

THEME OF MOURNING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

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DECLARATION

I declare that THEME OF MOURNING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

Sefoto C.N

Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Mapula, my late sister, my four brothers, my mother, my children; and in particular my wife, Matsatsi, who has made a home for and with me, and who continues to sustain me and the rest of the family in every way.

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Finally, I would like to thank God the almighty for his tutelage in making me move forward against all odds.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the significance of the concept of mourning in post-apartheid South Africa as presented in the following selected post-apartheid South African literary texts: *Ways of dying*, a novel by Zakes Mda; *Nothing but the truth*, a play by John Kani and *Freedom lament and song*, a poem by Mongane Wally Serote. The dissertation interrogates the legitimacy of the prefix 'post' in 'post-apartheid' as a point of departure. It discusses the theories of key thinkers on the concept mourning and then applies their theories to the analysis of the selected literary texts thereby interpreting the selected literary texts as symbolic codes communicating messages about the state of politics in post-apartheid South Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE	Cover Page
Declaration	2
Dedication	3
Acknowledgments	4
Abstract	5
Table of Contents	6
CHAPTER 1	8
1.1 Definition of the prefix 'post' in the term 'post-apartheid'	8
1.2 Problem of meaning of the term 'post-apartheid'	8
1.3 Legacy of apartheid	9
1.4 The phenomenon of melancholia	11
1.5 Prevalence of mourning in South African literature	11
1.6 Statement of the research problem	13
1.7 Purpose of the research	13
1.8 Aim of the research project	13
1.9 Objectives of the research project	14
CHAPTER 2	15
2.1 Definition	15
2.2 European concept of mourning	16
2.2.1 Freud: Anaclitic melancholia	16
2.2.2 Sacks: Creative writing as remedy for mourning	16
2.2.3 Kristeva: Rejection of kin as remedy for mourning	17
2.3 African concept of mourning	17
2.3.1 Mbiti: The living dead	17
2.3.2 Tlhagale: No man's land	17
2.3.3 Ngubane: Pollution of the land	18
2.3 Conclusion	18
CHAPTER 3	20
3.1 Definition	20
3.2 Research design	22
3.3 Qualitative methodology	22
3.4 Descriptive approach	22
3.5 Data collection	23
3.5.1 Justification of selected novels	23
3.6 Data analysis	23
CHAPTER 4	25
4.1 Critical background	25
4.2 Contextual background	25
4.3 Critical analysis	26
4.3.1 Profiting from death	26
4.3.2 Funeral and wedding presented as one and the same	26
4.3.3 Wearing the master's clothes	27
4.3.4 The legacy of land dispossession	29
4.3.4.1 Direct consequences of the legacy of land dispossession	31
4.3.4.1.1 Disintegration of families	31
4.3.4.1.2 Poor service delivery	32
4.3.5 Solution of the problem	33

4.4 Conclusion	34
CHAPTER 5	36
5.1 Critical background	36
5.2 Contextual background	37
5.3 Critical analysis	38
5.3.1 Turning death into politics	38
5.3.2 Frustration of the ordinary citizen	40
5.3.3 <i>Nothing but the truth</i> as a satire of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)	40
5.4 Conclusion	43
CHAPTER 6	44
6.1 Critical background	44
6.2 Contextual background	45
6.3 Critical analysis	46
6.3.1 Lessons of history	46
6.3.2 Interrogating freedom	47
6.3.3 Acknowledging international contribution	48
6.3.4 <i>Freedom lament and song</i> as a criticism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission	49
6.3.5 <i>Freedom lament and song</i> as a lament of the true heroes and heroines of South Africa	49
6.3.5.1 Mourning for the uncelebrated heroes who died in exile	50
6.3.5.2 Mourning for the victims of brutal murders	51
6.3.5.3 Mourning for those bombed	52
6.3.5.4 Mourning for the ones who disappeared without trace	52
6.4 Conclusion	53
CHAPTER 7	54
7.1 Significance of research	54
7.2 General conclusion	54
7.3 Recommendations	55
REFERENCES	56

CHAPTER 1

1.1 DEFINITION OF THE PREFIX 'POST' IN THE TERM 'POST-APARTHEID'

The prefix 'post' according to the *Oxford Companion to the English Language Dictionary* (2008: 798) means 'after' and therefore suggests a condition or situation which is completed already in the past. Apartheid is Afrikaans word which means 'separation'. It was coined in the 1930s by Dr Verwoerd in reference to the South African race separation policy in which blacks, coloureds and Indians were forcefully segregated into their own racial groups and separated from other groups. This racial policy of apartheid was officially started in 1948 when the National Party came to power in South Africa. The apartheid policy remained in force as a fundamental policy of the government of the National Party until 1994.

Many historians and sociologists describe the period after 1994 as 'post-apartheid'; thus suggesting that apartheid is a condition and situation of the past which is completed and done with.

1.2 PROBLEM OF MEANING OF THE TERM 'POST-APARTHEID'

The implication of the term 'post-apartheid' that apartheid is completed and finished is problematic. Apartheid was so deeply ingrained in all aspects of South African society that its features and legacy are still in persistence today. Uys (2013) contends that apartheid is not gone; but it is only legalised racism which is gone. Similarly, Mzamane (2005) describes the current era in South Africa as 'not post-apartheid' but rather 'neo-apartheid'; meaning that he regards the period after 1994 as an era in which a new ('neo') form of apartheid is being practised. Mzamane is therefore contending that apartheid is still very much alive in South Africa. According to Twalo (2009), the masses are still as oppressed as they had been prior to independence; the only difference being that the oppressors are now some of their former comrades in the struggle. The masses, Twalo continues, now realise that the post-apartheid state is far from being what they hoped for because they thought that the liberation would be for all the people, not only the few. Molefe (2013) makes a similar statement in the form

of a proverb. He describes the period since 1994 as new clothing worn by a person; the clothing is new but the person wearing the clothing is the same as before.

1.3 LEGACY OF APARTHEID

Although apartheid is gone, its legacy still persists in land ownership. The Native Land Act of 1913 (No. 27) reduced the ownership of land by blacks and stipulated that blacks were entitled to only 17,6 million morgen, about 12%, of South Africa's total land area. Today, 100 years after the 1913 Native Land Act, less than 2% of the land has been redistributed. According to Ramphela (2012: 46) land ownership has remained much as it was in the years of apartheid in which 14% of white population owned about 85% of the land.

The legacy of apartheid also still persists in education. Bantu Education Act of 1953 (No. 47), like the 1913 Land Act, restricted the education of blacks. The chief protagonist of apartheid, Hendrick Verwoerd, declared that the goal of the Bantu Education Act was to train blacks to be "good Bantus": to be good labourers, good domestic servants, good farm workers, and good miners. Today, sixty years after the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was passed, the legacy of discriminatory education lives on in most of the former Bantu educational institutions. The democratic government which took over from the apartheid regime nearly two decades ago has failed to ensure that children from disadvantaged communities get a high quality education which will enable them to participate fully in the socio-economic development of their country. Thus, according to (Ramphela, 2012: 173) "Verwoerd continues to triumph from his grave".

Resistance to the Land Act and to the Bantu Education Act in particular and to apartheid in general led to innumerable and unspeakable atrocities. The apartheid government inflicted horrendous atrocities upon the lives of people of South Africa who resisted these laws. Many of these people lost their lives and they were buried by their relatives; but to this day many of their relatives have not been given clear information about how they died. Some went into exile and never came back. Many more of them disappeared without trace and to this day their relatives are still

traumatised because they cannot put closure on the lives of their beloved ones since they are not certain whether they are still alive or not.

It was in this context of mystery and uncertainty about what happened to people during the apartheid years that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established. Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated the aim of the commission as follows in his opening address on the 15th of April 1996 as the chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission:

We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past; to lay the ghost of that past so that they will not return to haunt us. And that we will thereby contribute to the healing of a traumatised and wounded people – and in this manner promote national unity and reconciliation (cited in Ramphela, 2008: 46).

