigilance to a symbiotic relationship between literature and the informing culture. However, according to Vermeulen and Slijper (2000:21), the irony similar to this symbiosis in the case of African literature could be traced to a multiculturalist misunderstanding of disaggregating culture, where

[a ] ... consequence of a non-culturalistic multiculturalism is to take cultural transformation and internal heterogeneity of ethnic minority cultures seriously. This is an important fact in relation

to arguments for financial or other forms of support for the expression or preservation of elements of minority cultures. A good example is the support for ethnic minority languages, for example through language classes in the public educational system. We would not contend that there are no good arguments at all for such language classes. But taking cultural change and internal heterogeneity seriously does mean that it does not make much sense to consider the maintenance of immigrant languages as a 'right', much less so to be translated in an official legal right. Measures that are aimed at the support for elements of ethnic minority cultures should therefore better be considered not as rights, but as possible and justifiable policy options. As such, they may be introduced when there is a clear demand, they can be altered as a result of changing circumstances, and they can be abolished when the target-group is integrated or when there is evidence that a majority shows no interest in preserving their ancestor's culture.

This view is principally akin to the colonially induced skewed Africa-Europe symbiotic literary approach which often ignores approaches that advance typically African perspectives in African literary study. Other facets of this literary unorthodoxy can be ascribed to the fact that

... for us to forget Europe is to suppress the conflicts that have shaped our identities; since it is too late for us to escape each other, we might instead seek to turn to our advantage the mutual interdependencies history has thrust upon us (Appiah, 1992:72).

These mutual interdependencies do not manifest the entire impact of colonisation. Kunene (1971:xi) refers to this phenomenon of cultural imperialism as "deculturation". As if corroborating Kunene's views, Asante (2005) argues that "Eurocentric view has become an ethnocentric view which elevates the European experience and down-grades all others". Flowing from this observation, Asante (2005a:2) argues further that

[i]n the Afrocentric view the problem of cultural location takes precedence over the topic or data under consideration. The argument is that Africans have been moved off of social, political, philosophical, and economic terms [...] Consequently it becomes necessary to examine all data from the standpoint of Africans as subjects, human agents, rather than as objects in a European frame of reference.

In the same vein Kunene (1971) views indigenous cultural location as enlightenment and equates it to the liberation of the Basotho

people in particular, and Africans in general. This backdrop seems to provide a strategic argument for the pursuit of cultural relocation. Cultural relocation is also a strategy that leads to the liberation of the term *literature* from its erstwhile over-literal definition in order to include all forms of verbal art. Kunene's perception tempts one to ask whether in African literature Western civilisation should not be reinterpreted as the antithesis of liberation. John Lye (1998:1) observes as follows:

The development (development itself may be an entirely Western concept) of hybrid and reclaimed cultures in colonized countries is uneven, disparate, and might defy those notions of order and common sense which may be central not only to Western thinking, but to literary forms and traditions produced through western thought.

This article will by means of a case study of *Mosali a nkholo*, attempt to demonstrate how cultural dislocation has negatively affected African literary study and how its relocation could also remedy the social situation as well.

### **3. An Afrocentric perspective on *Mosali a nkholo***

Although Kunene's (1989:1) "deculturation" refers to Mofolo's works in particular, cultural relocation seems to be what he implies in his thesis that the emergence of Sesotho literature requires full enquiry. Kunene asserts that "this [...] problem can, and should, be approached by way of in-depth studies of individual works". Such a study of individual works would then contribute to the exposure of cultural dislocation and subsequently of cultural relocation in African literary study.

Previously he also argued that verbal art should be understood to refer to the reservoir of original forms of art that embodies the values and philosophies of the Basotho people. The same wisdom, values and philosophies should be understood to underline the evolution of Basotho culture and written literature as well. Unless this is done, he claims, one is

[in] danger of undergoing 'deculturation' [...] the process whereby, at the meeting point of two cultures, one consciously and deliberately dominates the other and denies it the right to exist, by both directly and indirectly questioning its validity as a culture, denigrating it, making its carriers objects of ridicule and scorn, and thus finally leading to its questioning by the very

people whom it has nurtured and given an identity and positive being (cf. Kunene, 1971:xi).

