VIOLENCE, FANTASY, MEMORY AND TESTIMONY IN MDA'S *WAYS OF DYING* AND *SHE PLAYS WITH THE DARKNESS*
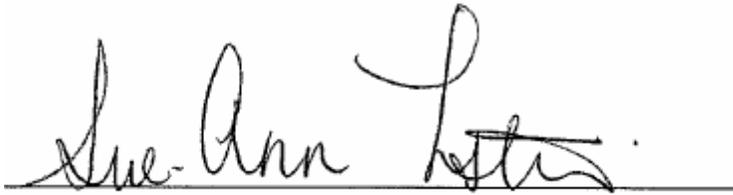
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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the narration of violence in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*. Both novels reveal Mda's preoccupation with finding new ways of portraying violence and his endeavor to challenge the notion of violence that is usually associated with Black South African literature. This study therefore examines the unorthodox path Mda has taken in representing violence, specifically addressing his representation of the oppressed as oppressors and his presentation of memory, testimony, fantasy and art as therapeutic processes that counteract the effects of violence.

Literature written by Black South African writers between 1970 and 1994 largely narrates the oppression and violence that characterized the lives of Blacks under apartheid. Despite justifiable reasons that compelled Black writers to write repeatedly about oppression, they have been criticized for allowing the political climate of their society to circumscribe their ideas and stifle their creativity. According to Lewis Nkosi, for example, the overt political content of Black South African literature has engendered its poor aesthetics. He claims that Black writers have given more attention to political commitment than to aesthetical commitment in their fiction (Nkosi 39). Because of such criticisms, Black South African literature has been labeled 'protest literature' or 'resistance literature', denoting its political objective to condemn apartheid.

Ways of Dying and *She Plays with the Darkness* similarly explore the themes of violence and oppression. Like Black South African literature written between 1970 and 1994, *Ways of Dying* depicts the impact of structural and political violence on the lives of Black South Africans during

the era of apartheid. *She Plays with the Darkness*, on the other hand, offers a historical account of political instability and persecution in Lesotho throughout 1970 and 1994 when this country underwent a succession of coups and despotic governments because the apartheid regime and the West interloped in its political affairs.

The history of apartheid and of political instability in Lesotho is the backdrop against which Mda foregrounds his concern about violence that is perpetrated by the oppressed. In *Ways of Dying*, Mda addresses undemocratic practices committed within the ranks of the liberation movement and attends to other violent realities in the African community seldom tackled in 'protest literature' because of the precedence given to the violence of apartheid and to the liberation movement. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda points out corruption among politicians and the middleclass in Lesotho, puppets of the West and the apartheid regime who persecute and exploit the masses in order to satisfy their desire for power and wealth. In examining the ways in which Africans have perpetuated violence in spite of their own oppression, Mda raises a subject deserving of much attention as it has been severely neglected in Black South African literature.

Apart from his focus on the oppressed as oppressors in his writings about violence, Mda's novels are marked by his concern not only with condemning violence but also with finding new ways of narrating the experience of violence. For the most part, the narration of violence in 'protest literature' is centered on the "spectacle" or the "outward ... signs" of suffering and resistance (Ndebele 435). Scant literary attention is afforded the internal processes through which the individual interprets and copes with the experience of violence. In other words, the psychological dimension of trauma and the victim's personal response to it, which constitutes a

large part of the experience of violence, is glaringly absent in Black South African literature. Filling this void, Mda explores themes such as memory and fantasy, allowing the reader to connect with what may be partly described as the "interior of disproportion, dislocation and terror, that is simply *felt*" (Chan 372).

Notwithstanding Mda's denunciation of violence in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*, it would be erroneous to classify these novels as 'protest literature'. First, the narration of violence in both novels transcends the condemnation of violence – the fundamental referent of 'protest literature' – to include the theme of redemption through memory, testimony, fantasy and art. Second, Mda defies realism by depicting extraordinary phenomena in his novels. 'Protest literature', in contrast, is rooted in realism evidenced by the tendency of Black writers to "report" the political climate under apartheid (Nkosi 49). Mda's departure from the realist conventions of verisimilitude and mimesis has caused critics to place *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* under the rubric of magical realism (Guidotti 229 and Gaylard 96).

Magical realism has its roots in Latin American fiction where it has been used to depict the syncretistic realities of this region, but it is a literary mode that has become popular among African writers (Gaylard 97). By and large, African writers, who are "socially and politically committed" to anti-imperialism, have used magical realism as a subversive mode (Gaylard 97). Continuing this tradition, Mda uses magical realism as a critique of violence. For Mda, violence not only constitutes brutal and repressive practices that destabilize African societies but also the destruction of African traditions by modernity. He therefore uses magic, or, more accurately, African epistemologies, to contradict Western notions of the real that underpin modernity. He

also uses magic, i.e., the supernatural or the bizarre, to illuminate the abnormality of violence and to re-instate violence – a phenomenon that has become ordinary – to the realm of the extraordinary.

In using magic to depict violence, Mda concurs with a number of critics who point out the limitations of realism. Benita Parry proposes a disruptive literary form, one that deviates from the orderliness and "mimetic modes" of "populist realism", to depict the turbulent experiences of Black South Africans under the apartheid regime (16). Parry's suggestion can be read in the following statement in which she makes reference to the inadequacy of socialist realism in 'protest literature':

> Yet if we concede that there is a politics of form, it remains relevant to ask why it
> is that mimetic modes that are testamentary and documentary continue to be
> dominant in black South African fiction, given the fantastic congruence and
> incongruence of cultural forces, of the broken histories and disruptive traditions of
> the dispossessed and persecuted communities. (16)

Parry suggests that literary modes such as fantasy and the grotesque would appropriately highlight the persecution of Black South Africans and their resistance to apartheid (15). Likewise, Dambudzo Marechera argues that given the abnormality of violence, it is only fitting that violence be rendered by an equally bizarre aesthetic. His sentiments are as follows: "For me the point is if one is living in an abnormal society then only abnormal expression can express that society. Documentary cannot" (qtd. in Shaw 17).

These arguments are developed further in the following chapters. Chapter one examines Mda's depiction of the oppressed as oppressors in *Ways of Dying*. This chapter argues that Mda deconstructs the narration of violence in 'protest literature' by contradicting its positive myths about the liberation movement and the African community, which conceal violence and oppression perpetrated by and against Blacks. By raising the implications of these violent practices, Mda questions the notion in 'protest literature' that the end of apartheid signifies the advent of freedom. Chapter two explores the presentation of magical realism, humor and fantasy in *She Plays with the Darkness* and *Ways of Dying*. Each of these themes offers a critique on violence and commentary on redemption. Chapter three explores Mda's representation of memory, testimony and art as redemptive practices. This chapter looks at healing as a social process through which African societies and trauma victims are redeemed from violence.

The narration of violence in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* can illuminate possible rationale(s) behind the narration of violence in earlier fiction written by Black writers and can redeem it from critiques that reductively bind it to a prescribed and narrow sense of politics. Mda demonstrates that writing about violence encompasses more than the condemnation of violence. He draws attention to the relationship between the narration of violence and healing, a relationship often overlooked in critiques about Black South African literature. Both novels can be used, therefore, to rethink and reinterpret earlier texts that are often uncritically dubbed 'protest literature'.

CHAPTER ONE

Demythologizing Black South African Literature:

Representations of

Violence in *Ways of Dying*

Between 1970 and 1994, Black South African writers wrote under a politically restrictive atmosphere that determined the content of their literature. The exigencies of the time – repression by the apartheid state and the resultant pressure felt by Black writers to document the state of affairs in South Africa in order to advance the liberation struggle – generated omissions or what Andre Brink describes as "silences" in their writings:

> the very urgencies of a struggle against apartheid encouraged the imposition of ...
>
> silences (betrayals and excesses within the ranks of the liberation movement;
>
> appalling conditions, torture, and murder in the training camps and detention
>
> centers of the exiled ANC in Angola, etc.) and produced a sense of priorities
>
> which made it very difficult for writers – even for writers who refused to be
>
> explicitly harnessed to any 'cause' – to write about certain ordinary human
>
> experiences without inviting accusations of fiddling while Rome burns, of
>
> suppressing more 'urgent' issues, of avoiding 'reality', or of self-indulgence. (15)

Alluded to in this citation is the general opinion held by anti-apartheid supporters that writing about injustices committed by the oppressed would cast the oppressed in a negative light and undermine the liberation struggle. Bearing this in mind, Black writers did not simply neglect to narrate execrable truths about the oppressed in their literature. Instead, they also created

affirmative myths about the liberation movement and the African community, the function of which was to underscore how unjust the system of apartheid was. Hence, in Black South African literature, silences and myths work in conjunction to effectively protest against the disenfranchisement of Blacks under apartheid[1].

Ways of Dying breaks the silences in Black South African literature, which predominantly depicts the atrocities suffered by Blacks under apartheid, by debunking two of its myths. Mda disproves the myth of a unified and just liberation movement by exposing the oppressive impact the liberation movement had on the people it sought to liberate. He counters the myth of a utopian African community by demonstrating that the African community is as much a site of violence and moral degeneration as it is one where strong social networks and values are found. *Ways of Dying* therefore challenges the scope of the representation of violence in Black South African literature by bringing to light occurrences of violence that compounded the persecution of Blacks during apartheid, but which are seldom broached in Black South African literature because the progenitors of this violence are Blacks themselves.

In the light of the novel's disclosure of atrocities committed by and against Blacks, this chapter argues that Mda contests the notion apparent in Black South African literature that the end of apartheid signifies the advent of freedom. He conveys this sentiment by rendering the impending death of apartheid and the prospect of democracy in South Africa peripheral themes in the novel[2]. Instead, he chooses to foreground the pervasiveness of violence in the African

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[1] In addition to Africans, Coloureds and Indians were disenfranchised by the system of apartheid.

[2] This essay concurs with Mervis and Van Wyk's claim that *Ways of Dying* is set during the tumultuous period preceding South Africa's first democratic elections, between 1990 and 1994. It takes as the basis of its argument,

community. Considering the meaningful positioning of these motifs, Mda implies that freedom in South Africa will not be realized when apartheid has been displaced, but rather when the causes of violence and all its manifestations have been expunged from this society.