Judging by the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it can be said that the aim “to unearth the truth about our dark past ... [and] thereby contribute to the healing of a traumatised and wounded people” was not achieved. Instead of “healing of a traumatised and wounded people”, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission rather focussed on reconciliation which was the second aim of the commission and scratched only on the surface of truth, the first aim of the commission. As a result, many of the perpetrators of the atrocities went away scot free. In contrast, the people who were traumatised – the people who were physically assaulted and wounded and survived; the relatives of those who disappeared and have not been seen since; and, the relatives of those who died mysteriously felt hard done by because they were left in limbo – were not compensated.

This situation in which the hope of many people in South Africa was raised in 1994 that the injustices of the Land Act (by the policy of land reclamation through the principle of willing buyer and willing seller), the Bantu Education Act (by the policy of Outcomes Based Education and National Curriculum Statement), and displacements of lives would soon be addressed only for it to be dashed has created a psychological problem of dejection for many people (Ashforth, 1996; Bonora, 2001). According to Bonora, many of these people experiencing dejection are the direct victims or relatives of the

victims of apartheid.

1.4 THE PHENOMENON OF MELANCHOLIA

Sigmund Freud, regarded by most people as the founder of psychoanalysis, attributes dejection to the loss of a close relative, a bread winner or someone who provided support. He coined the term 'anaclitic melancholia' for that type of depression which is caused directly by death. He explains that the dejection is brought about by a persistent desire by the loved ones of the deceased "to restore an earlier state of things (1987: 316)" to a relationship which has ceased to exist as a result of death. He explains further that this urge to connect with a past which is no longer there often becomes an acute psychological disease which sometimes passes on to younger generations in the family. Freud's analysis that anaclitic melancholia is caused by the urge to connect with a past in order to restore a connection which has disappeared as a result of death is consistent with the phenomenon of dejection that Ashforth and Bonora have noticed in many post-apartheid communities.

1.5 PREVALENCE OF MOURNING IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

Freud's analysis also accounts for the prominence of the theme of mourning in post-apartheid literature. Durrant (2005: 448) states its significance as follows: "for the post-apartheid writer, mourning becomes a way of testifying to a fundamental commonality." In the same vein, Olaluwa (2012: 10) argues that the theme of mourning in post-apartheid literature is significant because it symbolises the general state of dejection and despair in South Africa in particular and in Africa in general.

Critics are not all in agreement about whether the theme of mourning is a new feature of South African literature which came in the post-apartheid era or whether it has always been a feature of South African literature. Bleek and Lloyd who studied Khoisan folklore in the nineteenth century argue that the theme of mourning is one of the fundamental themes in the literature of the Khoisan people (Brown, 1998). On that basis, Chapman (1998) argues that the theme of mourning has always been part of South African literature.

A well-known South African literary work of the colonial and apartheid eras that deals with mourning is Alan Paton's *Cry the beloved country* (1948). The novel deals with mourning on several levels. The narrator mourns the loss of custom and tradition: "Cry for the broken tribe, for the law and the custom that is gone" (p. 66). The narrator also mourns the shortage of fertile land accessible to Africans:

But the rich green hills break down. They fall to valley below, and falling, change their nature. For they grow red and bare: they cannot hold the rain and mist, and the streams are dry in the kloofs. Too many cattle feed upon the grass, and too many fires have burnt it (p. 13).

The narrator also mourns the lawlessness that has occurred because of the loss of custom and tradition: "Cry for the man who is dead, for the woman and children bereaved. Cry, the Beloved Country, these things are not yet at an end" (p. 66). Although the theme of mourning is replete in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, it is not the main theme of the novel. The main theme is hope of change and transformation from the mourning and gloom which the novel depicts. That main theme is stated in the sub-heading of the novel: "A story of comfort in desolation".

Contrary to those who argue that mourning is a fundamental theme in South African literature, Mda (1994) argues that the theme of mourning is a new feature of post-Apartheid literature. He explains that traditional African literature and culture played an important role in pre-colonial Africa in educating and preserving indigenous African societies and hence their marginalisation and destruction by the twin forces of colonialism and globalisation created a state of loss and nostalgia. He explains further that many of the anti-apartheid literary figures were not just protesting against the political situation of apartheid but also against the loss of indigenous culture. He is therefore of the opinion that whereas the anti-apartheid writers were filled with optimism that one day apartheid would be defeated, the writers of the post-apartheid era are however filled with nostalgia and loss because the democratic dispensation has not placed much emphasis on the restoration of the indigenous culture. Hence, he concludes that the mourning in post-apartheid literature is much more acute than in the previous literature.

Mda's stance that the theme of mourning in post-apartheid literature is peculiar appears to be corroborated by Durant (2005) who states that anthropological studies of mourning in South Africa are scarce and furthermore that very few critics have commented on the theme of mourning in literature written during the apartheid era.

1.6 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As mentioned earlier, the term 'post-apartheid' is problematic because it is filled with contradictions. The dictionary meaning and the popular usage of the term suggest that the 'post-apartheid' denotes a finished and completed era. These two meanings are in contradiction with the prevailing reality which shows that the conditions of apartheid are still a force to reckon with in South Africa. This contradiction between the usage of the term 'post-apartheid' and the actual referents is the main focus of attention of this study.

1.7 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Literature plays an important role in the lives of people in all societies. It sheds some light on the issues that pose challenges to the survival of societies. For this reason, many critics regard literature as a reflection of life. South African literature is no exception; the prose, poetry and theatre of the apartheid era closely mirrored the political and social realities of life to such an extent that critics such as Ndebele (1991) condemned most of it to be one-dimensional. Similarly, the South African literature of the 'post-apartheid era' reflects the social ills that continue to plague the people in South Africa.

1.8 AIM OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The aim of this study is to analyse the theme of mourning in selected South African post-apartheid literary texts and to discuss its significance in the over-all structure of the texts.

1.9 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The objectives of this study are:

- To provide a background analysis of the significance of mourning in post-apartheid literature.
- To evaluate the extent to which the writers use the theme of mourning as a symbolic representation of the hardships that present post-apartheid society goes through.
- To speculate on the future trend of the theme of mourning in South African literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DEFINITION

The *Wikipedia Encyclopaedia* defines literature review as “a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge including substantive findings as well as theoretical and methodological contributions to a particular topic.” It also explains that a literature review is classified as a secondary source in comparison with the main research and as such, it does not deal with any new or original work and its main purpose is to highlight areas of that research which have already been covered by previous researchers and to expose gaps in knowledge which are still existing.

Hofstee (2006) states that “a good literature review must be comprehensive, critical and contextualised; it must provide the reader with a theory base, a survey of published works pertaining to the investigation and an analysis of that work.”

Hart (1998: 27) describes the following as key elements of a good literature review:

- distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done
- discovering important variables relevant to the topic
- synthesising and gaining a new perspective
- identifying relationships between ideas and practices
- establishing the context of the topic or problem
- rationalising the significance of the problem
- enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary
- understanding the structure of the subject
- relating ideas and theory to applications
- identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used placing the research in a historical context.

Although mourning is universal, each society has its own unique way of mourning. In

this literature review two broad types of mourning are highlighted: European conception of mourning, and African conception of mourning. It must be stated immediately that there is no intention to suggest that all Europeans mourn in the same way and all Africans also mourn in the same way; the two broad distinctions are being made as a matter of convenience only to draw attention to the fact that cultural and environmental factors play a significant role in mourning.

2.2 EUROPEAN CONCEPT OF MOURNING

2.2.1 Freud: Anaclitic melancholia

Freud is regarded by many social anthropologists and psychologists as one of the pioneers in the study of mourning. His ideas about the concept of mourning are found in his book, *Mourning and Melancholia* (first published in 1917). According to him, mourning is “profoundly painful and leads to dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, and inhibition of all activities (p. 316).” In order to ensure that this condition does not deteriorate and become a disease, Freud recommends that people involved should engage in activities which are the opposite of mourning. One key activity which Freud regards as the opposite of mourning is sexual intercourse. This remedy which Freud advocates may make sense to Europeans; to Africans, however, such an activity is regarded as an abomination.