The sentiments that Kunene expresses in his thesis actually refer to the modus operandi of Western cultural imperialism and its agents in the past as well as the present. This modus operandi has created a situation where Africa is absent as a subject except when the same powers refer to her as a mere object. Therefore, it becomes imperative to create conditions in which Africa can speak for herself in order to disseminate the "new" information which has for so long been suppressed, namely the African perspective of the world. In this regard Kunene (1971:xi) writes that the African perspective

[...] throws fresh light on some old controversies, debunks some old myths, exposes certain old skeletons in certain old cupboards, corrects certain crucial time perspectives against which some of the events [...] must be judged, especially in so far as they affected [...] creative writer(s) and it somewhat redistributes the emphasis of blame in so far as it is levelled at the missionaries of the PEMS<sup>1</sup> in those years.

This is the situation that Khaketla seems to portray in his novel, *Mosali a nkholo*, but at the same time his fascination with Western education reveals the ideological turbulence within which he is trapped as an author. The subject of *diretlo* (ritual murder) which Khaketla claims has inspired him to write this novel is by and large dwarfed by considerations of deculturation and cultural snobbery. Although incidents of *diretlo* occurred among the Basotho people, these were never a widely accepted practice and were not considered as a cultural norm. Instead, this practice was widely condemned (Maake, 1997). This unpopular practice seems mainly to have occurred as a result of sporadic cases of a sense of insecurity as will be illustrated later. In fact ritual murder was never a well thought-out proactive practice, but often was an impulsive reaction in the wake of uncertainty or fear of an impending disaster.

Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993:68) aptly capture the gist of such an uncertainty, illuminating the backdrop referred to above in the case of the hero of this novel, *Mosito*. They claim the following:

Set in the heyday of British colonial rule in Lesotho, with an over-elaborate system of local administration through traditional chiefs, the novel explores the consequences when a

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1 Paris Evangelical Missionary Society.

*young ruler, who has a wide education and who values the freedom of choice, has to face the prejudice of conservative traditionalists.* (Italics – TS.)

It should, however, be pointed out, first and foremost, that the “over-elaborate” local Basotho administration was the view of the British, not that of the Basotho people, towards their administration. In fact, this so-called over-elaborate local administration turns out to be one of the first most democratic institutions of its time. Davenport (1991:55) writes in this regard:

Moshoeshoe’s state was not an autocracy, but a loose federation held together by two kinds of bond, the maintenance of family ties within a large ruling house, and the consent of subordinate chiefs. [...] In general, Moshoeshoe controlled his sons and his leading subordinates [...] by giving them their head as much as possible, and balancing their influence in the tribal *khotla* with that of his councillors [...]

Furthermore, the freedom of choice referred to by Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993) is not just a matter between a young ruler and conservative traditionalists. The conflict is actually between what is considered to be right for the Basotho in general, not just for Mosito; vis-à-vis what is considered to be right for the Basotho, by the British colonial regime.

The young ruler, Mosito, is actually thrown into the centre of this political and cultural dispute. Consequently, the inclusion of the cultural dimension, which has largely been ignored by Western induced perspectives (cf. Ntuli & Swanepoel, 1993), changes the context of the story substantially. The novel then turns out to be more about deculturation rather than just about an over-elaborate administration or about ritual murder, as Khaketla claims in his foreword.

#### **4. Aspects of deculturation in *Mosali a nkholo***

The novel opens with the arrival of chief Lekaota’s son, Mosito, and his peers, Pokane and Khosi, who have just graduated from Lovedale College. We immediately find Khaketla drawing a parallel between this event and a graduation from *lebollong* (the Basotho initiation institution). Consequently, chief Lekaota organises a welcome-cum-graduation feast for his son, as would have been the case if he had graduated from *lebollong*.

Events during this feast establish a context within which the process of deculturation will unfold in the rest of the story. Khaketla writes about Mosito's graduation:

Kajeno he, tsena tseo Lekaota a neng a li lakatsa li ne li phethehile. Mosito o ne a phethile thuto ea ntat'ae, a kene sekolo, *a ithutile bohlale ba Makhooa*, a itokiselitse hore a tie a tsebe ho nka borena ba ntat'ae ha nako ea teng e fihla. Koana moo a tsoang teng Kolone, *mophato o ne o chele. Le eena Mosito, joaloka makoloane a tsoang mophatong, boshemane bo ne bo setse bo echa le mophato koana, bonna ba hae, e leng thuto, a e-tla a bo phuthile ka kobo.* (Khaketla, 1960:2; italics – TS.)