Black South African literature and the Black Consciousness Movement

Black South African literature produced throughout the 1970s is distinguished from later works by its overtly political content. Piniel Viriri Shava attributes this characteristic to the strong influence that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa had on literary production throughout this decade:

> Because of the BCM's consciousness-raising objective, the literature that has emerged as a result of the Movement's influence has generally tended to be assertive, didactic, exhortatory and overtly political. (98)

The philosophy of Black Consciousness, coined by Steve Biko, called for "self examination" through which Blacks may realize their true and "envisaged" selves as well as unity among Blacks as an imperative in their overcoming oppression (91-92). Biko defines Black Consciousness in these terms:

> Black Consciousness is an attitude of the mind and a way of life ... Its essence is
> the realization by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers
> around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate
> as a group to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude.
> It is based on self-examination which has ultimately led them to believe that by

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the meaningful juxtaposition between the past and the future in *Ways of Dying*, whereby the characters' memories of violence are given precedence over the prospect of democracy in South Africa.

seeking to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, they are

insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. The philosophy of

Black Consciousness therefore expresses group pride and the determination of the

black to rise and attain the envisaged self. (91-92)

The Black Consciousness Movement is strikingly similar to the American Black Power

movement, which also called for racial pride, solidarity and self-determination among Blacks in

the diaspora (Shava 98). Developed during the 1960s and 1970s, the Black Power movement

deemed these objectives in addition to that of raising political consciousness among Blacks as

essential in challenging and eradicating institutional racism in America (Ward 1-5). Similarly,

the Black Consciousness Movement was premised on the belief that "foster[ing] political

consciousness among black people" in South Africa through cultural and racial affirmation was a

fundamental precursor to their attainment of liberation (Shava 98). Black South African writers

were influenced by the tenets of the Black Consciousness Movement and, most likely, by the

American Black Power movement. They consequently offered various depictions of "the black

experience" in their literature, which condemned apartheid and demanded the liberation of

Blacks from this oppressive social order (Couzens and Patel qtd. in Shava 99).

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Black writers continued to decry apartheid in their

literature. Shava observes, however, that they diverged from the radical approach seen in

literature of the 1970s by adopting a subtle style to denounce apartheid. This change was most

likely influenced by mounting criticism by writers and critics who accused Black writers of

being unimaginative and overly preoccupied with documenting conditions of oppression in South Africa. Describing the general tone of this criticism, Shava asserts that:

> These writers and critics feel that the descriptive protest against apartheid has become an overworked, and correspondingly less engaging, undertaking. They are asking for a kind of writing that transcends the advocacy of mass action and recording of mass suffering. Putting a higher premium on form rather than content, these writers and critics espouse symbolic and subtle political writing rather than direct, descriptive protest. (146)

Among these critics, Njabulo Ndebele advocates for literature that depicts the ordinary experiences of Black South Africans, which he claims signify a life of resistance against the system of apartheid (451). Benita Parry, on the other hand, criticizes the revolutionary content of Black South African literature by taking issue with the preponderance of critiques that characterize resistance in literature as an oppositional stance, failing to explore the subversive potential of the literary form (12).

According to Ndebele, literature produced by Black writers from the fifties onwards contains "spectacular representation[s]" of "the culture of oppression" in South Africa (435). He describes the trademark of this literature in these terms:

> The spectacular documents; it indicts explicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority; it keeps the larger issues of society in our minds, obliterating the details; it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather

than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate

knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge. (Ndebele 442)

In other words, Black South African literature underscores the brutality of apartheid, the

victimization of Blacks and their resistance to apartheid. It works according to the principle that

"the more the brutality of the system is dramatised, the better; the more exploitation is revealed

and starkly dramatized, the better" (Ndebele 441).

This dramatization, and the literature itself, had a political function. According to Ndebele,

Black South African writers felt a sense of urgency to take on the political responsibility,

especially after the political organizations (African National Congress and the Pan African

Congress) leading the liberation movement were banned at the beginning of the 1960s, of

depicting in literature the exploitation and oppression endured by Blacks under apartheid (436-

437). Black writers addressed their literature to a "white [South African] audience" with the

intention of inciting it to condemn apartheid (Ndebele 441). However, their literature had the

opposite effect:

Conventional wisdom proclaims that the literature was premised on its supposed

appeal to the conscience of the white oppressor: 'If the oppressor sees himself as

evil, he will be revolted by his negative image, and will try to change.' … But that

audience, schooled under a Eurocentric literary tradition, was, in turn, schooled to

reject this literature 'meant' for them. They rejected both the methods of

representation as well as the content. Where they yielded to accept the validity of

the content, they emphasised the crudeness of method. (Ndebele 441)

Renouncing prevailing narratives in Black South African literature about the politics of oppression and resistance, Ndebele calls for literature that engages with the ordinary experiences of Black people. For him, survival under oppression does not only manifest itself as the armed struggle, but also as the ability of the oppressed to carry on with their lives in spite of oppression: "the ordinary day-to-day lives of people should be the direct focus of political interest because they constitute the very content of the struggle (Ndebele 451).

Parry's criticism of Black South African literature is raised in her complaint against critics who restrict their analyses of revolutionary literature to its oppositional content. Reviewing Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature,* Parry asserts that Harlow's "study installs the notion that a rhetoric of solidarity and militancy, of protest and dissent is a sufficient condition for constituting a revolutionary literature" (12). Opposing this notion, Parry argues for a broader conceptualization of a literature of resistance. She rejects the explicit political content in Black South African literature, which has invariably led to its classification as resistance or protest literature by critics like Harlow, by pointing out that:

> oppositional discourses quickening liberation energies can reside in spaces where
>
> there is no obvious correspondence between image and social message, and in
>
> articulations which do not register a literal relationship of word to social referent.
>
> (Parry 13)

To support her argument, Parry identifies literary techniques and genres that communicate resistance without "directly illuminating the struggle or ostensibly articulating dissent and protest" because of their transgressive and disruptive effects (15); among these are:

The fantastic and the fabulous, the grotesque and the disorderly, the parodic

reiteration or inversion of dominant codes, the deformation of master tropes, the

estrangement of received usage, [and] the fracture of authorized syntax. (Parry

15)

Both Ndebele and Parry have shown in their criticism of Black South African literature that its

documentation of the injustices borne by Black South Africans is its most prominent

characteristic. This is particularly so since one of its objectives is to expose the truth of

oppression, which is distorted by the "colonial capitalist discourse" of the apartheid regime

(Trump, "Part of the Struggle" 163). The colonial capitalist discourse posits the imperative of

the use of violence, as a remedial measure, to 'civilize' the Black race. It also purports that the

propagation of communist ideas among Blacks threatens the sovereignty of the apartheid state

and warrants the state's use of violence. Black South African literature defies the colonial

capitalist discourse by "offer[ing] a view of history significantly different from that disseminated

by the ruling hegemony" (Trump, "Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 2). In other words, the

realities of the oppressed – their dispossession, disenfranchisement and exploitation – depicted in

Black South African literature subvert the falsehoods that underpin the colonial capitalist

discourse and undermines its justifications for the violation of Blacks.

The revolutionary content of Black South African literature also challenges Western literary

traditions. In her analysis of resistance literature, Barbara Harlow expounds on this point,

asserting that:

like the resistance and national liberation movements which it reflects and in

which it can be said to participate…[resistance literature] presents a serious

challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and the practice of literature

and its criticisms as these have been developed in the West. (xvi)

Critics who uphold Western literary standards deem resistance literature a vulgar appropriation

of literature because it is steeped in the political and the historical. Harlow cites the literary critic

Stendhal who claims essentially that the marriage of art and politics contradicts the true function

of literature (qtd. in Harlow 16). Literature, according to critics like Stendhal, should serve no

other function but the pursuit of art. Refuting this position, Ngugi wa Thiong'o proclaims:

Haven't we heard … critics who demand of African writers that they stop writing

about colonialism, race, colour, exploitation, and simply write about human

beings? Such an attitude to society is often the basis of some European writers'

mania for man without history – solitary and free – with unexplainable despair

and anguish and death as the ultimate truth about the human condition. (qtd. in

Harlow 16-17)

According to Harlow, this espousal of an apolitical literature attempts to negate, silence and de-

historicize the experiences of the oppressed (Harlow 17).

Ways of Dying and Apartheid

Like Black South African literature written between 1970 and 1994, *Ways of Dying* captures the

dispossession and subjugation of Black South Africans under the apartheid regime. The central

protagonists Noria and Toloki are childhood friends who are reunited years after they left the

village where they grew up at the funeral of Noria's son, Vutha The Second, where Toloki was plying his trade of professional mourning. They recall the violence they endured and witnessed throughout their lives and, in so doing, expose the injustices of the apartheid system. Notably, through Toloki and Noria's life experiences, *Ways of Dying* calls attention to the ways in which Black South Africans coped with the impact of structural violence on their lives.

Structural violence constitutes the "violation of normal rights or values" through "customs and laws", which "create and perpetrate structures that curb the freedom of subjects unfairly or which discriminate unjustly against certain sections preventing them from attaining full citizenship" (Degenaar 78). During apartheid, the Nationalist government utilized structural violence to create and sustain socio-economic inequalities. Grounded in racist ideologies, structural violence produced a socially and economically stratified South African society wherein the ruling white minority monopolized access to the wealth generated by South Africa's natural resources and by the labor of the oppressed. The remainder of the country's population was differentially discriminated against depending on the social value attached to particular racial groups. Black South Africans occupied the lowest stratum of the social hierarchy, living in abject poverty as non-citizens.