2.2.2 Sacks: Creative writing as remedy for mourning

Sacks (1985) agrees with Freud’s notion that mourning can degenerate into an acute psychological condition which can extend to younger generations. He, however, differs from Freud on the remedy. Unlike Freud who advocates sexual activity, Sacks recommends creative writing and more specifically, fiction. He argues that by casting the past into fiction, a close relative or a loved one is able to re-live that past and by so doing to confront the trauma of loss and separation. His remedy of writing fiction to confront the trauma of mourning may apply well in the European context considering the fact that the culture of Europe is a written culture. However, the culture of Africa is an oral culture, so this remedy can only work for those few Africans who have lost their

traditional culture.

2.2.3 Kristeva: Rejection of kin as remedy for mourning

Kristeva also agrees with Freud with respect to the idea that the condition of 'anaclitic melancholia' (depression) can grow and become a disease which can even be passed on to younger generation. The two however differ on how the problem can be solved. While Freud thinks that the problem of dejection can be solved if alternative activity of sexual intercourse is performed, Kristeva, however, recommends disowning one's relationship with the deceased person. In other words, Kristeva advocates that the mourner should strive to cut off the attachments that they had and start living a new life as though the deceased person had never existed. This remedy which Kristeva advocates may make sense to Europeans; to Africans, however, such an idea would be regarded as an abomination.

2.3 AFRICAN CONCEPT OF MOURNING

2.3.1 Mbiti: The living dead

Mbiti argues that in traditional African societies the dead are regarded as "the living dead". He uses this inconsistency in terminology to indicate that in traditional African societies the dead are regarded as beings which continue to live with their relatives; the only difference being that they have lost their bodily shapes. Mbiti explains that, for this reason, in traditional African societies meticulous care is taken to perform all the necessary funeral rites for the deceased so as to avoid causing any offence to the departed which in turn might cause harm to the living. Mbiti's arguments apply well to South Africa. The vast majority of black South Africans are still traditional in their beliefs so whenever things are not going on well many families attribute that to the fact that their loved ones who died mysteriously are 'crying'.

2.3.2 Tlhagale: No man's land

Tlhagale agrees with Mbiti's argument that in traditional African culture the dead are

regarded as the “living dead”. Tlhagale (2000) explains that traditional African societies believe that a person who has recently died can only join the rest of the ancestral spirits if the living members of the family perform all the laid-down rituals of burial and mourning for the person. If that is not done, the spirit of the dead person would be left ‘in no man’s land’ and that would bring calamity to the living members of the family. Tlhagale’s argument is very relevant to South Africa because it reflects the thinking of many traditional-minded people who feel that when things are not going well in their lives it is because they have left their relatives who died unnaturally during the apartheid era in ‘no man’s land’.

2.3.3 Ngubane: Pollution of the land

Ngubane also agrees with Mbiti’s assertion that in traditional African societies the dead are regarded as “the living dead”. He argues that, in traditional culture, an incidence of death is regarded as a ‘pollution’ and family members of the deceased are regarded as contaminated or polluted. According to him, rituals are performed by the family members themselves and also by indigenous healers to cleanse the family members. Ngubane argues that if this cleansing is not done at all or it is not done strictly in accordance with laid-down rules, the ‘pollution’ will spread and damage the family members. Ngubane’s argument is also very relevant to South Africa because it explains the thinking of many traditional-minded people who feel because they were not able, due to circumstances beyond their control during the apartheid era, to undergo the ritual rites of cleansing when they lost their relatives they have now been damaged.

2.3 CONCLUSION

One can conclude that Africans and Westerners mourn differently. Their different ways of mourning emanate from their different cultural traits. Westerners pay special attention to the survivors who are given all sorts of remedies including an attempt to erase all signs of the deceased from their lives. The survivors strive to let go of everything about the deceased and continue as though he or she has never been part of their lives. Africans, however, pay special attention to the very objects the

Westerners abandon. They do everything in their power to appease the deceased.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 DEFINITION

Fox (1958: 285) defines research methodology as follows:

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them.

Kumar (2005: 8) also regards research methodology as a science.

We must understand research methodology as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. Researchers, not only need to know how to develop certain indices or tests, how to calculate the mean, the mode, the median or the standard deviation or chi-square, how to apply particular research techniques, but they also need to know which of these methods or techniques, are relevant and which are not, and what would they mean and indicate and why. Researchers also need to understand the assumptions underlying various techniques and they need to know the criteria by which they can decide that certain techniques and procedures will be applicable to certain problems and others will not.

Kothari (2004: 27) argues that research methodology should be regarded as a science for the following reasons:

- It relies on empirical evidence
- It utilises relevant concepts
- It is committed to only objective considerations
- It presupposes ethical neutrality
- It results into probabilistic predictions.

According to Goddard and Melville (2005), there are two main types of research methodologies: quantitative research methodology and qualitative research

methodology. Quantitative research methodology involves numerical and statistical modelling and is suitable for laboratory experiments. In other words, quantitative research methodology is used in researches which use numerical and statistical methods to identify facts or trends in a particular phenomenon. On the basis of the numerical and statistical evidence, a deduction is made and general conclusions are drawn. Two main advantages of the quantitative methodology are that it promotes objectivity and the deductions and generalisations can be verified. However, its main disadvantage is that it cannot be used to analyse culture specific symbolic events and situations.

Qualitative research methodology involves interpreting events and situations which are often culture specific and have symbolic connotations. Such events and situations cannot adequately be described and understood by numerical and statistical methods because their meanings lie in the symbols. The qualitative methodology is used to unravel the varieties of meanings of these symbols. On the basis of these varieties of meanings, a deduction is made about the significance of the symbols and a generalisation is then drawn about the world-view of a community. The main advantage of the qualitative methodology is that it is well suited for literary analysis of symbolic texts. However, its main disadvantage is that its interpretations cannot be verified.

Goddard & Melville (2005: 9) use the term 'descriptive research' for research based mainly on interpretation because such a research involves describing events and situations and then discussing their significance. They explain that as the goal of interpretative research is to arrive at a theory or concept, some amount of quantification of themes will be involved in the study. Hence, they recommend that a mixing of the qualitative and quantitative methodologies should be used as follows: the qualitative method should be used for the description and interpretation; the quantification method should be used for the deduction and generalisation.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Creswell (2003: xxv) defines research design as "the structure of the specific

procedures used in identifying the type of mixed methods strategy of enquiry, the data collection and the analysis approaches in a particular research project.” Creswell argues that a research design is one of the most important elements of a research project. He explains that the success or failure of the research depends on how a research project is designed.

3.3 QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

As this research project involves identifying authorial comments, statements by characters, episodes and characters in the selected texts which can be used for deduction and generalisation about indigenous African concepts of a leader, its main focus therefore falls within the interpretation of culture specific symbols. This involves reading the specific literary texts in order to interpret them as reflections of real-life case studies. The qualitative methodology which is suitable for such studies is therefore used for the research. The use of the qualitative methodology is therefore grounded on the assumption that literature is a reflection of life and for that reason episodes in literature can be used as valid reflections of real-life case studies.

3.4 DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

A descriptive approach is used for the qualitative methodology. Goddard & Melville (2005: 9) define the descriptive approach to research as follows:

Descriptive or case study research is research in which a specific situation is studied either to see if it gives rise to any general theories, or to see if existing general theories are borne out by the specific situation.

The descriptive approach is used in this research project because it is the most suitable method of analysis for analysing case studies which are symbolic in nature. The descriptive approach is used in the research to identify, describe and analyse the selected texts in a systematic manner in order to isolate their themes of mourning and also to determine the significance of these themes in the overall structure of the texts.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

The following texts will be used for the descriptive analysis:

Ways of dying, a novel by Zakes Mda

Nothing but the truth, a play by John Kani

Freedom lament and song, a poem by Mongane Wally Serote.

3.5.1 JUSTIFICATION OF SELECTED NOVELS

Ways of dying by Mda uses mourning as a symbol in two ways. The novel depicts the people of South Africa as people in mourning during apartheid and after because they have lost their land which they regard as part and parcel of their heritage and culture. The novel also shows the people of South Africa as mourning during apartheid and after because they have lost their pride as a result of Bantu education. *Freedom lament and song* by Serote mourns the horrendous killings and the disappearance of activists during the apartheid era. *Nothing but the truth* by Kani exposes the shortcomings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Textual analysis is the main data analysis method that is used in this research. Mckee (2004: 4) defines a text as follows: “whenever we produce an interpretation something’s meaning in a book, television programme, film, magazine, T-shirt or kilt, piece of furniture or ornament, we treat it as a text. A text is something that we make meaning from.” This is a broad definition that tries to avoid normal idea of a text as a piece of printed literary writing. Just as Mckee regards a text broadly, so also does he regard textual analysis? He defines textual analysis as “a way of researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of their world” (p.1).