*Today, all that Lekaota had wished for has been fulfilled. Mosito has fulfilled his father's teachings and has attended school, learned the wisdom of the white man ready to succeed his father at the right time. The past from which he came, the era had ended, boyhood has remained behind, his manhood, which is education, has come along intact.*

When initiates graduate from the traditional *lebollo*, the *mophato* (dwelling of initiates) is burned down to symbolise the end of an era – the destruction of what defined their past and to demonstrate their newly acquired status – the era of manhood or womanhood. Khaketla (1960) uses the same *lebollong* metaphor to demonstrate that Mosito, by graduating from college, has shed his previous cultural identity and has acquired a new one.

However, in this case the identity that Mosito has shed is the same as the one that defined Moshoeshe, the epitome of the cultural identity of being African, i.e. human (*botho/ubuntu*). In contrast, Khaketla (1960:2) claims that clinging to such an identity is like clutching at straws when one is swept away by a strong current. According to Khaketla that strong current is Western civilisation, which was sweeping across Lesotho in particular and the African continent in general using religion and education as a bate.

Furthermore, what Khaketla sees as the current of civilisation is in fact the seeds of self-hate and self-denial wrought by colonialism and religion in Africa. Ironically, Khaketla (1960:2) also seems to reinforce this perception when he claims that Mosito comes back *a ithutile bohlale ba Makhooa* (having learned the wisdom of the whites). By implication this education has annihilated his past and alienated him from that which defined him, namely, the wisdom of the Basotho people, i.e. *botho*. This is the culture that has nurtured



and given him an identity – the identity of a Mosotho, the identity of Moshoeshoe and the identity of being African.

Ngugi (1986:3) regards the effects of Western education on the African mind as a cultural bomb in the sense that:

[t]he effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in them. It makes them see their past as a wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own.

Considering all these factors, the question arises whether Mosito's education of annihilation and alienation will benefit him and his people. To initiate an answer to this question Khaketla creates a situation of potential conflict. Mosito marries an "uneducated" Mosotho woman, Sebolelo, who is steeped in her cultural beliefs and value systems. As if this was not enough, Mosito's *lekgotla* (council) is divided into two camps: the former advisors of his late father who are "uneducated", and his own peer advisors who are educated in the Western sense. These contradictions seem to foreshadow the developments that will follow during Mosito's reign as chief, which will illustrate the beginning of an endless cultural conflict in which Basotho account for most casualties. Mosito has, indeed, become a trapped Mosotho "who has been assimilated, and then found it impossible to accept his own traditional culture" (Larson, 1971:170).

A real test for Mosito comes when the British government passes a proclamation to reduce the number of councils in Lesotho from 1 340 to 117. It becomes evident that if this proclamation is implemented, Mosito's council will be one of those that will be phased out. While there is provision for the Basotho nation to express their opinion on this matter, experience tells Khaketla that their opinion will not change the resolve of the British.

Ke mokhoa oa Makhooa [...] ha a rata ho kenya ntho. A ee a re ho hlahisoe maikutlo, ere ha a se a hlahisitsoe ebe ha a mameloe, haeba a sa lumellane le se batloang ke lithena. U sa tla b'ua mpotse; haeba sechaba se ka hana taba ena. 'Muso o tla e sebetsa feela ka ho rata ha oona empa re ntse re hana.' (Khaketla, 1960:30.)

*It is the way white people introduce their things. They invite opinions, but they do not consider them if they don't agree with what they want. You'll ask me; if the nation disagrees, the*

*government will proceed to implement its plan in spite of our refusal.*

Khaketla appears not to be naive in his admiration of *bohlale ba Makhooa* (the wisdom of the whites). He is aware that the British need neither willingness nor consent from anyone to implement their programmes. Now, with Mosito educated in the wisdom of the *Makhooa*, it remains to be seen whether his subjects will respect his wisdom or whether he will be able to use that wisdom to prevent the *Makhooa* from interfering with that which has made him – his culture and cultural institutions.

In the first instance, Mosito is a chief by birth – not by choice or circumstances – and this is one of the most valued cornerstones of the Basotho socio-cultural system. However, in trying to please the British, Mosito ignores this fact to his own peril. In the process he loses the support of his own people, but does not gain the support of the British either. Worse still, he also does not seem to be aware that the British only need his cooperation as far as it can help them to reach their goal and not for the benefit of him or his subjects. It is for similar reasons that Armah (quoted by Larson, 1971:262-263) laments.

