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NARRATOR -
JOHN BANKOLE
JONES:

In our programme to-day South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele talks about some of the problems facing African writers and a Professor of Geology at Ghana University talks about the problems of learning and teaching Geology in Ghana.

Ezekiel Mphahlele is one of Africa's more seasoned writers and literary critics. Unable to make a home and settle down in his native South Africa, it's not surprising that his journeys abroad have taken him to many countries where he has taught and lectured extensively. He has edited a number of anthologies of African writings and has, in addition, published a collection of short essays of his own as well as, of course, his well known novel "Down Second Avenue". Ezekiel Mphahlele is now a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Zambia and recently at a seminar on Creative Writing held there he gave a talk on the problems facing African writers. Apparently, he sees African society as consisting of two worlds - the rural and the urban and he makes the point that it is difficult - indeed almost impossible - for a writer to emerge in a rural setting. He discusses this now with John Barnor

EZEKIEL
MPHALELE:

Everywhere in the world you realise that writers are to be found in the towns and cities and not in the rural areas because town life or city life is much more challenging: it's cosmopolitan, there are many ideas emerging in town and city life which are threshing about and these are very stimulating for a person who wants to write and he also responds to this situation of challenge which you will not get in rural areas. When people have established

themselves in town and city life after their apprenticeship they do often go out into the rural areas for greater composure and peace of mind. But they don't grow in rural areas.

JOHN BARNOR: Quite apart from this division in our society between the rural and the urban area you also make the point that it is very difficult for writers to emerge in society that is not culturally self-supporting.

EZEKIEL
MPHALELE: Yes, indeed. We have as an example very close to us here that of Zambia. Zambia is not culturally self-sufficient and you find other countries in Africa which are not culturally self-sufficient. You don't have writers growing or emerging in situations like these. Sometimes a writer does emerge by chance and he does help to promote the movement towards cultural self-sufficiency. By self-sufficiency here I mean people provide their own music. They provide their own fun. They create their own fun. They create their own ways of entertainment. They create their own theatre like again in West Africa and in South Africa where people have been long enough in the areas where they are to have become culturally self-sufficient and not depend on what the white man brings from outside.

JOHN BARNOR: Dr Mphalele, you also made a point that during this period of striving towards cultural self-sufficiency the writer should act as a spearhead to this cultural movement.

EZEKIEL
MPHALELE: Yes. I'm very much for teaching children in the medium of their mother tongue. It leaves them the first six or seven years of their school life. I think it is criminal to try to convey concepts about the external world to a child in a foreign language. You can't imagine, for instance, my going to Britain with children and then asking if they have a school where they teach in the medium of Sotho which is my mother tongue. It would be ridiculous. And by the same token when white people come to work in Africa and bring their children along with

them they would like them taught in the medium of their mother tongue. If they are French or Polish or Czech they do something about it at least to counterbalance - if these children have to be taught in the medium of English which is foreign to a number of continental peoples they do a number of things to balance up this. And why should we always have to cater for people who are coming to work here and then put our children through the pipeline where they have to be taught in the medium of English? Most of our African writers did not start school life in the medium of English. We all learned English as a subject in the first five or six years of our school life and then we were taught in the medium of English so that we have some basic feel for our mother tongue which, as you realise, is now contributing to much of our English writing and French writing. We are infusing the English language with African idiom and we are kicking it around and bending it to our will, and thank goodness this can be done with English in a way it can be done with very few languages. And it's a good thing that this can happen. But if you're going to teach children English in the very first years of their school life they are never going to develop this basic feel for their own language and they're going to be strangers to their own community. And this has very much to do with the growth of a literature. And it has something to do also with the cultural self-sufficiency or insufficiency that I have mentioned and that I think is so vital in creating a climate which permits this to emerge.

JOHN BARNOR: You also regard politics as one of the limiting factors for the African writer.

EZEKIEL
MPHALELE: We are beginning to feel the muscle of political power. In the case of Wole Soyinka the Nigerian writer who has been imprisoned for more than two years is a case in point. We are beginning to realise that people in authority in Africa do not like the things that may be said about them or that are being said about them in black and white, and we have to face up to this problem. We have a problem here that every so often although we share these political

factors with the Western world they have a tradition of dissent - a tradition of protest which we do not have. And the question that the intelligent man asks is "If we do not have this tradition of dissent and protest against political power and we have inherited our political systems from the Western world are we going to use the very standards that the Western world uses in order to express dissent or express disagreement or express protest? And, when a political authority does something, do we stand up in protest as a kind of reflex which is a Western reflex?" This is something I have not made up my mind about but I do know that in many cases as soon as we adopt the same reflexes they don't work. This is a very awkward thing for the African writer. How long is he going to keep quiet about the things that he's burning to protest against or criticise? I don't know and I think we will have sooner or later to answer these questions for ourselves.