The main tool of textual analysis that is used is content analysis. Krippendorff (2004: xviii) defines content analysis as a technique of interpretation used “to examine data, printed matter, images, or sounds texts in order to understand what they mean to

people, what they enable or prevent, and what the information conveyed by them does. These are questions for which natural scientists have no answers and for which their methods are generally insensitive.”

Content analysis involves reading the texts to identify the relevant themes. This is done through analysis of the stylistic devices of narrative such as the overt and discreet meaning of authorial comments, statements by characters, descriptions of characters and settings, similes, metaphor and other figures of speech.

CHAPTER 4

THEME OF MOURNING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AS REFLECTED IN *WAYS OF DYING*

4.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Many critics regard *Ways of dying* as a novel that is different in form and content from most previous South African novels. For instance, Chapman (1998: 148) states that *Ways of dying* is “one of the first novels to step beyond the Manichean psycho-dynamic of apartheid, thus marking a trend away from political protest”.

Similarly, Farred (2000) argues that in *Ways of dying* Mda has retreated from the dogmatic political discourse that used to be the favourite practice of South African writers in the past. The novel, Farred continues, can be read as an allegorical shift away from overly politicised cultural practices that leave no room for individual grief. Gogal (2011: 148), for his part, argues that *Ways of dying* is one of Mda’s post-apartheid novels that “promote the new aesthetic agenda in South African letters. Mda’s fiction is therefore a direct response to the call made by Sacks in 1989 for writers to reveal joy, wonder, wit, grace, invention, and humour and avoid the dogmatic Marxist propagation”. Gogal states further that in *Ways of dying*, Mda “emphasises the haunting presence of the violent past of apartheid in the present (p.149)” and suggests that the novel establishes a relationship between the violent past and uncertain present in order to mourn the past so that the present can heal its scars” (p.150). Ngom (2014: 48) takes a position that is similar to that of Yogal and argues that *Ways of dying* is a “riveting window on a country caught between the painful memories of its harrowing past and the scourges that it has spawned”.

4.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Ways of dying is set in the transitional years between 1989 and 1994 in South Africa. Ngom (2014) argues that this contextual background in *Ways of dying* is significant to the full understanding of the novel. He refers to these transitional years as the “interregnum”, and explains that Frans Fanon uses the term to describe a period of

instability in society when the old order is dying but the new order has not yet come into existence. He explains further that this period of instability is characterised by acts of brutality and extreme violence because the forces of law and order are not as visible as they used to be. Ngom contends that Mda has deliberately chosen this period of instability when the forces of apartheid are in retreat but a new democratic government has not yet fully taken over in order to portray the horrors of poverty, squalor and deprivation that have been created by the apartheid regime.

4.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

4.3.1 Profiting from death

Durant (2005) and Ngom (2014) argue that the society that is depicted in *Ways of dying* is so violent that mourning for the dead has become an everyday occurrence. This state of affairs is represented through Toloki, one of the main characters in the novel. As a result of the incessant deaths, Toloki has devised a clever idea to turn himself into a professional mourner in order to make money out of the funerals.

Toloki sits on one of the mounds, and groans and wails, and produces other sounds that he had recently invented especially for mass funeral with political overtones. But Toloki has modified them, and added to them whines and moans that are meant to invoke sorrow and pain (*Ways of dying*: 11).

Toloki, as this passage suggests, has turned the incessant deaths into an opportunity for business; as soon as he hears that someone has died, he would go to the house bedecked in black funeral attire with a top hat to match and start wailing. Mda uses this tendency on the part of Toloki to turn mourning into a business as a symbol of the callousness and heartlessness that have replaced the indigenous African principles of sympathy and care of *ubuntu*.

4.3.2 Funeral and wedding presented as one and the same

Another technique which Mda uses to depict the callousness and heartlessness that

have replaced indigenous African principles of sympathy and care of *ubuntu* is found in the episode in which a funeral cortege and a wedding convoy going in opposite directions fight over who must give way to the other on the narrow road. The funeral mourners feel that they must have the right of way as a sign of respect to the dead; the wedding party, however, feel that they must have the right of way because they are bedecked in flashy costumes and are riding in flashy cars in contrast to the funeral party who are bedecked in uniform black attire. The following argument that develops between the two groups attests to the insensitivity which Mda is portraying:

“You must give way!” “But we are a funeral procession.” “We are a procession of beautiful people, and many posh cars and busses, while yours is an old skorokoro of a van, and hundreds of ragged souls on foot (p.11).”

In addition to the theme of insensitivity, Mda also brings the two natural opposites, funeral and wedding, together as a symbol to convey the message that funeral rites for the dead have become such flamboyant activities that there is very little difference between a funeral and a wedding. Mda uses this confusion in separating funeral from wedding to convey the message that society has lost that traditional respect for the dead in particular and lost all principles of morality in general.

4.3.3 Wearing the master's clothes

Fanon states in his *Black skin, White masks* (1952) that attire is an objective symbol that can be used to assess the influence of colonisation on indigenous people. He argues that through colonisation indigenous people are made to abandon their own indigenous attire in favour of Western attire. Fanon argues that how decolonised people react to using Western attire can be used as an objective assessment of whether those decolonised people are still clinging to colonisation or they have successfully freed themselves from colonisation: if they cling to Western attire, it suggests that they are still clinging to colonisation; but if they adopted their own attire, it suggests that they have successfully freed themselves from colonisation.

Mda uses Fanon's conception in this episode. The people in the wedding party who

are insulting to the funeral procession because most of them are scantily dressed are dressed in expensive attire and are riding in convertible cars. During the days of apartheid, it was only whites who had the wealth to dress in expensive clothes and ride in convertible cars. Mda is using this flashy appearance of the wedding people as a symbol to reiterate Fanon's message that the new leaders who are wearing the same clothes which the oppressors used to wear and riding in the same cars which the oppressors used to ride in are the same as the colonial oppressors; the only difference being the colour of the skin.

This message from Mda is an indictment of the post-apartheid political leaders. The message confirms the observation made by Mbulelo Mzamane that apartheid is still alive in South Africa; the only difference being that the new oppressors are now the same Blacks with whom the masses struggled. Molefe makes a similar observation in the form of a proverb when he states that the same Blacks with whom the masses struggled in the past are now wearing new clothing. Lazarus (1990: 108) also makes the same point.

Anticolonial nationalism was aimed not at national liberation but at securing political and economic power for the national middle class they could not otherwise attain under colonial system. The anticolonial nationalists' project was framed by the desire to inherit the colonial state apparatus for the middle class citizens.

In the same vein, the following comment by Aronson (1990: 128) in what he then regarded as a defence of the commitment of the ANC to the plight of the under-privileged is subject to be interpreted differently now:

The ANC does not aim at a social radical transformation beyond abolishing apartheid. As many critics within the liberation struggle point out, the UDF-ANC Movements, which takes the Freedom Charter as its touchstone, is committed to a respectable, moderate, and universalist vision- a middle class vision of non-racial South Africa governed by a broad coalition of social forces.

4.3.4 The legacy of land dispossession

Ways of dying also deals with how the shortage of land for the Blacks has contributed to the crisis of poverty, squalor and deprivation. Mda uses the literary technique of juxtaposition to present the issue of how land dispossession has affected the black population by contrasting the vast and fertile lands that are available to whites with the small and infertile lands that are available to blacks. Mda uses Toloki as his point of view and describes the land owned by whites as follows:

Toloki walked through semi-arid lands that stretched for many miles, where the Boers farmed ostriches and prickly pears. He walked day and night, passing through farmlands and through small towns that reeked of discrimination against people of his colour (p. 59).

The message of the passage above is clear: the whites are using the vast tracks of land that are in their possession not for living-preserving economic ventures but only for fanciful things like ostriches and prickly pears.