There is something so terrible in watching a black man trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European, and that was what we were seeing in those days. How could they understand that even those who have not been anywhere know that the black man who has spent his life fleeing from himself into whiteness has no power if the white master gives him none? We knew then, and we know now, that the only real power a black man can have will come from black people. We knew also that we were the people to whom these oily men were looking for their support.

Likewise, Mosito is too naive to recognise the treachery of the British and fails to fathom its consequences for both him and his subjects. As an established practice among colonialists, the changes they introduce among the colonised must only be supported by the latter even if they are aware that such changes are not to be mutually beneficial. This is also the case in this novel, and Khaketla captures this situation succinctly.

The first change which goes along with the reduction of councils is that the fines paid by offenders will no longer go to the councils, but into the *Mokotla oa Polokelo ea Sechaba* (National Trust Fund). This, the colonialists claim, will curtail the practice by some councils of imposing unreasonable fines. The second change is that chiefs will

be paid from the *Mokotla oa Polokelo ea Sechaba* according to the number of their subjects who pay taxes. The third change is that wandering livestock, which cannot be claimed, and which was initially given to chiefs, will henceforth be sold and the proceeds will go into the coffers of *Mokotla oa Polokelo ea Sechaba*.

These changes imply that the powers of the institution of traditional Basotho leadership are also being curtailed. The new twist is that the fact that chiefs are born into this traditional institution has become irrelevant. This process is seen in the portrayal of the restructuring of councils imposed by the British. As pointed out earlier, Mosito's council is one of those that has to be dissolved and its powers has to be taken over by chief Mosuoe. Administrative matters will be initiated by Mosuoe and then be referred to chief Rantsoeli of the Qacha district. This means that Mosito is not only losing his status as chief, but that he is also forfeiting the jurisdiction over his own subjects.

The question that Khaketla is grappling with here is whether it is Mosito's education and civilisation or the Basotho culture and traditional leadership that will provide answers to the problems facing him and his subjects. Khati and his group – the “uneducated” clique – resolve that Mosito should be advised to fight against this reduction of councils as well as the resultant administrative changes.

Morena, taba ea rona e 'ngoe feela ngoan'a mong'a rona ke hore u itlhamise ho Morena-e-Moholo, a u talimele litaba hantle, o lokisetsoe litokelo tsa hao, e leng hore o be le lekhotla la hao, 'me le oena u tsejoe u le Morena oa Sebaka. Kamoo Khosi a re boleletseng kateng, re fumana hobane literekeng tsohle tsa Lesotho ha ho moo Morena oa Sebaka a leng mong, haese ho sena sa rona feela, le sa Quthing, le sa Mokhotlong. Literekeng tse ling ho bile ho na le marena a mang a bitsoang a Libaka, empa ao maikutlong a rona a sa o feteng ka letho. (Khaketla, 1930:35.)

*Chief, there is only one issue we wish to raise, child of our master: It is that you should present yourself to the Head Chief so that he could consider your case, which is that you deserve to have your own council and that you should be known as a Local Chief. According to Khosi's information there is no district throughout Lesotho where there is only one Local Chief except this one of the Quthing, the Mokhotlong districts and ours. In all of the districts there are even what is called Local Chiefs, which in our view aren't better than you are.*

To this question Mosito comes up with a very surprising answer, typical of an alienated African who no longer values his traditional

cultural institutions. It clearly confirms that European education was not aimed "at elevating the African but at devaluing his culture, and that was why it was thought necessary to strip him of his true self and put on him a foreign one" (Egudu, 1978:30). It is for this reason that educated Africans generally have an obsession with and an arid arrogant admiration of the mind of the European. As a result anything typically African no longer makes sense to them. Hence Mosito's arrogant answer to one of his older advisors:

Monnamoholo [...] taba ea hao kea e utloa, ha ke e utloe. Ke e utloa hobane e buuo a ka Sesotho; ha ke e utloe hobane ha ke bone hore na ekaba tseko ea ka nka e tsetleha ka mabaka afe. (Khaketla, 1960:35.)