One form of structural violence, unequivocally depicted in *Ways of Dying*, is the Nationalist government's refusal to grant Blacks ownership of the land. Most of the characters live in an informal settlement in an unnamed city that represents any metropolis in South Africa. Toloki, an exception, stores his meager belongings in a trolley and sleeps at the "quayside shelter and waiting-room" (Mda 10; ch. 1). However, prior to residing there, Toloki also lived in an

informal settlement, which was established in defiance of the government's effort to relocate him
and other homeless people to a township far from their sources of livelihood:

> The government was refusing to give people houses. Instead, they were saying
> that people who had qualifying papers had to move to a new township that was
> more than fifty miles away from the city. How were people going to reach their
> places of work from fifty miles away? And yet there was land all over, close to
> where people worked. (Mda 112; ch. 6)

The government had designated the land occupied 'illegally' by Toloki and the other residents of
the informal settlement for "white residential development" only (Mda 112; ch. 6). The
Nationalist government therefore imposed a condition of homelessness on Black South Africans
by depriving them of the right to use and possess land.

A policy of forced removals also worked in conjunction with these discriminatory laws to secure
the Nationalist government's stronghold over the land. The government took stringent measures
to evict Blacks from land officially reserved for other racial groups. The narrator explains that
Toloki and other residents of the informal settlement were constantly vigilant because their
shacks and personal effects were likely to be destroyed by bulldozers dispatched by the
government. Toloki's shack was destroyed in this manner, but like the other residents he
resiliently rebuilt his home. He decided to live in a waiting room following a second
confrontation with the government, which had deployed vigilantes to burn down his shack.
Ways of Dying reveals that Black South Africans were subjected to various acts of intimidation
perpetrated by the Nationalist government to control their movement throughout the country.

As with the issue of land, the Nationalist government also restricted most Blacks from undertaking employment that would enable them to escape the throes of poverty. In *Ways of Dying*, domestic tasks such as cleaning homes, washing clothes and caring for children are the main employment opportunities available to the women of the informal settlement where Noria resides. Shadrack, Noria's neighbour and suitor, earns a living by transporting people to and from the informal settlement in an old van. Besides these avenues, the people in Noria's community subsist on a system of mutual dependency. For instance, in exchange for food Noria assists Madimbhaza, her neighbor, who cares for children orphaned by violence and abandoned by parents. *Ways of Dying* demonstrates that under apartheid, many Blacks could only make a living through informal means and by assisting one another, as Noria states, like "two hands that wash each other" (Mda 62; ch. 4).

Ways of Dying also illustrates that for some Black South Africans begging was the only recourse for survival during apartheid. Toloki is a mendicant, but he escapes this harsh and undignified reality by calling himself a "Professional Mourner" (Mda 4; ch.1). He created this vocation because he was unskilled, had experienced difficulties finding employment after city officials destroyed his business and believed that death was lucrative since it was pervasive within the black community. Begging is an indication of the fact that discriminatory laws obstructed Black South Africans from gaining formal or well-paying jobs and the type of socio-economic mobility that would accompany this. Toloki, as the Professional Mourner, embodies the violence inflicted on a group of people who struggle to survive and, at the same time, maintain their dignity in spite of their dehumanizing and demoralizing circumstances.

Violence was an intrinsic element of the apartheid system, serving no other purpose than to create a submissive Black populist. Shadrack was brutally assaulted by White policemen who declared their allegiance to a "right-wing supremacist organization" (Mda 131-132; ch. 7). Explaining the ordeal to Toloki and Noria, Shadrack states: "They were doing it just because it was a fun thing to do" (Mda 133; ch. 7). Similarly, a Black farm worker, who befriended Toloki before his arrival in the city, was burned to death because his white overseer wanted to "play" with fire (Mda 57; ch. 3). What appear to be examples of sadism, evidenced by the terms "play" and "fun", are also constitutive acts that sustained a system whose very existence depended on the brutalization of Blacks.

However, *Ways of Dying* also illustrates that the subjugation of Black South Africans was also maintained with their complicity. Another Black farm laborer who witnessed Toloki's friend being set alight justifies this violence by explaining that:

> The same white man doused me with petrol and set me alight last month. I
> sustained burns, but I healed after a while. Although he is a big white bass, he is
> very friendly and likes to play with black laborers. (Mda 57; ch. 3)

By using "play" to describe violence, the farm laborer negates his experience of abuse. No rational person wishes to be violated. "Play" therefore creates an illusion for the laborer, which makes tolerable the experience of violence. However, the adverse effect of this denial is that it reinforces the status quo, allowing Whites to continue to subject Blacks to the most inhumane forms of abuse.

Like Black South African literature written between 1970 and 1994, *Ways of Dying* condemns apartheid. Mda, however, does this by focusing less on suffering and more on a spirit of survival, which is perceptible in the strategies that his protagonists devise to cope with the daily injustices of apartheid.

Having brought this similarity to the fore, I now turn to highlight dissimilarities between the representation of the liberation struggle in Black South African literature and the depiction of this theme in *Ways of Dying*.

The Representation of the Liberation Struggle in Black South African Literature

By and large, Black South African writers seldom depicted the discord within the liberation struggle in their works. Instead, they portrayed the struggle as a unified and unifying movement, concealing its shortcomings and contradictions out of concern that negative depictions may destabilize the liberation movement. More likely than not, Black writers also felt obligated to offer idealized representations of the struggle as a show of solidarity, particularly, since antiapartheid organizations urged "cultural workers to produce art in which [their] commitment ... [to the liberation struggle] is literally registered in the product" (Parry 12). Such distorted representations in Black South African literature have caused Martin Trump to declare that it is "intensely involved with mythologizing, particularly in its presentation of a social vision that is markedly different from that promoted by colonial capitalism" (Trump, "Part of the Struggle" 163).

Notably, the idealized portrayal of the liberation struggle in Black South African literature mirrors some of the claims that Fanon makes about the virtues of revolutionary violence. Fanon attributes unifying powers to decolonization. He claims that revolutionary violence "unifies [the] people by the radical decision to remove from it its heterogeneity" (Fanon 35). Here, heterogeneity refers to ethnicity, a source of contention among the colonized (Fanon 73). Blurring ethnic differences, the armed struggle brings tribal warfare – a legacy of colonialism – to a halt by "[throwing the people] in one way and one direction" (Fanon 73). On the subject of colonialism and its role in causing and exacerbating tribal warfare, Fanon asserts that:

> By its very structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces and separates them. The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. (Fanon 74)

In contrast, Fanon claims that revolutionary violence, being "all-inclusive and national", is "closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and tribalism" (74).

Opposing this perspective, Martin Trump debunks the myth of a unified liberation movement in his critique of the novel, *To Every Birth its Blood*. According to Trump, Mongane Serote, the author, largely omits the presence of "discordant voices" from his portrayal of the liberation movement in South Africa (Trump, "Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 7). About the novel, Trump states that "There is no sense of any conflict or discordance within liberation groupings, or of essentially irreconcilable differences on many central issues of strategy and ideology" (7). This idealistic portrayal of the liberation movement is partly shaped by a Marxist perspective on the attainment of liberation (Trump, "Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 2). In this view,

liberation is achieved when 'the oppressed class' overthrows 'the ruling class'. The focus on two opposing classes eclipses the economic, political, and cultural differences that variegate the ruling and oppressed classes. Trump expounds on this point in his description of the oppressed class:

> the oppressed class itself is made up of several class fractions (for example, certain strata of the petit-bourgeoisie) and eccentric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry and certain ethnically distinguishable groups). And the oppressed class contains opposing political allegiances. ("Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 3-4)

Although Trump acknowledges that "idealization or romanticization of the liberation struggle is clearly felt by Serote in a time of intense hardship as necessary in order to inspire change", he argues that this idealistic portrayal is nonetheless problematic ("Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 7). In Trump's view, *To Every Birth its Blood* has an undemocratic undertone in its failing to bring to light oppositional stances that existed within the liberation struggle (7). Notably, Trump credits Serote for depicting debates that question the value of the Black Consciousness's philosophy in a struggle more concerned with changing the material and political circumstances of the oppressed and less with fostering racial pride and forgoing alliances with Whites who opposed apartheid (11). Nevertheless, Trump contends that Serote largely over-simplifies his representation of the liberation movement. Trump posits a tenable argument especially in view of Andre Brink's account of the atrocities committed within the liberation struggle, a testament of its essentially divisive structure.

In support of Trump's criticism of *To Every Birth it Blood's*, one can also argue that Serote caused more harm than good to society by not openly providing balanced insights into the conflicts that riddled the liberation movement in South Africa. These insights would have generated more debate and concerted efforts to find resolutions.

Trump calls for liberation literature in which "dialogues" are "set up within the oppositional discourse itself" (Trump, "Serote's to Every Birth its Blood" 9). In his view, *The Non-Believer's Journey* by Stanley Nyamfukudza is paradigmatic for Nyamfukudza's portrayal of the Zimbabwean liberation movement neither glosses over its shortcomings nor underplays its disjunctions. Instead, Nyamfukudza unveils paradoxes that prevailed within the Zimbabwean liberation movement in his account of the repressive tactics employed by the guerillas to silence dissent and criticism from within. Similarly, as will be shown, *Ways of Dying* re-enacts conflicts that existed within the liberation struggle in South Africa and, consequently, brings to the fore its sordid record of undemocratic practices. In illuminating this past and the scope of political violence among Blacks during apartheid, *Ways of Dying* constitutes a dialogic text on the South African liberation movement, which unmistakably questions whether political stability and democracy would be fully realized in post-apartheid South Africa.

Ways of Dying and the Liberation Struggle

In *Ways of Dying*, Toloki's quest to discover how Noria's five-year-old son, Vutha The Second, met an untimely death reveals much about the factions and contradictions that characterize the liberation movement in South Africa. Vutha The Second, a reincarnation of Noria's first son,

Vutha, developed a reputation for being 'committed' to the struggle because he was always seen at the front of demonstrations throwing stones at armed soldiers.