Besides Toloki, Mda uses Noria, another main character, to drive home the message of the consequences of land dispossession. This is how Noria describes a typical Black 'cattle ranch business': "pale herd boys with mucus hanging from the nostrils, looking after cattle whose ribs you can count, on barren hills with sparse grass and shrubs (p. 28)." The contrast between the vast and fertile lands of the whites as described by Toloki and the small and infertile lands of the blacks as seen by Noria clearly demonstrates the unethical situation of land in South Africa.

Alan Paton describes a similar unethical situation in his novel, *Cry, the beloved country* (1948).

When the grown men came back from the mines and the towns, they sat in the sun and drank their liquor and made endless conversation. Some said there was little land anyway, and that the natives could not support themselves on it, even with the most progressive methods of agriculture (*Cry, the beloved country*: 113).

Through Noria, Mda shows that the shortage of land has created a psychological turmoil of frustration and depression which often feed into the climate of violence. Mda shows that as a result of the fact a huge population is crammed into a small space; the Blacks suffer from frustration and depression and often resort to heinous brutal actions. This is illustrated by the following description of black-on-black violence that is witnessed by Noria:

The Young Tigers questioned the children sternly about their activities at the hostel. The children had to confess that they told hostel inmates about the planned ambush by the Young Tigers. The leaders of the Young Tigers were very angry. They called all the children to come and see what happened to sell-outs. They put a tyre around Vutha's small neck, and around his friend's. They filled both tyres with petrol. Then they gave boxes of matches to Danisa and to a small boy of roughly the same age. They then ordered the children to watch the nightmare so that they should not dare sell-out lest they also burn in hell like their friends, "now, all of you children who have gathered here, watch and see what happens to a sell-out. This is what will happen to you as well." (page 189)

This account of 'revolutionary justice' gives credence to Ramphele's (2012) argument that many practices by 'freedom fighters' during the anti-apartheid struggle undermined respect for human rights in equally the same way that apartheid forces also undermined human rights. Similarly, Ross (2003) argues that the events of the liberation struggle left scars to many people in the squatter camps where the hostel inmates and the squatters waged a war against each other.

Toloki also illustrates this sense of frustration and depression through his resentment of the term "squatters": "how can we be squatters on our own land in our own country? Squatters are those who came from across the seas and stole our land" (page 158). This statement by Toloki reflects Mandela's comment on the squatter status of African people in their own land.

The white man was hungry and greedy for land and the black man shared the land with him as they shared the air and the water, land was not for a man to possess. But the white man took land as you might seize

another man's horse; a steady encroachment of white settlers systematically dispossessed the Africans of their land (1994: 27)

This argument by Mda that land dispossession has caused frustration and depression which often lead to heinous black-on-black violence is corroborated by many social thinkers. For instance, Twalo (2009: 78) states that “the primary cause for the suffering of Black people in South Africa is land dispossession”. Twalo argues that so much psychological damage has been done to the psyche of black South Africans that merely passing legislation and returning the land in the post-apartheid era will not completely solve the problem.

The nationalists are faced with the fact that, in the past national identity was inscribed in the law and usurpation of land went hand in hand with the distortion of that identity. The blacks cannot easily identify with their own land because they no longer own it (page 80).

Ramphela makes a similar point when she argues that only less than 2% of land has been redistributed and as a result the imbalances that existed during the apartheid era are still in existence in the post-apartheid era. In the same vein, Stratton (1994: 82) attributes “perpetual suffering of the underclass even after independence” to the failure of political leaders to comprehensively address the legacy of land dispossession.

4.3.4.1 Direct consequences of the legacy of land dispossession

Mda describes the following social conditions as the direct consequences of the legacy of land dispossession:

4.3.4.1.1 Disintegration of families

Mda explains that as a result of the small and infertile land that is allocated to blacks,

many people are forced to leave their homes to migrate to urban areas in search of jobs. This in turn results in unstable family relationships in which children grow up without adequate attention from their parents. This state of affairs is described in *Ways of dying* through the turmoil in the family relationship of Noria. As a result of the frustration and depression of living in abject poverty, her husband is driven into such brutal violence that he once threw one of his children into fire. The brutal violence eventually forces Noria to flee with her son Vutha. In order to fend for herself and her son, Noria is driven into prostitution.

Twalo uses this episode as a basis for the following generalisation about the consequences of unstable family relationships due to financial stresses:

Young women whose husbands are migrant workers in the mines are sometimes overwhelmed by natural desires that have to be suppressed due to this forced separation. Some become unfaithful to their men leading to unwanted pregnancy (page 80).

To many critics, for example, Yoyal (2011) and Rush (2005), one major weakness in the novel is Mda's silence in dwelling at length on the incidence of HIV/AIDS in order to link them in a thematic manner to the consequences of the legacy of land dispossession. They argue that the scourge of HIV/AIDS has become an acute problem in post-apartheid South Africa because most family members still do not have quality time together; husbands and wives are still living apart due to economic factors directly related to the consequences of land dispossession and this separation often leads to risky sexual activities. Thus, this status quo is a direct result of policies and events of the apartheid era.

4.3.4.1.2 **Poor service delivery**

Another condition which Mda identifies as a consequence of the legacy of land dispossession is poor service delivery. As a result of the fact that most of the able-bodied young men and women have left home in search of jobs in the urban areas, municipal rates in the infertile lands where blacks live are not enough to support

proper provisions of social service. Hence, many of the trained municipal workers in those areas have also left and gone to the urban areas in search of higher pay. As a result, service delivery in the infertile lands where blacks live is poor and the clerical staff who manage the already poor service are also inadequately trained. This unfortunate condition of existence is shown in the novel through the episode in which the municipal authorities had issued wrong death certificates which has resulted in the wrong corpse being released for burial.

To their horror, the body was already in the graveyard, and a funeral service was in progress (page 21).

Another important result of the inadequate municipal rates collected from the infertile lands where blacks live is that the municipal authorities then decide to give poor amenities to the people living in those areas and in contrast give good amenities to the people living in the erstwhile white areas.

The municipality was going to introduce the water cistern for the well to do families, and pit latrines for the poor ones (page 131).

Mda uses this disproportionate allocation of municipal resources to give the message that the same discriminatory sharing of resources which existed during the apartheid era is still being practised by political leaders in the post-apartheid era. Hence, as Ramphela (2008; 2012) asserts “the quality of life of the people who were dispossessed in the apartheid will continue to deteriorate, while the quality of life of the people who were privileged in the apartheid era will continue to improve”.

4.3.5 **Solution of the problem**

Mda uses the character, Toloki, to explain where all these problems that have been described emanated in the society. *Ways of dying* describes this end-result through Nevolovhodwe, one of the people who have migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas. Nevolovhodwe has become what society describes as a ‘successful’ man; he has become rich, he has adopted a Western lifestyle, and he has abandoned his people and does not want to associate with anyone who would remind him of his

background. This is how Toloki describes him:

Toloki knew immediately that wealth had had a strange effect of erasing from Nefolovhodwe's once sharp mind everything he used to know about his old friends back in the village (page 129).

Mda uses this episode as a sign to give the message that the policies and events which were started in the apartheid era and have continued in the post-apartheid era have 'succeeded' in turning Africans away from their indigenous culture and turning them, like Nefolovhodwe, into Western products.

Having thus identified the end-result of the problem, Mda then proposes a solution. The solution is presented through the following episode. Toloki goes to visit Nefolovhodwe who is related to Toloki's people. The wife of Nefolovhodwe receives him well by giving him food. Toloki accepts the food but makes it clear to Nefolovhodwe that he is a man of honour.

The woman who Nefolovhodwe referred to as his wife had given him food. He had vowed that he was going to pay for it once he had the money, as he was not a beggar. He had told both Nefolovhodwe and the woman that he was going to pay back every cent's worth of food that he ate at their house" "I do not take things from men, Toloki. I am going to pay you back every cent You have helped me with. I accepted your help because I knew you were doing it from your kind heart. You did not expect anything in return. But I insist that when I found myself, I'll pay you back." (pages 164-165)

Mda is here advocating that Africans need to go back to their indigenous culture in order to assert themselves as people of honour. Ndebele (1991: 386) makes the same point: "the past no matter how horrible it has been, can redeem us. It can be a moral foundation on which to build the pillars of the future".