*Old man, I understand you, but I do not understand your argument. I understand you, because you speak Sesotho; I don't understand you, because I can't see how I can substantiate my case.*

Mosito suggests that the proposal of his adviser does not make sense within Sesotho semantics. He suggests further that he is powerless to oppose the British within their own framework of mind. This response, on the one hand, makes a mockery of the *bonna* (manhood), which Mosito has acquired at Lovedale. He seems incapacitated in the sense that he is not man enough to fight for his rights even if his people give him the power to do so. On the other hand, Mosito's education seems to give his people a naive shred of hope, since they think it can be used as an argument to substantiate his claim to the status of a local chief. They are not aware that it is the very education that has atrophied his understanding of his own cultural standing. This hollow hope of Mosito's elderly advisers is appropriately captured in the following extract:

Hona joale ke sa bona taba e le 'ngoe feela, e ka re thusang, e leng ea hore marena ana a boleloang, ao ho thoeng ke a Libaka, ha a na thuto e kaalo ka ea hao, 'me ba 'Muso ba tla u tlatsa hore u neoe litulo tse o lokelang, tse lokelang thuto ena ea hao, e leng eona ntho e batlwang haholo matsatsing ana. (Khaketla, 1960:35.)

*For now I can only see one thing that could help us. It is that these chiefs, who are called Local Chiefs, do not have the type of education you have. Therefore, the government will support the claim to your rightful position, appropriate to your education, something which is in demand these days.*

Another argument that is put forward to persuade Mosito to fight against the restructuring of councils, is that the council of Mosito's father, Lekaota, has always been economically viable and that the restructuring can only diminish its revenue (cf. Khaketla, 1960:36). Hence the following candid advice.

Haeba u ke ke oa etma ka maoto, ua itseka, etlaba o le sethoto se seholo haholo.

Hlalefa, Morena, u itseke joaloka monna, ho seng joalo u tla khangoa u nts'u talimile. (Khaketla, 1960:36.)

*If you cannot stand up and fight, you'll be the worst fool. Be wise, Chief, and fight like a man, otherwise you'll be strangled alive.*

After such persuasive arguments Mosito promises to reconsider his initial position of not challenging the restructuring of councils. On consulting with his peers later, Mosito is again informed that the possible loss of revenue is fundamental to the problem of restructuring. However, his peers are not keen to fight the process via legal channels, because it could be costly (cf. Khaketla, 1960:37).

It becomes evident from the latter argument that Mosito, as a Local Chief, has no legal recourse against the problem facing him. In the traditional Basotho legal system, judgement would have been handed down on the basis of moral justice and not economic power. In this case one's observation is that in the British colonial legal system, the outcome of the case depended on who has, through better financial resources, assembled the better legal team. That is why when the Basotho people could not afford the penalty placed on them for daring to fight the British, vast tracts of land in the present Eastern Cape were also confiscated. Therefore, this imposition of the imperialist culture creates a situation where the Basotho cultural systems are rendered powerless to advance the interests of the people who espouse them.

Mosito cannot decide which horn of this dilemma to choose. Khaketla complicates the action by introducing Sebolelo, Mosito's wife, into the situation. Khati and his group secretly go to Sebolelo to encourage her to persuade Mosito to oppose the restructuring of the councils. They persuasively demonstrate to her the implications of the restructuring of councils, especially how it will affect the future of her son, Thabo.

Kopo ea rona he, Mofumahali, ke hore o mpe o hauhele ngoana enoa oa hao ka ho bua le nta'ae, le hp mo elets'a hore a

tseke, hobane ha a sa etse joalo, etlaba o nka lerapo o le akhela molaleng oa Thabo a nts'a phela. Na uena u khotso hore ngoan'a hao a khangoe u le teng, u talimile, ebe ha phamise le monoana o monyenyanane feela hore u mo pholose? (Khaketla, 1960:42.)

*Our request, Chieftainess, is that you should consider this child by talking to his father, by advising him to fight, because without doing that, he'll literally be hanging Thabo alive. Will you be satisfied to see your child strangled in your presence without lifting your finger to save him?*

This passionate plea touches Sebolelo's heart and she resolves to confront her husband about the issue of the restructuring of the councils. In this way Khaketla pits Sebolelo against Mosito by creating a situation where Mosito could focus on his and his son's future emotionally rather than rationally. Sebolelo starts by instilling a feeling of guilt in Mosito for withholding such important information, namely, the restructuring of councils, from her as his natural confidante. She continues to show Mosito that it will be scandalous not to resist the reduction of councils. She says:

[k]e re na u hopola hore haeba o ka tlohela ho tseka, eaba borena ba hao boa fela, na o hopola hore Thabo o tla hlohonolofatsa lebitla la hao joalokaha la Morena Moshoeshe le hlohonolofatsoa ke bohle? U ratela'ng hore e tie ere ka tsatsi le leng Thabo a otiloe ke lefatse, a feta pel'a lebitla la hao, ere bakeng sa hore a ise liteboho le hlomphe, ebe o tsoela leo la hao ka sehlotho sa mathe, o re: 'Ke papatlele e tjena ka baka la mphophahali ena e shoetseng mona!' (Khaketla, 1960:45.)