Yet Mda shows that what appeared to be precociousness in the area of politics was merely childlike mimicry. Vutha The Second simply imitated behaviors he witnessed daily and did not truly grasp the significance and gravity of his actions. This explains why he disclosed to the migrant workers privy information about the "Young Tigers'" (the youth league of the liberation movement) plot to attack the "tribal chief" and his entourage of migrant workers, who opposed the struggle, in exchange for meat and sweets (Mda 169-178; ch. 9). When the Young Tigers found out about Vutha The Second's indiscretion, they ordered that a tire be placed around his neck, soaked with petrol and set alight. Although an act of punishment, this violent, public spectacle was deliberately performed to instill fear and obedience in the children who witnessed the fatal fate of a "sell-out" (Mda 177; ch. 9). Furthermore, it was executed to dispel any opposing views that may have existed within the youth league of the liberation movement.

Symbolically, the brutal and excessive action taken by the Young Tigers replicates the violence of apartheid. Achille Mbembe offers insight into the contagious nature of violence in his discussion of the abuse of power in postcolonial African societies. According to Mbembe, the oppressed, as a result of their desire for "majesty", or power, reenact in their daily lives the rituals and behaviors through which the oppressor constitutes and maintains his power over the postcolony (133). Violence and coercion are often at the core of these rituals. Mbembe has this to say about the effect of the autocracy, or what he refers to as the *"commandment"*, on the oppressed:

[the people] become part of a system of signs that the *commandment* leaves, like

tracks, as it passes, and so make it possible to follow the trail of violence and

domination intrinsic to the *commandment*. One can thus find these signs

reproduced, recurring even in the remotest, tiniest corners of everyday life – in

relations between parents and children, between husbands and wives, between

policemen and victims, between teachers and pupils. (107)

As this citation explicates, the people are intimately integrated into the processes through which

the autocrat constitutes power. Whether it is their obligatory attendance at ceremonies held in

tribute of the despot or their participation in public executions as perpetrators or witnesses, the

people are drawn into this system of domination. As a result, they internalize the violence and

repression of the system and reproduce its logic throughout their personal lives (Mbembe 128).

In turn, a false consciousness cripples most, if not all, of the actors in the postcolony. Mbembe

writes about the postcolony, but his analysis is pertinent to the system of apartheid in view of the

Young Tigers' mimicry of its violence to secure social control within the struggle.

The narrative about Vutha The Second's execution disputes the idealistic portrayal of the

liberation struggle discussed earlier. Mda disproves the associations that are often drawn

between the oppressed and righteousness, on the one hand, and the liberation struggle and

freedom, on the other. He illustrates that in spite of their denunciation of oppression, the

oppressed are capable of oppressing as well. Maxime Rodison, expounding on this point asserts

that:

the oppressed are sanctified and every aspect of their actions, their culture, their

past, present and future behavior is presented as admirable. Direct or indirect

narcissism takes over and the fact that the oppressed are oppressed becomes less
important than the admirable way they are themselves. The slightest criticism is
seen as criminal sacrilege. In particular, it becomes quite inconceivable that the
oppressed might themselves be oppressing others. In an ideological conception,
such as admission would imply that the object of admiration was flawed and
hence in some sense deserving of past or present oppression. (qtd. in Harlow 29)

It is precisely the fear that their oppression will be deemed "deserving", which causes the people
at Vutha The Second's funeral to disapprove of the Nurse's telling of the events that led to his
death:

"This our little brother was killed by those who are fighting to free us!" We
mumble. It is not for the Nurse to make such statements. His duty is to tell how
the child saw his death, not to give ammunition to the enemy...But others feel that
there is no way the Nurse can explain to the funeral crowd how we killed the little
brother without parading our shame to the world. That the enemy will seize hold
of this, and use it against us, is certainly not the Nurse's fault. (Mda 3; ch. 1)

In essence, *Ways of Dying* de-romanticizes the liberation struggle. It illustrates that at times the
liberation movement, contrary to its tenets, was an oppressive force. The novel therefore
weakens Fanon's claim, and that of resistance literature, that "[t]he colonized man finds his
freedom in and through [revolutionary] violence" (68).

The tale about Vutha The Second's murder also calls our attention to the oppositional stance
taken by groups within the oppressed class against the liberation movement. In examining this
subject, the novel adds complexity to the representation of political violence – "acts of

destruction aimed at altering or maintaining power relations" – found in Black South African literature, which predominantly portrays political violence as conflict that occurred between whites who supported apartheid and Blacks who opposed it (McKendrick and Hoffman 14).

In *Ways of Dying*, the warring parties consist of the tribal chief and the migrant workers who support him, on the one hand, and the proponents of the liberation movement, on the other. Opposing the nation-building efforts of the liberation struggle, the tribal chief collaborates with the apartheid government to undermine the liberation movement by terrorizing its supporters. He uses ethnicity to garner support, declaring that the liberation struggle poses a threat to the sovereignty and existence of his ethnic group:

> He has concocted a non-existent threat to his people, telling them that they are at risk from other ethnic groups in the country. Whereas other leaders are trying very hard to build one free and united nation out of various ethnic groups and races, he thinks he will reach a position of national importance by exploiting ethnicity, and by telling people of his ethnic group that if they don't fight they will be overwhelmed by other ethnic groups which are bent on dominating them, or even exterminating them. (Mda 47-48; ch. 3)

As this excerpt demonstrates, 'tribalism' and so-called 'tribal violence' (political violence in disguise) emerged in opposition to the liberation struggle. More importantly, the novel contradicts Black South African literature's representation of the oppressed as a unified force fighting against the ruling class. Rather, Mda illustrates that political violence divided Blacks and alliances were often forged between the oppressed and their oppressors.

Finally, the narrative about Vutha The Second's murder raises questions on the issue of 'commitment' to the liberation movement. Some of the questions that come to mind are as follows: When does commitment cross the line and become extremism and oppression? Should one still remain committed to the liberation struggle when its ideals of justice and collective empowerment through unity have been violated?

The issue of 'commitment' to the liberation struggle surfaces again in the novel's criticism of the national and regional leaders of the liberation struggle. Instead of publicly condemning the Young Tigers' actions, the leaders offer Noria an apology in private yet inform her that Vutha The Second was not completely blameless. More concerned with the image of the struggle than with Noria's need for justice, the leaders insist that she no longer speak about her son's death, as illustrated below in a discussion between Noria and the leaders:

> They express their heart felt sorrow at the death of her son. They say it was a regrettable mistake. But they warn Noria very strongly that she must not speak to anyone about it, especially the newspaper people, because this would take the struggle for freedom a step backwards. She must remember that her son was not completely innocent in this whole matter. (Mda 162; ch. 9)

In this excerpt, Mda exposes undemocratic and repressive behaviors among the leaders of the struggle whose commitment to liberation is clearly unaligned with the people's need for justice, democracy and freedom. The leaders' reaction to Vutha The Second's death calls into question the extent of their alliance with the people. The people appear, first and foremost, as instruments to be manipulated to ensure the leaders rise to power. Hence, when this agenda is threatened the

people's rights and needs are inconsequential. Amilcar Cabral raises a similar point, but with regard to the involvement of "traditional and religious leaders" in the liberation struggle:

> individuals in this category generally see in the liberation movement the only valid means, using the sacrifices of the masses, to eliminate colonial repression of their own class and to re-establish in this way their complete political and cultural domination of the people. (46-47)

Echoing Cabral's sentiments, Mda also demonstrates that the roots of a tyrannical government precede its reign. Signs of moral bankruptcy within the leadership of the liberation struggle are indicative of the kind of government that will come to power when liberation is attained. *Ways of Dying* therefore questions the notion of a unified liberation movement and the existence of democracy after apartheid because of repressive practices carried out by the leaders of the liberation struggle.

In *Ways of Dying*, class differences are also highlighted, drawing attention to an additional disjuncture within the liberation movement. The leaders arrive at the informal settlement in the midst of penury with their luxury cars and jewels, sending a message about their social status and their obvious disconnection to the destitution that plagues the residents of the informal settlement. The incongruent images in this scene raise the question as to whether this middle class consciousness is aligned with the struggles and aspirations of the underclass.

Ways of Dying contradicts idealistic depictions of the liberation movement in Black South African literature in its portrayal of the conflicts that divided Black South Africans who

supported the struggle. The romanticized portrayal of the liberation movement in Black South African literature magnifies the evil of apartheid to which it is juxtaposed. Although this depiction clearly had a political function, i.e., to condemn apartheid, it also provided a psychological benefit to Black South African writers. They were aware of the paradoxes and shortcomings of the struggle but chose not to grapple with the possibility that the liberation movement may not usher South Africa into a future of democratic governance, justice and social stability, especially when all hope, including their own, was placed in the liberation movement to transform South Africa. Facing such a possibility posed a question to Black writers, a question they were not willing to contemplate during the apartheid era, hence, their predilection to mythologizing: if not the liberation movement, what would be the catalyst of change in South Africa?

Ways of Dying and the African Community

Ways of Dying also counters the myth of a utopian African society apparent in some writings by Black South African writers. According to Martin Trump, the principal virtues of this society are its "spirit of communalism" and camaraderie ("Part of the Struggle" 166-172). This portrayal, Trump argues, demonstrates that "the collectivist society offers the individual a more satisfying style of living than the exclusively capitalist society" ("Part of the Struggle" 172). Taking issue with the myth itself as opposed to its assault on apartheid, *Ways of Dying* posits that in reality the relationship between the Black individual and his/her community is a troubled one. This being its point of departure, *Ways of Dying* elucidates a number of social ills that fragment the African community.

It is important to note that in *Ways of Dying*, representations of discord, anomie and privation in the African community differ from dystopian images in Black writings. In literature written during apartheid, Black writers largely attributed the existence of dysfunctional families, the underworld and a plethora of problems in the African community to conditions of deprivation imposed on Blacks by the Nationalist government and to Blacks' subsequent internalization of violence (Trump, "Part of the Struggle" 173-177). In contrast, *Ways of Dying* attributes the degenerative state of affairs in the African community to a moral failure among Blacks themselves.

Contrary to the myth that the African community is the locus of solidarity in an otherwise hostile country, the Black individual does experience alienation in his/her family and community. Throughout his childhood, Toloki is violently rejected by the people in his village and by his father, Jwara. Whereas the villagers relentlessly ridiculed his physical appearance, Jwara assaulted and verbally abused Toloki whenever he was unable to create figurines of the things he had seen in his dreams. During these fits of anger, Jwara reminded Toloki that Noria, Jwara's muse, was more important to him than Toloki could ever be. Alienated from his father and his community, Toloki left the village, as a tortured and rejected young man, in search of love and a place of belonging in the city.