4.4 CONCLUSION

This analysis has revealed that in *Ways of dying* Mda expresses his frustration with the trend of politics in particular and public activities in general in post-apartheid South Africa. Mda explains that many of the fundamental problems facing the post-apartheid

society are legacies of policies and public activities which were initiated during the apartheid era. His frustration arises from the fact that the political leaders and the elite of the post-apartheid era who were in the fore-front of the anti-apartheid struggles have abandoned their zeal for reform and they are concentrating on their own personal needs.

CHAPTER 5

THEME OF MOURNING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AS REFLECTED IN *NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH*

5.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

According to Brown (2000: 75) *Nothing but the truth* “explores issues that are relevant to the youth today. These issues include, among others, sibling rivalry, the importance of cultural traditions, Ubuntu etc”. Mda (2002: vii) regards *Nothing but the truth* as a turning point in South African drama in the sense that it avoids the familiar theme of discussing apartheid politics and deals instead with the problems living in post-apartheid South Africa. According to Mda (2002), *Nothing but the truth* belongs to a body of post-apartheid work that exposes the shortcomings of reconciliation as espoused by the post-apartheid political leaders, who focused on reconciliation between blacks and whites, forgetting the dire need for reconciliation among the blacks themselves.

One of the greatest lessons of *Nothing but the truth* is that we should only look back to the past in order to have a better understanding of our present (page ix).

According to Acone (2002) the play deals with “the contradictions of liberation and the perplexities of freedom”. Cox (2003), for his part, describes *Nothing but the truth* as a family drama. Durant (2005: 72), agreeing with Mda, also regards the play as a turning point in South African drama. He states that the play deals with the past not so much to remind people of the horrors of the past but rather to urge people to confront the past so that each and every one can satisfy his or her conscience that he/she is well positioned for the future.

There is an attempt in some sectors of South Africa to erase the past in order to construct a collective identity that will transform race and ethnic bounds into a new South African national identity. In my view, the beauty of South Africa lies in its many cultures, each with its own history. The memory of the peculiar past can only enrich our present.

Durant (2005: 442) regards *Nothing but the truth* as semi-autobiographical in nature because it stages the author's real life experience. According to Durant, Luvuyo, Sipho's son, in the play who was shot by a white policeman on his way to a little girl's funeral to recite poems was Kani's own son who was shot in New Brighton in 1985. Hence, Durant argues that Kani "has clearly used the play to work through his own deferred grief at his son's death. Actually, to be precise, it is the anger which is autobiographical".

5.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

According to Mda (2000: x), the time setting of *Nothing but the truth* is 2000, the time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the place setting is New Brighton, where John Kani was born and grew up. This comment confirms Durant's (2005) view that the play is semi-autobiographical.

In making the sittings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) the time setting of the play, Kani intends to use the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a means of recalling the past in order to address present problems. One such present problem which the play deals with is how to put closure on family relationships which were disrupted during the apartheid era. This is represented in the play by the relationship between Sipho and Themba. The relationship between the two brothers was not cordial when they were growing up. Themba joined the African National Congress (ANC) and went into exile where he eventually died. Since becoming an adult, Sipho has always yearned to mend the relationship with his brother. The untimely death of his brother abroad has, however, denied him that opportunity of

reconciliation and has instead created a psychological problem of depression for him. This point is important because it relates to the central theme of mourning which this play deals with.

The place setting of the play in New Brighton, where John Kani was born and grew up is also of significance. It is reasonable to assume that the house where John Kani was born and the neighbourhood in New Brighton where he grew up are no longer in existence there. In recollecting this place of birth which has since ceased to exist, John Kani is engaging in a mental activity which Freud (1974: 245) describes as *anaclitic melancholia*: “a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, and inhibition of all activities caused by a desire to establish a connection to a relationship which has ceased to exist through death or loss”.

5.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

5.3.1 Turning death into politics

The society which Kani projects in *Nothing but the truth* is a society completely taken over by politics to such an extent that death which is normally regarded as an event in which family members are given space to mourn their dead in privacy has become an opportunity for political propaganda. This is shown in the play during the funeral of Siphos father. When news spreads that Themba's father has died, the political parties flock to the scene, push the family members aside and take over the funeral. They falsify the information: instead of Siphos who has lost his father; the information is falsified into 'Themba has lost father'. They also push aside all the funeral arrangements that have been made by the family. This is how Siphos describes the funeral scene.

It was comrade Themba's wishes. They turned my father's funeral into a political rally. There were twelve speakers; one after the other, talking

about Themba's father. I sat there like a stranger. I paid for the coffin. I paid for all the funeral arrangements. I even paid for the food they were eating. But I was just comrade Themba's brother. They whisked his coffin away, carried it shoulder high and ran with it all the way to the cemetery. My aunts and uncles could not keep up with them. The police were all over. It was chaos. Kids were *toyi-toying*, taunting the police to shoot them (*Nothing but the truth*, 2002: 51).

Sipho feels frustrated by the fact that the politicians who claim to be honouring Themba's father on Themba's behalf have not made any financial contribution on behalf of Themba yet they have taken over the funeral that others have organised with their own money and consumed all the food that others have bought with their own money.

The same exploitation of ordinary people by politicians occurred during the funeral of Sipho's son. The family was pushed aside and the funeral rites were performed by the politicians.

It was like the day they buried my son. I ran behind the coffin. At the graveyard I was not even the first to throw the soil on the coffin. No, it was the delegates first. The songs went on forever (page 51).

As Kani shows in these two episodes, politicians have turned death into an opportunity for publicity and funerals into an arena for the exploitation of ordinary people. Kani uses Sipho as his voice to express his indignation at how politics is being conducted in the post-apartheid era.

Ross (2003: 9) expresses a different opinion on the episode. She argues that it is dishonest to use this episode to argue that funerals in the post-apartheid era have been turned into arenas for politics because, according to her, funerals in South Africa have always been arenas for politics.

In terms of resistance to apartheid, collectivising pain provided a charter for collective action against the state and its representative... The mass funerals of people killed in political violence were transformed into political spaces otherwise prohibited. Fiery speeches characterised the funerals. Coffins were draped in flags of banned political structures to graveyards singing freedom songs and doing the *Toyj-toyi*.

5.3.2 Frustration of the ordinary citizen

Durrant (2005) argues that in *Nothing but the truth*, Sipho represents the masses of the people who have been forgotten by the nationalists who are now occupying the high echelons of the state. According to Durrant these are the same masses that sacrificed their lives and enabled the ANC to come to power, but who have not been empowered themselves. This unfortunate state of affairs is illustrated in the play through Sipho's anger as he charges:

I might not have been on Robben Island; I did not leave this country, but I suffered too; the thousand that attended those funeral on Saturdays, that was me; the thousand that were tear-gassed, sjamboked by the police; mauled by Alsatian dogs, that was me. When Bishop Tutu led thousands through the streets of white Port Elizabeth, that was me. I WAS THOSE THOUSANDS. I deserved some recognition (pages 57-58).

5.3.3 *Nothing but the truth* as a satire of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

Shange (2009) interprets these two afore-mentioned episodes as satirical comments being projected by Kani at the TRC. Shange explains that the proceedings of the TRC were mainly directed to statements from politicians who were already in the limelight and did not suffer much during the apartheid era but very little attention was

paid to the ordinary people, the rank and file of whom suffered heavily during the apartheid era.

The argument that *Nothing but the truth* can be interpreted as a satire against the proceedings of the TRC has credence because the play does make an allusion to the TRC. Thando, Siphos daughter, urges the father to go to the TRC to testify about how his son, Luvuyo, was shot for no obvious reason by a white policeman. This is the dialogue that takes place between father and daughter:

It is not too late. The hearings are still on. No case is closed". .I am not talking about the TRC and your amnesty hearings. I want to know now what the government, what the police are going to do about it. I want the minister of safety and security to appoint a senior investigating officer to re-open Luvuyo's case. to investigate and to report back to the attorney general that he has found the white policeman who shot my son...He must be charged with the murder of Luvuyo Makhanya, the son of Mr Siphos Makhanya (pages 58-59).