JOHN BANKOLE: Ezekiel Mphahlele was talking to John Barnor in Lusaka
JONES: about some of the problems facing African writers to-day.

We move on now to the subject of Geology. When the average African school-leaver has to face the agonising business of choosing a career, the career of geologist either does not enter his mind at all or else it features very low down on his list of choices - as second or third best when nothing else seems to square with his qualifications. So the question is why don't young school leavers opt for a course in Geology when the career potential for geologists in Africa is so obviously high. Well, a Geology professor at the University of Ghana has studied the situation in Ghana very closely and has come up with some answers. He is Professor A.F.J. Smit and he has been with the University for sixteen years. Recently he delivered an inaugural lecture on his appointment as professor and he chose as his subject "Some Aspects of Geological Practice and Education in Ghana!" Afterwards, Mary Wagstaffe spoke to him and she asked him first what problems of geological education were peculiar to Ghana.

PROFESSOR
SMIT:

One problem is that, with few exceptions, the schools in Ghana do not seem to touch on the subject at all. Most students coming to the university are therefore completely ignorant about Geology and its career possibilities. However, I should add that this situation is not unique to Ghana. Another problem is the general tendency of our secondary school pupils to aim at careers other than those affording travel and fieldwork. The idea still prevails a successful academic career can only be made behind a desk and in the comfort of the city. Far too many students who take 'A' level qualifications in Science do so with the intention of gaining admission to the Medical School or the Engineering faculty in Kumasi, for instance. A career in Science is more often than not considered only when the door to those highly popular professions of doctor or engineer is closed to them. Of course, considerations of a purely materialistic nature like salary and status play a role here. And when Science is chosen as a career Geology is usually, for reasons just mentioned, not normally the first choice either.

MARY
WAGSTAFFE:

In your lecture you emphasised that you are against the teaching of Geology on a full 'O' level or 'A' level basis. Why is this? Don't you think this would be one way of encouraging an interest in Geology in schoolchildren?

PROFESSOR
SMIT:

No. I consider such teaching as the other undesirable extreme. The first one is the total avoidance of Geology at school. Geology, as it is offered in Ghana, as a full 'A' level subject is merely descriptive, requiring the acquisition of factual knowledge rather than an insight into problems. This is not so in the university. Geology is gradually becoming a quantitative science, heavily leaning on Chemistry, Physics and, of course, Mathematics. Prospective Geology students who spend a considerable part of their sixth form time in gaining an 'O' level qualification in Geology could spend this time more profitably on Physics or Maths or Chemistry. Experience here has indeed taught us that those students who offer Geology at 'A' level are weak on the mathematical/physical side and try to avoid the study of it. Geology is a

comparatively easy substitute and this is exactly what we would like to avoid. It is like building a house without laying the foundation first. However, I wish to emphasise that I am in favour of the teaching of Geology as an integrated part of a General Science course in close association with Physics and Chemistry.

MARY
WAGSTAFFE: What basic knowledge, do you think, would be useful for the study of Geology?

PROFESSOR
SMIT: Apart from a good grounding in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics, some knowledge of biological principles would be useful together with the study of palaeontology which is in no other part of any Geologist's course. Furthermore, outside the field of science, I think that every West African Geologist should be able to understand and read French as a great part of the geological literature in that part of the continent is written in that language.

MARY
WAGSTAFFE: What are the career possibilities for Geologists in Ghana?

PROFESSOR
SMIT: Ghana is rich in minerals: gold, manganese, diamonds and bauxite are already exploited and have been for a long time. A great deal of exploration and geological mapping has still to be done and it should be done by the Ghanians themselves if it is possible and not by expatriates. The Government Geological Survey Department responsible for this task can absorb many more Ghanaian geologists. The mining industry, the institutions engaged in water supply - which is a major problem in a country like Ghana - also employ geologists and let us now forget the important role the geologist can play in town planning, the planning of large engineering works - think of the building of the Volta Dam - and so on, all of great importance in a rapidly developing country like Ghana.

NARRATOR -
JOHN BANKOLE
JONES: Professor A.F.J. Smit talking to Mary Wagstaffe about some of the problems of learning and teaching Geology in Ghana.