*I'm asking you to consider whether, if you abandon the fight, Thabo will ever honour your grave, as it is the case with Moshoeshe's? Why do you allow a situation where Thabo, on passing by your grave would, instead of thanking and honouring it, rather mutter: 'I am miserable because of the fool that lies here!'*

Before Mosito could finally make up his mind Khaketla introduces the possibility of a miraculous solution. Through this trick, Khaketla instils fear in Mosito, thus directing his attention away from a rational solution. Khati and his group summon a traditional healer, Selone, whose perception of life concurs with theirs and that of Sebolelo. Selone does not mince his words about the disastrous implications of the restructuring of councils for the Basotho:

Ha ke khloe hore ho na le monna oa Mosotho, ea nang le keello e phethehileng ea ka lumelang hore makhotla a fokotsoe. Batho ba bangata haeso koana ha ba e utloisise; empa ke bona

hobane e re hlotse, hobane *bahlalefinyana bana bao re ba khethileng ho re emela Lekhotleng la Sechaba bona ba re e lokile, 'me ba se ba lumellane le Makhooa hore Mokotla ona oa Polokelo ea Sechaba ke ntho e molemo haholo, O theoe. Kamoo 'na ke le'-mong ke talimang taba ena kateng, ke fumana hobane ke polao ea marena a rona le pheliso ya borena ba Basotho.* (Khaketla, 1960:46; italics – TS.)

*I don't think there is a mentally balanced Mosotho man who would agree to the reduction of the councils. A number of people from my place do not understand; but I accept defeat because these learned people we have chosen to represent us in the National Council claim that it is right. They have agreed with the whites that the National Fund is beneficial, so it must be established. The way I see it, it is the annulment of our chiefs and the chieftdom of the Basotho.*

From this observation it becomes evident that most of the “uneducated” Basotho people are apprehensive about any form of interference in their governance structures, while the educated ones seem more inclined to accept such changes. The observation made here further underlines the claim made earlier that Western education has caused the elite Basotho to no longer value their traditional cultural institutions. What follows from such a situation is the division of a nation along ideological lines. Alluding to a similar situation of a society divided on the basis of education, Kunene (1973:49-50) laments that

[c]olonial ideology has atrophied our cultural limbs and in their place seeks to place artificial ones. [In] this way it hopes to separate the herd from the elite, the barbaric and illiterate mass from the ‘elegant’ Intellectuals. Yet the pre-colonial history of Africa, whatever defects it had, preached emphatically an integrated ideology of culture, economics and politics. This is illustrated by a highly socialised artistic and literary tradition.

The highly socialised artistic and literary tradition referred to here is the verbal and creative arts, which initially kept society a close-knit entity, thus giving it a uniquely shared identity. This observation implies that by creating an ideological divide between the educated and the uneducated, modern Sesotho literature – a novel in this case – also became class literature. Its audience became the elite who can read and write while the rest of the Basotho people who did not have the benefit of education are excluded from appreciating this form of modern written art. Therefore, it can be assumed that while Khaketla translates what obtains in society into art, he simultaneously promotes the ideology of the elite. He also demonstrates

the dilemma – the ideological contradiction – of a Mosotho who has his one leg standing in his tradition and the other dangling on the periphery of the so-called Western civilisation. Khaketla demonstrates this dilemma by using Mosito, who, when faced with a gloomy future, falls back on his own cultural base. Being a chief by birth, he is ultimately persuaded to try and save this institution not only for himself, but also for his son as well as his people.

The possibility of losing his status as chief subsequently compels him to hold secret meetings with Khati and his group without the knowledge of his educated peers. He seems to have come to the sobering realisation that he owes his life to his own people and their cultural tradition and not to the British and their so-called civilisation. Coming back from one of the secret meetings with Khati and his group, we encounter Mosito saying the following to his wife, 'Mathabo (as Sebolelo is called by her in-laws):

Ke rerile hona mohla ke neng ke buisana le uena. Mantsoe ao esaleng o mpuela 'ona ha a ka a mpha tsoeea, 'me qetellong ka bona hobane ua bolela, ha u re ke tseke, hobane ha ke sa else jwalo ke tla be ke bolaea Thabo, 'me borena ha a sa tla bo bona. (Khaketla, 1960:58.)