The daughter states the point that everyone who feels that he or she has a valid complaint is free to go and testify. That point is exactly the official message that the TRC has put across to the nation. The father dismisses the daughter's suggestion, and by so doing, dismisses the official view-point as well, because he regards it as a waste of time that is calculated in order to divert attention from the real task which morality and ethics demand that must be done: "I want the minister of safety and security to appoint a senior investigating officer to re-open Luvuyo's case" so that the culprit could be brought to justice.

They must give him a prison khakhi shirt and a pair of prison khakhi shorts. No shoes, one grey blanket and a mat to sleep on. The following day he must wake up in his cell in prison, knowing that he is serving time for killing my son. A day, a month, a year or ten years. I don't care. As long as he knows that he has been found guilty of the crime he committed. He must be taken to St Alban's prison outside Port Elizabeth, like any other murderer. At the prison reception they must shave his

head, strip him naked and search to see if he has hidden anything up his arse (page 59).

Durrant (2005) regards this rejection of the TRC as significant in the sense that it reveals how ordinary citizens are losing faith in the political leaders of the post-apartheid era. According to Durant, Siphos outburst is not pure fiction; it reflects the feelings of the family of Steve Biko who were seeking justice.

Hamber and Wilson (1999; 2002) disagree with this argument and explain that it would be humanly impossible for the TRC to go round the entire country to collect each every testimony from all the aggrieved citizens. They explain further that in every country national priorities often tend to over-ride individual priorities because it is those national priorities, rather than individual priorities, which guide the social and economic development of a nation.

Hamber and Wilson however concede that the information that TRC gave out in its publicity campaigns created the impression that the TRC was indeed prepared to travel to every nook and corner of the country to meet with all aggrieved citizens and collect their testimonies. Hamber and Wilson argue that the strategy of the TRC was flawed.

Nations are not like individuals in that they do not have collective psyches. Nation building discourses on reconciliation often subordinate individual needs, and truth commissions and individual process of healing work on different time line.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that the post-apartheid society as presented in *Nothing but the truth* is a frustrated society. Kani presents a society that is living in disappointment and disillusionment. He explains that many of the men and women who participated in the anti-apartheid struggle as anonymous people did not seek the limelight. When freedom has been attained, these ordinary men and women have been abandoned by the political leaders. Consequently, Kani shows in this work that the ordinary citizens of South Africa have lost faith in their political leaders.

CHAPTER 6

THEME OF MOURNING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE AS REFLECTED IN *FREEDOM LAMENT AND SONG*

6.1 CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Chapman (2002) describes *Freedom lament and song* as a poem situated in the Soweto poetic tradition'; a type of poetry which is both personal and political. According to Durrant (2005) *Freedom lament and song* deals with untimely death, which happens outside home in unexpected and unknown circumstances. Olaoluwa (2012), for his part describes *Freedom lament and song* (1997) as a fusion of epic and elegiac. Olaoluwa explains that due to the fact that it is a long poem, *Freedom lament and song* qualifies to be described as an epic poem. He explains further that the mood of the poem is elegiac in the sense that it deals with issues of sorrow, pain and death which are associated with the anti-apartheid liberation struggle. What these critics have in common is that they all view *Freedom lament and song* as a poem dealing with the trauma of sudden death which occurs in unexpected circumstances outside home.

Olaoluwa elaborates on the significance of mourning in *Freedom lament and song* as follows:

The mournful intervention constitutes an attempt to reconnect with an age and movement defined by the struggle for liberation. Both the age and the movement, for all the pains and anguish they engendered, are not without contents that those involved in them wish would not pass away. Like the age and movement, the figures, both dead and living, but especially the dead that run through the lines of the epic poem, are reminders of the process through which an undesirable domination of apartheid was upturned (page 11).

6.2 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Durrant (2005) contends that post-apartheid South African literature is filled up with themes of mourning. He explains that Serote's *Freedom lament and song* is one of those literary texts. Similarly, Olaoluwa (2012: 231) posits that South African post-apartheid literature is replete with narratives of mourning and he too cites *Freedom lament and song* is one of those texts of mourning. Olaoluwa explains that many post-apartheid South African writers choose the theme of mourning because it enables them to look back into the past "to probe into the despicable cesspit of the past due to the enormity of the scars and wounds the apartheid system inflicted on its victims". Olaoluwa argues that although the poem deals with mourning, Serote's aim is to recount the heroism of the anonymous volunteers who sacrificed their lives to "kindle the fire of the struggle to its ultimate stage of functional transformation" (page 4).

Ngom (2014: 48) agrees with Olaoluwa and argues that these narratives of mourning are attempts by post-apartheid South African writers to deal with challenges facing "a country caught between the painful memories of its harrowing past and the scourge that it spawned". He also states that in *Freedom lament and song* Serote acknowledges the contribution made by ordinary people in the anti-apartheid struggle and thus confirms the following observation in the thick of the anti-apartheid struggle by Cronin (1989: 35-35) about grassroots participation in the anti-apartheid struggle:

Mass stayaways, political strikes, consumer boycotts, huge political funerals (including up to seventy thousand mourners at a time), factory occupations, rent boycotts, schools and university boycotts, mass rallies and physical confrontation over barricades with security forces. This wave of mobilization and struggle has spread into the smallest rural village. It has interwoven with a substantial organisation renaissance: youth, civic, religious, women's trade union, and student organizations have sprung up and spread countrywide.

6.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

6.3.1 Lessons of history

Serote begins the poem with some philosophical discussions. One of the philosophical discussions centres on the idea that history always repeats itself.

Here we go again
History is a life and it is a death
It reincarnates
In words
Feelings and deeds
It walks the streets
It repeats itself
At your door step and window and at your eye (*Freedom lament and song*, 1997: 1).

This passage can be interpreted in two different ways. One possible meaning which is based on the lines “History is a life and it is a death; it reincarnates” is that life is ever-changing: today, all is fine and well (“is a life”) but tomorrow, it changes to sorrow and misery (“it is a death”). The message that comes from this interpretation is that people need to adopt a calm attitude to life so that they can rejoice in times of happiness and persevere in times of sorrow and misery. This interpretation can be said to be a message of encouragement in the sense that it encourages people to be patient in life.

The second possible meaning is that life is circle and, whatever one does, one will ultimately return to the same spot. The message that comes from this interpretation is that however hard people try to succeed in life; they will only end up where they began. This interpretation can be said to be a message which stresses the importance of fate and destiny in a person’s life.

6.3.2 Interrogating freedom

Another philosophical discussion which Serote makes centres on the idea of freedom. Serote uses the advantage of hindsight stemming from the fact that *Freedom lament and song* was written after the anti-apartheid struggles to interrogate the idea of freedom.

Let us talk about freedom.
What is freedom?
It is said
If we build the house
And bring electricity from the wind
If we conquer disease
And defeat poverty
If we brought water
And build the road
Is that freedom (*Freedom lament and song*, 1997: 59)?

The tone which Serote uses in outlining items of physical development suggests that he does not think that building houses, bringing electricity, introducing primary health care, providing pipe-borne water and building roads are in themselves indicators of freedom. He relates this problem of what freedom really is to the sacrifices that freedom fighters made.

I think of the dead
They are the shadow of this large thing
This big thing
This colossal matter which they died for
They are the guardian of this thing
What is it
Electricity
A house
A school
A hospital
A street or bridge (page 55).

Serote recalls these freedom fighters and asks them what they sacrificed their lives for: was it for electricity, house, school, hospital, street or bridge? The tone of the questions to the freedom fighters also suggests that Serote believes that they died for something much more significant than electricity, house, school, hospital, street or bridge.

6.3.3 Acknowledging international contribution

Serote acknowledges the role of pan-African freedom fighters in motivating South African freedom fighters.

I hang on fate as it hangs on me
Cabral
Where are you
Neto where are you
Mondlane and Lumumba
The sun sets and rises and so the moon
The unanswered questions
The too many questions
The no answers, then
We come back
To Cabral, Machel
To Tongogara
And I know (pages 33-34)

By thus acknowledging the contribution of pan-African freedom fighters to the liberation of South Africa, Serote is making the point that South Africa's liberation should not be regarded as an isolated event but rather as part of the entire continental African drive for freedom from colonialism. Olaoluwa (2012: 4) agrees with Serote's point of view and states that "the narration of the South African nation cannot be said to be complete if it excluded the narration of the rest of Africa".