Noria's marriage to Napu calls additional attention to the alarming prevalence of physical and emotional abuse within the Black family. Embittered that Noria had regained control of their home after she had been expelled and substituted with a mistress, Napu meted out his revenge by

abducting Vutha, their son. Napu took Vutha to the city where he kept him chained to a pole near their cardboard home. When he was not in bondage, Vutha was seen begging in the streets. The horror of Vutha's neglect and maltreatment is engraved on the mind of the reader as the narrator relays that one fateful day Napu returned home after a few days of drinking and witnessed Vutha's dead body being eaten by dogs.

As evident from the given illustrations, children are most vulnerable to violence in a dysfunctional home. Noria's mother, "That Mountain Woman", treated her husband, Xesibe, with disdain and hostility, denigrating every aspect of his character in her attempt to emasculate him. In a bid to assert his manhood and avenge this cruelty, Xesibe maltreated his grandson, Vutha, whom Noria had entrusted in Xesibe's care. Vutha was neither fed nor sent to school while Noria tried to make a living as a sweeper. To save her son from this persecution, Noria eventually turned to prostitution through which she acquired enough money to provide a better life for her son.

In these narratives, Mda politicizes the African community. That is, he depicts the political nature of human relations, which are oftentimes violent. In so doing, Mda challenges mythical representations of the African community, which, in contrast, depoliticize reality. According to Roland Barthes, a myth is "depoliticized speech" that empties the world of its complexity, of its contradictions, of its intrinsically political character (143). He expounds on this, stating that:

> myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them
>
> the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, ... it organizes a world

which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide and

wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity. (Barthes 143)

By politicizing the African community, Mda unmasks atrocities perpetrated by Blacks against Blacks and so questions the notion in Black South African literature written during apartheid that the dismantling of apartheid is the cure-all to South Africa's evils. Clearly, this view is false as Mda reveals that violence in the African community was also self-imposed. He suggests that in the aftermath of apartheid, high levels of violence in the African community will continue to pose a threat to social stability in South Africa.

For Mda, South Africa's future appears grim. The dismantlement of apartheid offers no guarantee that justice, democracy, or political and social stability, would finally prevail in a country where Blacks have been deprived of these aspects of freedom. For Mda, freedom continues to be threatened, having revealed that Blacks, like the functionaries of apartheid, are capable of oppressing. Although clearly disillusioned, Mda's perspective should not be read pessimistically. He reawakens his society from its mythical imaginings, forcing it to acknowledge and tackle deplorable truths about the oppressed in order for freedom to become a reality in post-apartheid South Africa and not just remain a discourse of a radical era.

CHAPTER TWO

Towards a Redefinition of Black South African Literature:

Magical Realism Fantasy and Humor

Black South African literature evokes vivid images of repression, revolution and dispossession. It is not, however, readily associated with the themes of magic, fantasy and humor or with depictions of violence that tangentially relate to the context of apartheid. By going against the grain in depicting these novel themes, *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* redefine Black South African literature. Its redefinition is marked by Mda's defiance of socialist realism, his allegorical representations of violence and his emphasis on redemption in his commentaries on violence.

Socialist Realism and Magical Realism in Black South African Literature

Socialist realism has its roots in the U.S.S.R, but its influence on literary production in South Africa during apartheid was far-reaching. Black writers subscribed to its principle that literature must truthfully and concretely reflect the development of a society's political and social ideas (Ellis 41). Such notions guided Soviet writers who followed the injunction issued by the communist party in 1934 that required them to apply the theory of socialist realism in their works (Ellis 39). It necessitated that Soviet literature propagate socialist dogma and document the socialist movement as it unfolded in the U.S.S.R. Fictional devices such as allegory and satire were strongly opposed since literature was to lucidly express socialist ideas in order to conscientize the working class (Ellis 39). Known for its "[depiction of] reality in its

revolutionary development", socialist realism resonates in Black South African literature: in its journalistic documentation of the daily tribulations endured by Blacks under the apartheid regime and of the liberation movement's efforts to overthrow this oppressive system (Robin qtd. in Shaw 4).

Although many Black South African writers deemed the content and aesthetic of their literature as inevitable consequences of living under the stringency of apartheid, the recurrent application of socialist realism in Black South African literature generated scathing critiques from literary critics and writers alike. Among the proponents of socialist realism, Richard Rive proffers no apologies for the content or style of his works and argues that:

> Such a literature must differ in texture and quality from that emanating from a people who have the right to vote, suffer no discrimination and are in a powerful position because of the color of their skin. If this were not so, it would imply that external forces play hardly any part in moulding creativity; that the writer does not create out of experiences surrounding him, that there is therefore a common reaction regardless of the diversity of the forces at work. (92)

Notwithstanding the validity of Rive's argument, Christopher Van Wyk criticizes the tendency of Black South African literature to overstate the theme of oppression. Van Wyk contends that although Black writers intended to validate the efforts of the liberation movement by repeatedly highlighting the brutality of apartheid, their literature best illustrates an impoverished engagement with the imagination (170). He therefore asks that Black writers mine their creativity and expand the thematic discourses in their works. Similarly, Lewis Nkosi renounces the overused journalistic prose that dominates Black South African literature (49). He purports

that its stranglehold on Black writing effectively constitutes a literary "crisis" (Nkosi 49). According to Nkosi, the resolution of this crisis hinges on Black writers' formulation of "new ways of telling the story of apartheid" (50).

Such criticisms helped to reshape Black South African literature, but its shift from socialist realism to magical realism also corresponded with South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. Magical realism appealed to South African writers during this period because of its inclination to "[blur] ... boundaries" and, hence, "accelerate the dismantling of the monolithic imperatives, both political and cultural, entrenched by the rule of apartheid" (Guidotti 230). For liberal and Black South African writers, the essentially "subversive" and "re-creative" literary effects of magical realism appropriately conveyed their country's efforts to reverse the legacy of apartheid and attain its redemption (Guidotti 230). As a myopic literary style, socialist realism, in contrast, proved incompatible with this historical moment since it dwelt more on the immediate conditions of oppression and less on how to effect South Africa's recovery from a violent past.

Mda reveals his concern with South Africa's transition in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*. He uses magical realism in both novels to counteract the effects that apartheid had on Black South African literature. He achieves this by allegorically depicting experiences of violence, by addressing the gradual destruction of African traditions by modernity and by foregrounding the theme of redemption. Regarding this latter objective, Mda essentially posits that an African cultural renaissance, i.e., a restoration of African traditions, is necessary to redeem African societies from the debilitating effects of violence. This renaissance is already

evident in Mda's novels, which subvert the predominance of socialist realism in Black South African literature, thereby, delivering this literature from the constraints and impositions under which it was placed during apartheid.

It is necessary to first define magical realism in order to understand how Mda applies it in his novels. As the term indicates, magical realism signifies the fusion of magic and realism in literature. Wendy B. Faris expands on this definition, asserting that "magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (1). *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* typify this literary genre because both novels "[are] concern[ed] [with] the interrelation between the dismal quality of everyday life and the mythical-magical quality of the African cultural tradition" (Guidotti 229). The portrayal of "non-Western cultural systems", as indicated in Guidotti's description of Mda's novels, is a defining characteristic of magical realist fiction (Zamora and Faris 3). This is because magical realism aims to subvert the "singular version" of the world displayed in realist narratives (Zamora and Faris 3). It is therefore a literary style that:

> draw[s] upon cultural systems that are no less 'real' than those upon which traditional literary realism draws – often non-Western cultural systems that privilege mystery over empiricism, empathy over technology, tradition over innovation. Their primary narrative investment may be in myths, legends, rituals – that is, in collective (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) practices that bind communities together. (Zamora and Faris 3)

Magical realism is also known for its propensity to represent all facets of reality as complex, ambiguous and hybrid. Brenda Cooper expounds on this point, stating that magical realism "contests polarities" and "strives … to capture the paradox of the unity of opposites (1). Similarly, Zamora and Faris note that magical realism operates by:

> exploring – and transgressing – boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction … Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female: these are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts. (5-6)

This tendency reveals that magical realism not only refutes a singular version of reality but a reductive one as well. Because of this characteristic, Gaylard argues that the "magical realist text is more real than realism...[because it] can approach the bizarreness [and the complexity] of the world it is describing" (99).

Many of these devises are perceptible in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* as Mda draws on them to depict and condemn the absurdity, excess and brutality of violence in African societies and to underscore the motif of redemption.

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, magic, or the occurrence of phenomena that defy "the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western explicitly based discourse" (Faris 7), and anthropological accounts of African traditions function as an allegory of violence and

redemption. Dikosha's magical traversal to the world of the ancient Barwa people signifies her resistance to the encroachment of modernity in the mountain village of Ha Samane. Engravings on the walls of the Cave of the Barwa, which depict the Barwa's healing dance, captivate Dikosha, enabling this character's journey to the past. By participating in the Barwa's healing dance, which culminates with her entrancement or symbolic death, Dikosha travels to the world of the dead where she acquires healing powers in the form of songs from the Barwa's ancestors. In this extraordinary narrative Mda alludes to the necessity of an African renaissance to counter the destruction of African cultures and values by modernity – a renaissance, he suggests, that must begin with the re-exploration of Africans' past.

To emphasize the imperative of a revival of African traditions, Mda depicts reality as a dichotomous space, consisting of the realms of the supernatural and the ordinary. While Dikosha symbolizes the supernatural, Radisene, her twin brother, represents the realm of the ordinary, which is characterized by materialism, destructive change and the impending death of tradition. When Radisene returns to the village of Ha Samane after staying in the lowlands of Lesotho as a result of his desire for wealth, he neither remembers his customs nor values. He therefore represents the process through which the village loses an intrinsic part of itself – a transformation Dikosha attempts to resist by reviving the Barwa's past. The realms of the supernatural and the ordinary therefore signify the tension between stasis and change, between tradition and modernity.