*I took a decision on that day I spoke with you. Your words never gave me rest, and in the end I have accepted your point that I should fight, lest I kill Thabo, who will no longer taste chieftaincy.*

Khaketla, through Mosito, demonstrates further that an agreement has been reached to challenge the restructuring of the councils, although there is no agreement on the method. Mosito and his peers eventually prefer to take the matter to court while Khati and his group prefer to enlist the services of a traditional healer. 'Mathabo, who has been brought up within the untainted Sesotho culture, also prefers to engage the services of a traditional healer.

The novel reaches a climax when Mosito loses the court case at Matsieng and is subsequently summoned to Rantsoleli's – a Regional Chief. Instead of accompanying Mosito and the other councillors, the old councillor, Maime, fakes illness. When they are all gone, Maime then uses the opportunity to again implore 'Mathabo, Mosito's wife, to persuade the chief to engage the services of Selone, a traditional healer. The pair goes ahead with this plan in spite of Mosito's obvious unwillingness to fight for his position via this route.

This development has implications for Mosito as a round character – typical of a novel hero. He changes when circumstances change.



When he comes back from Matsieng, Mosito finds that 'Mathabo is more than ever determined to persuade him to seek help from Selone. A dead cobra, which Mosito discovers at his bedroom window, breaks the deadlock. Mosito changes his initial view and begins to see the possibility of survival by reverting to his traditional culture.

All the misgivings that Mosito initially had, and the dislike he initially harboured against traditional healers, are dispelled by Selone's accurate diagnosis of Mosito's apparent bad luck. He is willing to let Selone, through the ancestors, lead the way out of his dilemma. Khaketla demonstrates this change of heart in Mosito's monologue, after discussing the matter at length with 'Mathabo.

Empa 'Mathabo ke mosali oa ka, ea ratioeng ke ntate, eo le 'na ke ileng ka mo rata ke sa mo qobelloe; na ekaba ruri a ka nkhelosa tsela, a ncheha a re lebaka la ka le eena ke lefe? [...] Na e tla ba ke tloa taelo ea ntate ha nka amohela keletso ee ea hae, ka ka ka batla lenaka la borena? Koana haeba ke sa rate ho ithetsa, ke lokela ho lumela ha a re ke hloka seriti, hobane hoja se teng ha ke khloe hore tsena tse ntlhahetseng li ka be li ntlhahetse. (Khaketla, 1960:82.)

*But 'Mathabo is my wife, who was loved by my father, whom I also willingly loved. Can she really mislead me, and for what reason? Will I be disobeying my father if I accepted her advice, and sought the horn of chiefs? If I don't deceive myself I have to admit that I lack dignity, because all this would not have happened to me.*

At this stage of the process Mosito no longer consults Khosi and Pokane, his educated peers. He does everything with 'Mathabo, and his father's elderly and uneducated councillors. It is at this point that Khaketla successfully demonstrates that culture is to one as a nail is to the finger. Mosito's acquired Western culture seems to fail him at the critical moment when he needed it most. Instead, hope seems to emerge from the culture he had initially rejected as backward and uncivilised. Although symbols such as *lejwe la kwena* (the stone of a crocodile) and *lenaka la borena* (the kingship horn) initially baffled him, Mosito is now more than ready to accept them. It is these things, like in Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925), that he thinks will guarantee him *borena bo boholo* (a huge kingdom) and restore his *siriti* (dignity).

However, Khaketla as a graduate of a missionary institution does not want to glorify traditional cultural practices that are in contra-

diction with Christian teachings. Evidently, there is a line he cannot cross without falling back on Christian teachings, e.g. *mopotso wa sebe ke lefu* (the wages of sin is death). Khaketla illustrates this notion in the incident of the acquisition of a liver from Tlelima through ritual murder – an essential ingredient of the *lenaka la borena*, which sounds the death knell to Mosito's cherished kingdom. After the ritual murder, Mosito and his accomplices are apprehended and sentenced to death following the discovery of Tlelima's corpse.

What should be noted further here is that in spite of Khaketla's expressed intention of writing to expose the despicable practice of *diretlo*, this seems to be of lesser importance in this novel. Rather, the dichotomies between justice and injustice, educated and uneducated people, backward and advanced culture all contribute to one central idea, namely that if a foreign culture is imposed on a people, it is bound to disrupt the social fabric of their lives, thus causing mental dislocation, emotional displacement as well as confusion of self-knowledge among them. This is in short what deculturation amounts to.