6.3.4 ***Freedom lament and song* as a criticism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Many critics regard *Freedom lament and song* as a subtle attempt by Serote to explain that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has failed in its main aim “to unearth the truth about our dark past; and to lay the ghosts of that past so that they will not return to haunt us” (Ramphela, 2008: 46). For instance, Olaoluwa, (2012: 12) argues that writers such as Serote pointed out the failures of the TRC in their works.

The limitations of the TRC are transcended when writers resolve to ply their trade within the space of history and memory. For, in spite of the enormity of the areas covered by the TRC in its mandate, it was not possible for the commission to be exhaustive.

According to Olaoluwa, Serote might have been disappointed that the TRC focused on personalities who were already in the political limelight and ignored the ordinary citizens who bore the brunt of the apartheid-era atrocities. Hence, Serote chose as the main characters in *Freedom lament and song* the ordinary citizens and the uncelebrated freedom fighters that the TRC had ignored in order to make a point that those ordinary men and women are the ones who sacrificed their lives to ensure that freedom is won.

6.3.5 ***Freedom lament and song* as a lament of the true heroes and heroines of South Africa**

In *Freedom lament and song*, Serote ‘laments’ the sacrifices of the ordinary citizens and the uncelebrated freedom fighters so that their heroism will be remembered. Serote therefore imagines himself as a close relative to these unsung heroes and heroines and does the mourning for them so that their souls would rest in peace. Sachs (1985: 193) justifies this use of literature as an important duty that South African writers must perform: “by casting the past into creative writing more especially fiction,

a close relative or a beloved one is able to re-live that past and by so doing to confront the trauma of loss and separation". Brink (1996) agrees with Sachs and argues that it is the moral responsibility of South African writers to address these grey areas of silence in South African history in order to raise consciousness.

6.3.5.1 ***Mourning for the uncelebrated heroes who died in exile***

He fell at the border one day
In a battle
Without a grave he lies
Somewhere on the road to Gaborone or Lobatse
At the border
Remember him (pages 15-16).

In this passage Serote 'laments' the death of a freedom fighter who died "at the border" of South Africa with Botswana, apparently as he was trying to flee from the country. Serote specifically mentions that this freedom fighter has become anonymous and unknown because no trace has been preserved of him: "Without a grave he lies somewhere on the road to Gaborone or Lobatse".

In this wet and cold Sunday morning of the English
I found Tebello dying
His Kentucky box was there next to his bed
Chicken and chips and all alone
With flies flying above him
One foot on the floor
One on the bed
And feebly raising hand
Tebello
Was on the on the way out alone
What had he come to London for
To learn
To be alone
To cry and cry please bring my mother
Alexandra
Do you remember Tebello
Tebello died alone
With no one to hold his hand
We gave him a London white burial

In English graveyard
In a neat cemetery
Your boy Alexandra lies in London (page 22).

In this passage, Serote 'laments' the death of Tebello who went into exile in England to further his studies, apparently because the system of Bantu education then prevailing did not afford him the type of education that he wanted. Tebello's ambition to get the education that he wanted was not fulfilled because he died an untimely death.

6.3.5.2 ***Mourning for the victims of brutal murders***

I recall Thabo and Dikeledi
Who were shot dead when they were naked
Everywhere they were shot
On sight
In the house
They were put against the wall naked...
In my speech
When I write
I ask
What was like to be cornered like that
To face death naked
To die naked (page 17).

As the passage clearly states, Thabo and Dikeledi were killed while they were naked. Although the poem does not elaborate on the circumstances, one can make the following assumptions:

- They were confronted suddenly and unexpectedly while they were bathing. This sad event illustrates Serote's view-point that many of the deaths were sudden and unexpected.

- They were stripped naked and tortured before they were shot dead. This illustrates the brutality with which the apartheid forces confronted the freedom fighters.

6.3.5.3 *Mourning for those bombed*

I told them a tale
 About Joe whom I had to meet
 I could not find Joe
 His blood
 His flesh
 Turned the white thorns on the tree red and brown
 We can't find his back
 Nor his head or buttocks
 The bomb took everything
 It is hard to tell which part of the body this
 Lump was (pages 17-18).

This passage describes the death of Joe by bomb explosion. As the passage mentions, the persona had an appointment with him ("I had to meet"); but when the persona turned up for the appointment, Joe never appeared ("I could not find Joe"). What the persona rather found were body parts of Joe.

6.3.5.4 *Mourning for the ones who disappeared without trace*

The son is nowhere to be seen as if no
 Semen or ovary
 As if no love made the two meet
 I say it cannot be
 Me
 Women and children
 People
 Do not just disappear
 No questions have been asked
 No questions have been answered
 When people disappear
 I say it cannot be

People do not just disappear
They are of spirit
They are indestructible (pages 34-35).

In this passage, Serote expresses his frustration about how both government and the society at large seem to ignore the disappearance of people. Serote's frustration is very relevant in the sense that it suggests that government is using its control of the media to push any expressions of concern about the disappearance of people out of the public domain. Hence, all records of the freedom fighters that disappeared without trace were blocked out during the apartheid era and have remained blocked out even in the post-apartheid era.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This analysis shows that Serote feels that the post-apartheid government has not done enough to compensate the families of the ordinary men and women who died in the struggle for the liberation of the people of South Africa. Serote therefore urges the post-apartheid government to undertake concrete actions to ensure that their families would feel that their loved ones have not died in vain. Serote also tries to inform South Africans that they did not fight for their freedom alone; that many people throughout the continent of Africa helped them in various ways. He therefore urges the people of South Africa to be committed to the ideals of the African Union.

CHAPTER 7

7.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The researcher is aware of the fact that a topic dealing with the suffering of freedom fighters during the apartheid era and thereafter is a very sensitive and emotional matter. The research stems from the recommendations of many social critics and psychologists that the most effective remedy for trauma is exposing those very difficult situations which created the trauma so that they can be confronted and overcome.

This mini-dissertation will shed some light on South African post-apartheid literature. It will contribute, albeit in miniature, in broadening knowledge about the development of South African literature in recent times. The dissertation will further shed some light on the contradictions of liberation and the paradoxes of freedom in South Africa as noted by South African writers who fought alongside the politicians. The views of these writers are of great significance because they confirm the views of many social critics who state that the post-apartheid leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) has departed from the original principles of the party.

7.2 GENERAL CONCLUSION

The answers to social and political problems can be found in the literature written by authors who know the societies which they are writing about. This observation is very true of South African literature. The oral literatures of the country, according to most critics, performed important functions in the indigenous societies. They served as a transportation of cultural values for the people; they embodied the ethical values of the people; and, they served as tools of education for the youth. Hence, important lessons are found in this literature that existed before colonialism.

The protest literature carried on this tradition and played a crucial role in the liberation of the people of South Africa. Despite criticisms and castigations that this protest literature was lacking in literary merit, it stood the test of time because of the fact that it was performing in the modern sphere virtually the same functions which the oral

literature was performing in the indigenous sphere.

At the advent of the democratic dispensation, writers were already gearing up to pave a way for the kind of literature that will feasibly address the plight of the people in the post-apartheid era. Among these writers are Mda, Serote, Kani and Coetzee. These writers have in their works dealt with social problems which existed during the apartheid era and have continued to exist during the post-apartheid era. Their aim is to raise awareness about those problems so that they can be tackled and solved.

It is in the same spirit of raising awareness that this this work has focused on the theme of mourning. The writers, psychologists, and social commentators cited in this work all state that the trauma associated with death that has not been given proper spiritual and ritual closure can be very dangerous to the health of individuals and to society at large. The researcher therefore hopes that the government and non-governmental organisations will one day establish a second truth and reconciliation commission to fully investigate the horrors of the past so that the victims can be adequately compensated.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

- My study dealt only with black South African writers. I therefore recommend that the research should be expanded to include white South African writers.
- Due to the limitation of time, this study was restricted to only the theme of mourning. I recommend that a full research should be conducted on the major trends in post-apartheid literature in South Africa.

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