Similarly, in *Ways of Dying*, Mda uses magic to comment on the excessive dimensions of violence among Black South Africans. Suffering greatly from the death of her child, Vutha, who

is starved by his father, Noria re-conceives Vutha after having sexual intercourse with men in her dreams. The reunion between mother and child, however, is short-lived because Vutha The Second, the new name Noria gives to Vutha, is gruesomely killed by the Young Tigers who accused him of being a sell-out to the liberation movement. By having the same child killed twice, Mda effectively captures the extraordinary and excessive nature of violence in Black South African communities – a fact that needs to be highlighted, Mda suggests, because violence has become a quotidian and normalized phenomenon.

Mda also uses other magical realist themes, namely, the "[disruption of] received ideas about ... space" (Faris 23), in his discourse on violence and redemption. In *Ways of Dying*, the incongruous presence of golden figurines packed in boxes that surpass the height of squalid homes in an informal settlement exemplifies the disruption of space and functions to magnify the destitution forced on Blacks by the apartheid government. Although this scene expresses a critique of the violence of apartheid, it also symbolizes the necessity of recovery from violence. Symbolizing hope or a better future, the figurines instill joy in the children of the informal settlement, a rare experience for children who have only known loss, indigence and suffering throughout their lives.

The figurines also signify Mda's suggestion that Black South Africans reconnect with the mystical heritage of the African past from which they have been severed because of a long history of violence. The figurines are Jwara's creation, which he made with the assistance of the spirits and Noria's enchanting songs. Nefolovhodwe, Jwara's friend, brings the figurines from the village to the informal settlement at the behest of Jwara's spirit, which wants Toloki to have

the bewildering figurines as a gesture of reconciliation. This act represents Jwara's attempt to posthumously reconcile with his estranged son whom he abused excessively, but it can also be interpreted as a call for Blacks to reconnect with their traditions in order to be healed from years of repression under the apartheid regime.

Likewise in *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda applies the disruption of space in his criticism of modernity. The presence of a modern mansion, with over ten unused rooms, appears out of place in the mountain village of Ha Samane where most of the residents live in simple and traditional houses. Radisene built the mansion for his mother, Mother-of-Twins, to flaunt his newfound wealth and assimilation to Western culture. Mother-of-Twins, however, had no need for such a colossal home and, therefore, only utilized its large kitchen. The mansion symbolizes the ominous erosion of traditional values and customs due to Western cultural hegemony and excessive materialism. This is a process already underway as many of the villagers embraced Christianity and no longer decorated their homes with colorful *ditema* patterns because they considered it a heathen traditional practice (Mda 13; ch. 13).

Fantasy and Humor in *Ways of Dying*

Like magical realism, Mda uses fantasy and humor to criticize the normalization of violence in the African community. He therefore contradicts the charge of escapism raised against *Ways of Dying,* which stems from a misinterpretation of his use of fantasy as avoidance rather than direct confrontation of the problems facing Black South Africans (Visser 41-42). Although fantasy and

humor condemn both the violence of apartheid and its reproduction by Black South Africans, they also connote ways in which Blacks can either cope with or eradicate violence.

Fantasy is a subversive state of consciousness. According to Rosemary Jackson, it has less to do with fabricating "irreality", or a "non-human world", and more to do with imagining a world that is the inversion of our social order (8). The inversion of reality, or what Jackson dubs "alterity" (18), reveals our desire for "that which is experienced as absence or loss" (3). In view of Jackson's explanation of fantasy, it can therefore be argued that Toloki and Noria's fantasies reflect Mda's desire for a reality in South Africa where all forms of violence and their debilitating repercussions are wiped out.

Noria and Toloki's dreams of a regal home symbolize their desire for political and economic freedom in South Africa. Inspired by the luxurious homes pictured in the *Home and Garden* magazine, Toloki and Noria imagine owning a home that is the antithesis of their squalid shack and surroundings. The informal settlement in which they live is a constant reminder that they are exiled in their own country. Thus, by dreaming of a home or, more accurately, their rightful place in South Africa, Toloki and Noria do not attempt to escape their lot but develop the radical consciousness that will enable them to change their political and material circumstances. Mda therefore renders dreaming a subversive state of consciousness, a precursor to radical action that can potentially overthrow the violent order of apartheid.

Notably, this narrative offers a perspective on trauma and resistance that differs starkly from the public spectacles of oppression and resistance in Black South African literature. Mda illuminates

the personal dimension of suffering, i.e., the psychological responses that victims develop towards their persecution. In so doing, he humanizes the oppressed, a characteristic often missing in the one-dimensional, heroic images of Black freedom fighters pictured in Black South African literature.

Similarly, Toloki uses his eccentric vocation of professional mourning – the product of his fantasies – to reverse his marginalized social status. Throughout his life, Toloki is treated as a pariah, suffering abuse from his father, his community and the apartheid regime. As a child, Jwara physically and emotionally abused Toloki whenever Noria, on whom Jwara relied for inspiration to create figurines of the "strange people and animals he had seen in his dreams", did not sing for him (Mda 23; ch. 2). Like Jwara, the villagers habitually denigrated Toloki's unusual appearance. Then, as an adult, Toloki is made homeless by the repressive measures of the apartheid regime. To counter this maltreatment and fulfill his desire to belong in society, Toloki invents the unheard of vocation of professional mourning from his imaginings of the monks of the Orient. For Toloki, a Professional Mourner imparts dignity, "purity" and austerity to funerals, sparse virtues in the African community because death is commonplace (Mda 125; ch. 6). By attaching tremendous social value to his vocation, Toloki heals his wounded psyche and resolutely brings himself from the margins to the center of his society.

As the embodiment of his fantasies, Toloki is a carnivalesque character that disrupts his milieu. He adorns a mourning costume, which he bought from a "shop [that] served the theatre world", consisting of a top hat, "tight-fitting pants" and "a knee-length black cape with a hand-sized gold-coloured brooch with tassels of yellow, red and green" (Mda 21; ch. 2). His mourning is as

theatrical as his costume because he expresses "sounds that he deemed harrowing enough to enhance the sadness and pain of the occasion" (Mda 125; ch. 6). Toloki's eccentric costume and expressions of grief evoke the anarchic spirit of carnival, which "celebrate[s] temporary liberation ... from the established order" and "mark[s] the suspension of ... norms and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10).

Carnival festivities, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, caricature the status quo, thereby, exposing the people's aversion to the official social order (4). Toloki makes a travesty of mourning, exposing Mda's aversion to violence. He disrupts the solemnity and piety of funerals with his theatrical costume and aberrant antics, transforming these proceedings into comic spectacles. The customary way of mourning can no longer suffice in a society that has reached a state of abnormality as a result of its rampant practice of violence. As a Professional Mourner, Toloki therefore acts as a mirror of truth reflecting to his society the true character of its existence under apartheid – its absurd perversity. This condition is exemplified by the normalization of violence and the society's attempt to temporarily redress this pathology through the sanctifying ceremony of the funeral.

Bakhtin also associates carnival festivities with a process of "renewal" (11). This is because a "festive" laughter, in spite of its parody of the status quo, is the basis of carnival (Bakhtin 11). Carnival laughter mocks, opposes and degrades the status quo, yet its intoxicating gaiety "liberates" and revitalizes (Bakhtin 94). The convivial atmosphere of the carnival releases the body politic from its inhibitions and fears, enabling hope and freedom of expression to flourish once again (Bakhtin 90). Toloki's absurdly humorous persona incites the children's laughter and

causes them to "compose a song about him, which they sing with derisive gusto" (Mda 42; ch. 2). He prevents Noria from scolding them, reminding her that she should "[n]ever stifle the creativity of children" (Mda 62; ch. 4). He subsequently emphasizes the importance of laughter in stating that the greatest death is that of laughter (Mda 153; ch. 8).

Mda's preoccupation with finding new ways of narrating the experience of violence is salient in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*. Narratives of violence in both texts are defined, not by socialist realism as are novels written during the apartheid era, but by magical realism, fantasy and humor. A re-conceptualization of Black South African literature is therefore necessary because it can no longer be said that it invariably depicts spectacles of violence rendered in a mimetic realism or radical declarations of protest. On the contrary, Black South African literature is also characterized by comic spectacles and declarations of renewal. Such distinctive themes in Mda's novels reflect the concerns and the discourses of the historical juncture during which they were written. Indeed, Mda facilitates South Africa's redemption from its violent past by resurrecting Black South African literature from the literary constraints and conventions of the apartheid era.

CHAPTER THREE

The Motif of Redemption in *Ways of Dying* and

***She Plays with the Darkness*: Memory, Testimony and Art**

Representations of memory, testimony and art reinforce the theme of redemption in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*. Mda suggests that the memory of African traditions restores the moral consciousness of African societies riddled by violence, whereas testimony releases victims of violence from the experience of trauma. Regarding the former, Mda implies that by reviving indigenous traditions through memory, African societies would be reminded of the importance of the well-being of the community and the enormity of violence. He also suggests that artists can facilitate social healing, as art is a highly expressive medium. For Mda, memory, testimony and art are, therefore, redemptive because they can relieve trauma victims of the burden of pain and restore morality, unity and stability to African societies besieged by violence.

Memory, Art and Community in *Ways of Dying*

Throughout *Ways of Dying*, Mda illustrates that while remembering is a painful process for victims of violence, it is a precondition to healing. Toloki made a deliberate effort to forget an abusive childhood. Similarly, Noria suppressed the memory of Vutha The Second's murder instead of expressing her pain and outrage at this atrocity. Memory prevails however as Toloki and Noria testify to each other about the suffering they endured throughout life. Both are able to unburden their pain in the supportive relationship they developed following their reunion at

Vutha The Second's funeral. Mda illustrates in the bond that grows between Noria and Toloki that expressing the memory of a painful past to an empathetic listener facilitates the process of healing.