## 5. Conclusion

The Africanist interpretation of *Mosali a nkholo* seems to have had special significance for the Basotho people during the historical period covered in the novel. That period was marked by ideological turbulence, where Eurocentrism, as the way of life imposed on the Basotho people, was substantially interrogated. Parallels to this phenomenon can also be established from other novels of the same period, such as Ntsane's *Nna, Sajene Kokobela C.I.D.* (1963) (I, Sergeant Kokobela C.I.D.) This stage of ideological turbulence is summed up well by Ntuli and Swanepoel (1993:28), when asserting the following:

Thus a culture of writing unwittingly took root. This had been an unreal consequence of the doctrine of love, forgiveness and faith, which led to artificial political neutrality – a feature which would plague the literatures for almost the entire century. This, in retrospect, signals something more prevalent than mere neutrality. This neutrality should rather be read as despondence.

Consequently, as long as people of African origin fail to identify and to react to forces that are bent on distorting their identity and displacing them from human world history, they would be perceived as acquiescing to the dictates of the oppressor – in the name of a

rhetoric such as modernity, postmodernity, globalisation, et cetera. The period portrayed in this novel should be considered as one of the most critical stages in the historical development of African literature in general, and the Sesotho novel in particular. The Afro-centric reading of African literature is even more relevant today as a consistent quest of bringing the African worldview on any studies undertaken on and about Africa.

In addition, the era under consideration should have been a period that should have determined, unless something extraordinary happened, whether or not Sesotho literature was to come of age or remain forever dwarfed by circumstances beyond its own means of existence, because

... part and parcel of the thorough system of economic exploitation and political oppression of the colonized peoples and [colonial] literature was part of that system of oppression and genocide (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1981:15).

The current state of affairs in African literary study still demonstrates that the imperial situation has not changed much, both locally and globally, because language and educational practices, among others, are still being used to keep Africa and Africans on the periphery of world development. In fact, Young (1994:42) argues that

[t]he booktrade in Africa, as in many post-colonial societies, arose out of the 19th century colonial assault on oral societies; it was a side-effect of the extension of European administrative control in Africa, and it accompanied the deployment of bureaucratic and instrumental control mechanisms over the natural and human resources of subjected territories.

The effects of this legacy are still generally alive in Africa, and particularly in South Africa. Therefore, shifting focus from Africa to South Africa, Young (1944:43) makes an enlightening corollary to underline this enduring colonial legacy when he argues that

[l]iteracy, education, books, and colonial subjugation were thus linked; the lack of a reading culture in South Africa, to which people involved in education, literacy and local publishing ventures often refer today, is rooted in this history.

Perhaps the question we need to ask at this point is whether African literature will ever come of age. In a current commissioned study I have discovered that of the estimated 112 Sesotho titles published by Basotho authors since 1994, very few have found their way into the market. Instead, the school market is flooded by African lan-

guages works translated from English by monopolies of the publishing industry.

This new trend is not only the continuation of colonialism, but also an economic deprivation of African authors, African literary development, as well as the distortion of cultural mores and worldviews. Translations do not strip literatures of their ideological foundations but propagate them. However, the answer to the critical questions raised in this article cannot be entirely explored within the limits of this article. What this article tried to prove, though, is that although it is important to critique literary works, it is equally important to critique critical works in order to arrive at a proper understanding of the circumstances that continue to bedevil African literary study. Afrocentricity would inter alia explain the causes of poverty, under-development, low self-esteem and dependency on charity rather than self-reliance.

This Africanist approach should explore and/or create possibilities of enriching the intellectual terrain of literary study by creating a healthy climate for robust, but positive academic debate among African literary scholars. African scholars cannot, therefore, remain unaffected by issues of socio-cultural concern in our era, and as a result literary study should also take note of the issues of culture and identity since these have become worldwide trends. To Africans, however, all charters and policies will be meaningful when their languages and cultures also become mechanisms to relocate African culture in the centre of national, continental and international developments<sup>2</sup> and scholarship.

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2 Cf. Cultural Charter for Africa (1975), The Asmara Declaration on African languages and literatures (2001) and National Language Plan Framework (2003).

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**Key concepts:**

African languages  
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*dirwetlo* (ritual murder)

**Kernbegrippe:**

Afrika-literatuur

Afrika-teorie

Afrikatale

Afrosentrisme

dekulturasie

*diretlo* (rituele moord)

kolonialisme

literêre kritiek, teorie van