Many scholars argue, as *Ways of Dying* suggests, that testifying is a cathartic act (Felman and Laub 69).   An understanding of the nature of trauma reveals why they have made this assumption. Michael Humphrey describes trauma as a "poison or cancer" that resides in the body (118-119). Felman and Laub, on the other hand, characterize trauma as an "event that has no beginning [or] ... ending" (69). This is because trauma's recurrent onslaught on the victim results in "ruptured" faculties or the victim's inability to demarcate the beginning and ending of the traumatic event; consequently, the victim remains trapped in a violated state. Nevertheless, Felman and Laub contend that by deliberately formulating narratives or externalizing the memory of trauma the victim can be freed from its bombardment. They describe this process in these terms:

> the re-externalization of the event can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself. ... Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim. (69)

It is important to emphasize, as Felman and Laub note, that redemption is not an inevitable consequence of testimony; rather it is determined by "what occurs in the social process of witnessing" (Humphrey 118). In other words, the witness's response to the victim's expression of pain can either facilitate or impede his/her recovery from violence.

Veena Das expresses a similar opinion on the relationship between testimony, witnessing and healing. Citing Wittgenstein, Das asserts that the expression of pain is an act that seeks acknowledgment of pain (328). To say "I am in pain" is not merely "indicative"; "it is not a referential statement that is simply pointing to an inner object" (qtd. in Das 328). Instead, to express pain is "to move out of an inexpressible privacy and suffocation of … pain" (328). With this in mind, any act committed by the witness that fails to acknowledge the victim's expression of pain imprisons pain and prevents catharsis.

Noria suffers greatly when the residents in her community, the press and the liberation leaders fail to acknowledge her pain. Following her discovery of Vutha The Second's death:

> [Noria] roamed around the settlement shouting that she wanted the bastards who
> had killed her son. She was prepared to kill them with her own bare hands, she
> said. ... Towards dawn, her voice became hoarse. Although she was not yet tired
> of going from street to street, she could not yell her challenge to the killers
> anymore. She went back to her shack, only to find it a sheet of flame. (Mda 178;
> ch. 9)

Noria's hysteria communicates her pain. Nevertheless, her voicing of outrage is suppressed by her community's paralysis and, then, by its attempt to silence her by burning down her shack. The press, on the other hand, exploits Noria's loss by appropriating and manipulating her expression of pain. It opportunistically uses Vutha The Second's death to attract readers and to make political statements that decry the liberation movement. According to the narrator:

> Newspaper reporters … ask her silly questions such as what her views are on the
> sorry fact that her son was killed by his own people. They are keen to trap her

into saying something damaging, so that they can have blazing headlines the next

day. (Mda 5, ch. 1)

The leaders of the liberation movement also minimize Noria's pain. They display their hypocrisy by "[expressing] their heartfelt sorrow at the death of her son", but subsequently "warn Noria very strongly that she must not speak to anyone about it, especially the newspaper people, because this would take the struggle for freedom a step backwards" (Mda 162, ch. 9). Instead of acknowledging Noria's pain by acquiescing to her request that they publicly apologize for Vutha The Second's death and "[reprimand] those who were responsible for it … [the leaders call] her privately, and [add] insult to injury by saying that her child, who was only five years old, was not completely blameless" (Mda 166; ch. 9). For the leaders of the liberation movement, Noria's anguish is of little importance in comparison to the public image of the struggle for freedom.

In contrast, Toloki genuinely acknowledges Noria's pain and facilitates her recovery from violence. He demonstrates this by crying after she tells him about the events that led to Vutha The Second's death. Although seemingly inconsequential, his compassionate response is meaningful when compared to the ways in which the community, the press and the liberation leaders suppress, exploit and minimize Noria's expression of loss. Toloki's desire to bear witness to Noria's sorrows, in turn, restores her voice, which, prior to his show of empathy, had been silenced and distorted.

While testimony restores Noria's voice, it enables Toloki's reintegration into society. Unlike Noria, who "has always lived in communion with her fellow-villagers", Toloki vowed not to

have "anything to do with any of the people of his village who have settled in the city" because, like his father, they denigrated him throughout his childhood (Mda 8, ch. 1). He therefore chose to live on the margins of society. One could say that trauma causes Toloki to "[inhabit] a liminal space, which is both part of society but removed from society" (Hamber and Wilson 3). Noria, however, changes Toloki's attitude by reminding him of positive aspects of his childhood. She recalls the national art competition that he won, which led to the appearance of his drawing in a calendar for April. She also informs Toloki that, "at his school they were proud, and through all the years, it was always April on the classroom wall" (Mda 61; ch. 4). By reviving memories that confirm Toloki's worth in society, Noria convinces him to abandon a reclusive lifestyle and reintegrate into society without the trappings of his eccentric funeral attire on which he depended to feel like a valued person. Toloki's re-integration into society, however, could not have happened had he not testify to Noria about his abusive childhood and, in turn, gained full knowledge of himself, which had been hampered by a predominance of negative views.

Toloki and Noria's recovery from violence is symbolically represented by an "aloed" bath, which they take after telling their memories of violence (Mda 180; ch.9). What is most noteworthy about the bath is its likeness to the narrator's description of the ritual cleansing of the hands in "aloed" water after a funeral (Mda 180, ch.9). The washing of the hands in a communal basin is meant to purge the body of impure and harmful elements associated with death such as malicious spirits, adversity or suffering. Noria fills a basin with "aloed" water and beckons Toloki to take a bath. They then "dazedly" wash each other's bodies, after which Noria "throws the remaining water outside" (Mda 180, ch. 9). The bath and Noria's act of throwing away the water symbolize that they are now purged of the life-depriving presence of pain.

Like the expression of memory, Mda illustrates that art is therapeutic. The multicolored shack that Toloki helps Noria to build because her home had been set alight incites their laughter. More importantly, it mobilizes the residents of the informal settlement out of the fear and paralysis caused by Vutha The Second's death. Upon viewing the shack, the residents "marvel at the workmanship, and at how the plastic and canvas of different colours have been woven together to form patterns that seem to say something to the viewer" (Mda 61; ch. 4). Perhaps the shack communicated a message of solidarity and resilience because it motivates the residents to normalize their community. The children sing and bring water for Noria to plaster mud on the floor of her new home. The women "[follow] the lead of their children [and] [bring] all sorts of household items to the shack", which Noria will need until "she has found herself" (Mda 62; ch. 4). The residents therefore gain inspiration from the shack, as a manifestation of art, to recreate themselves and to mend their community in the aftermath of violence.

Although a symbol of reconstruction, it is more accurate to say that the shack has a disruptive function. In explaining the function of art in relation to violence, Andrew Armstrong cites Soyinka and Okri whom he claims "see the work of the artist in an atmosphere of chaos as an irruption within the violence and chaos around" (176). According to Armstrong, Okri asserts that art "has to disturb something" while Soyinka argues that art forms "its own space of excoriation and exorcism" (176). Both analyses of the function of art are illuminating. One can therefore say that as a symbol of rebirth and survival, Noria's shack disturbs the milieu of the informal settlement by exorcizing the scourge of violence and destruction.

Like art, Mda conveys that commitment to the community is restorative. Noria volunteers at Madimbhaza's home, the "dumping ground", where she selflessly cares for children orphaned by the "war that is raging in the land" or abandoned by parents because of their disabilities (Mda 157; ch. 8). She gains no salary for the work she does, explaining to Toloki that "she … [receives] fulfillment from helping others" (Mda 126; ch. 6). By giving back to the community in spite of the fact that much has been taken from her, Noria demonstrates that healing involves "[knowing] how to live" beyond suffering and loss (Mda 158; ch. 8). She reveals that there is no better way to live than to promote life by redressing the repercussions of violence. Noria does this by caring for others who have also suffered in life and by working for the betterment of her community.

Notably, women play an active role in reconstructing the community. Toloki observes that mainly women attend a community meeting at which they express their grievances to the leaders of the liberation movement about the escalating political violence in their informal settlement. He also notices that the women make practical suggestions regarding the community's problems. Men, on the other hand, "[make] high-flown speeches that display eloquence, but are short on practical solutions" (Mda 161; ch. 9). Toloki's observations prompt him to conclude that, "the salvation of the settlement lies in the hands of women" (Mda 165; ch. 9). This commentary may be read as exclusionary and divisive. Nevertheless, Mda alludes to an indisputable point: most men are dangerously preoccupied with the wielding power, which is known to generate violence. Women, on the other hand, are often left to mend a destroyed community.

As has been shown, *Ways of Dying* demonstrates that testimony, art and a commitment to the community can facilitate healing. Healing signifies the social process through which the victim is alleviated from the burden of pain and the community is purged of the fear and destruction caused by violence. The latter explanation of healing is also prominent in *She Plays with the Darkness* in which Mda draws a connection between the memory of African traditions and the restoration of the moral fabric of African societies plagued by violence.

Memory in *She Plays with the Darkness*

Wole Soyinka argues that the tendency of African writers to fixate on "the splendors of the past" amounts to nothing more than "escapist indulgence" (18-19). Soyinka seems to imply that African writers' preoccupation with the past and neglect of the present have worsened volatile realities in post-colonial African nations. According to Soyinka, the African writer:

> was content to turn his eye backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for
>
> forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present. But never inwards,
>
> never truly into the present, never into the obvious symptoms of the niggling,
>
> warning, predictable present, from which alone lay the salvation of ideals. (18)

In this essay, which was first published in 1967, Soyinka, however, asserts that his criticism does not apply to Black South African writers who relentlessly address the dehumanizing realities of apartheid in their literature. Although Soyinka excluded Black South African writers from his critique then, would it now apply to Mda who largely focuses on the splendors of the African past in *She Plays with the Darkness*?

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the splendors of the past have a didactic function in relation to the present. Mda therefore contradicts Soyinka's assertion that African writers attempt to escape the present by invoking the past. For Mda, the splendors of the past translate into African traditions that attach importance to the community. In this novel, he suggests that political corruption, violence and moral degeneration in Lesotho occurred because modernity alienated Africans from their roots. Mda focuses particularly on the modern and divisive tendency of attaching more value to the needs of the individual than to those of the community. Essentially, he argues that the problems of the "modern African state" will be resolved once Africans (namely politicians, civil servants and the middleclass) return to their traditions and relearn the value of community.

Comaroff and Comaroff define modernity as a "European myth" on "Progress" (xii). They claim that it "has come to circulate, almost worldwide, as a metaphor of new means and ends, of new materialities and meanings … of great transformations that have reshaped social and economic relations on a global scale" (xiii). They also note that some theorists contend that these transformations have "the universal effect of eroding cultural differences" (Comaroff and Comaroff xi). They claim, however, that although real social, economic and political forces emanating from the West have altered societies throughout the world, modernity is largely ideological:

> It should no longer need saying that the self-sustaining antinomy between
>
> tradition and modernity underpins a long-standing European myth ... This story is,
>
> in fact, a Progress. It tells of the inexorable, if always incomplete, advancement
>
> of the primitive: of his conversion to a world religion, of his gradual incorporation

into civil society, of improvement in his material circumstances, of the rationalization of his beliefs and practices. (Comaroff and Comaroff xii)

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda illustrates that many Africans accepted this Eurocentric ideology of progress and, consequently, rejected their customs and values, namely, those that recognize the welfare of society.

Radisene's quest for wealth in the lowlands causes him to develop cultural amnesia. This is shown when he returns to his village after twenty years to herd cattle simply for pleasure. Radisene solicits the villagers to "rent" him their cattle "for one day" to "satisfy his craving" (p. 111). Whereas some villagers refused his request, stating that "they had not heard of anyone renting cattle before", others suspiciously agreed but "instructed their herdboys secretly to watch him, and see to it that he did nothing harmful to their animals" (p. 111). Radisene treats culture as a purchasable item instead of a way of life, as something that can be called on when needed and discarded after use. He is unable to grasp the significance of culture because vanity obstructs his comprehension of a social order that values the community over the individual.

Radisene's lack of concern for society is best illustrated by the corrupt tactics through which he accumulates his wealth. His preoccupation with money reduces him to an exploitative crook masquerading as a lawyer who claims to be "dedicated to working for [the] nation" (Mda 62; ch. 5). He acquires his wealth by stealing money that insurance companies provide to the dependents of people killed in vehicle accidents. He colludes with police officers, doctors and government ministers, who, as civil servants, should be committed to the welfare of the nation,

but, instead, willingly participate in exploiting the poor in exchange for bribes. Radisene sacrifices morality for the mansion he envisions constructing once he has accrued enough money. The satirical phrase "working for the nation" therefore exposes his hypocritical concern for society.

Like Radisene, the political leaders of Lesotho undermine the stability and welfare of the nation to satisfy their desire for wealth and power. The coup of 1970 marked the beginning of twenty-five years of political instability and moral decline in Lesotho. Instead of transferring power to the Congress Party after losing the elections in 1970, the incumbent National Party, under the leadership of Leabua, continued to exercise its control throughout the country by deploying terrorist tactics, which intimidated the citizens into accepting its illegitimate government. Then in 1986, with the support of the West, the South African government conspired with Leabua's soldiers and overthrew his government, which had become "leftist" throughout the years and had allied itself with communist nations. In this junta, the soldiers "looted the national coffers empty and covered themselves with layers and layers of the fat of the land" (Mda 132; ch. 10). When it seemed as if Lesotho proved to be a democratic nation after the elections held in 1993, another coup, led by King Letsie the Third, erupted in 1994. He ousted the legitimate government of the Congress Party and, like the despots before him, terrorized the citizens of Lesotho.

Like the leaders of Lesotho, Trooper Motsohi is alienated from his society and its values. After stringently enforcing the coup of 1970, he works for Radisene's insurance-scam business, as an informant, alerting Radisene to motor-vehicle accidents. His antagonistic stance towards society is also seen when he rapes Mothers-of-the-Daughters, his mother-in-law, because his wife,

Tampololo, had rejected him for Radisene. According to the narrator, custom prohibits Trooper Motsohi from touching his mother-in-law. However, he failed to take this into account or the immorality of rape when he decided to violate Mother-of-the-Daughters.

Dikosha escapes the immorality and violence that plague her society by sojourning in the Cave of Barwa. The paintings of the Great Dance of the Strong on the walls of the cave draw her to this sanctuary. The Great Dance of the Strong is the healing ritual through which the ancient Barwa maintained the well-being of their society. For the Barwa, songs and dance extracted pain from the body. Our understanding of healing, however, should not be confined to the preservation of health as Dikosha participates in the Great Dance of the Strong because she feels alienated in her own village. The rampant spread of violence, the destruction of African traditions and Radisene's transformation into an immoral person are too much for Dikosha to bear. She therefore finds respite and a place of belonging among the Barwa "when the world was becoming too thorny" (Mda 51; ch. 4).

In describing the Great Dance of the Strong, Mda draws our attention to the importance of memory. He proposes that the memory of African traditions is the antidote to Lesotho's social and political problems. This is because he attributes violence and moral degeneration in Lesotho to the erosion of African traditions and to the implantation of the ways of the West in this society. Mda criticizes the western values of individualism and materialism, which he suggests generate corruption, greed and immorality. He implies that the memory of African traditions can counteract the degenerative state of affairs in Lesotho by conveying that a society is bound to disintegrate once it has forgotten itself, especially the importance of the community.

The Aesthetics of Memory in *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*

In *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda uses a range of literary devices to represent memory in its various forms. The following paragraphs describe the ways in which Mda uses plot, narrative voice, characterization, repetition, silence and oral traditions to represent social, individual and traumatic memory.

It is important to start by acknowledging that all forms of memory are narratives. Disputing a common misconception, Fentress and Wickham argue that "memory is not a passive receptacle, but … a *process* of active restructuring in which elements may be retained, reordered, or suppressed" (40). The term "process" in Fentress and Wickham's definition refers to narrative construction. Similarly, Paul Connerton explicitly states that "to remember is not to recall events as isolated; it is to become capable of forming meaningful narrative sequences" (26). These narrative sequences "[represent] the past and present as connected to each other" (Connerton 24).

Having mentioned this similarity, there are obvious differences between social, individual and traumatic memory. Social memory, or collective memory, signifies "the shared views about the past which inform the identity of a social group" (Innes, 1998, para. 5). According to Matthew Innes, social memory should not be interpreted as "the shared culture of a group" (para. 6). He clarifies that unlike shared culture, which is not always about the past, social memory "relates to the past and is transmitted and transmuted from generation to generation" (para. 6). This is done through oral traditions or "oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments"

(Vansina 27). Oral communication, on the other hand, articulates individual memory. Before the moment of utterance, individual memory remains in the recesses of the mind as thoughts. Both social and individual memory in turn address trauma. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). Evident in Caruth's definition of trauma is a description of traumatic memory, which sufficiently portrays its major characteristics.

The plots of *She Plays with the Darkness* and *Ways of Dying* depict contrasting modes of memory. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda represents memory linearly. In this novel, the plot progresses from one historical moment to another, illustrating a chronological ordering of memory. The titles of particular chapters – The Coup - 1970, The Coup - 1986 and The Coup - 1994 – demarcate the temporal parameters of the novel and draw attention to its linearity. *She Plays with the Darkness* represents our tendency to remember sequentially. In *Ways of Dying*, on the other hand, memory is fragmented. In this novel, the plot oscillates between the past and the present. The communal narrator provides partial accounts of the central protagonists' memories of violence and, then, returns to current events in their lives. Consequently, the reader is only allowed partial insight into the past until he/she reaches the novel's denouement.

Ways of Dying reflects the fragmented and incoherent character of traumatic memory. Michael Humphrey cites Greenberg who explains that "If trauma creates a separation from the self, a fragmentation of identity, then the process of narrating a trauma mimics this fragmentation"

(112). Similarly, Cathy Caruth explains that the victim's memory of trauma is invariably fragmented because of the paradox that characterizes a traumatic experience:

> Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. (91-92)

This paradox – the experience of witnessing yet not knowing – results because trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" by the victim (Caruth 4). In the light of this, the condition of not knowing violence in full when it occurs poses a challenge for the victim who attempts to recall it. The difficulty of narrating violence is further compounded by the victim's experience of pain which "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (Scarry 366). Since the narration of violence is central in *Ways of Dying*, Mda attempts to capture trauma – the incapacitating effect violence has on memory and voice – in the structure of the narrative itself. In a disjointed narrative structure that delays the articulation of violence, Mda re-enacts the rupture of the victim's memory of violence, which obstructs a coherent and forthright narration of his/her violation.

Mda also represents traumatic memory in the narrative voice. In *Ways of Dying*, the reader is obstructed from witnessing the protagonists testify about their experiences with violence. When the protagonists are about to share memories about violence, the communal narrator intervenes to tell their stories. This technique is also apparent in Ben Okri's novel, *Dangerous Love.* Andrew Armstrong states that in *Dangerous Love*, the character "Okoro is gripped by a form of

speechlessness, 'disabled speech' – he never speaks directly to the reader about his experiences in the war" (178). Instead, "These [experiences] are often mediated through another vision/voice. In this case, Okoro's memory of the war is told through the mediating vision/voice of the artist, Omovo" (Armstrong 178). Drawing attention to the silencing effect of violence, Armstrong states that:

> in a situation of trauma, where the witness is rendered silent, made unspeakable,
> there is a need for a mediating voice to speak/write the narrative of devastation …
> Omovo gives voice to Okoro's scarred memories. (178)

Armstrong sheds light on the debilitating effect that violence has on the victim's or witness's ability to narrate violence; hence, requiring the intervention of a "mediating voice". In *Ways of Dying*, the narrative voice of the communal narrator undertakes this mediative role.

As silence is also a symptom of trauma, Mda uses it as a metaphor to address the erosion of the memory of African culture. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, the chapter titled *The Silence* explains that Dikosha's practice of rarely speaking when Radisene was temporarily away from the village intensified when he departed for the lowlands indefinitely. In the lowlands, Radisene learned to reject anything African and to embrace all things Western. In light of this, silence symbolizes rupture, the alienation of the self from an integral part of its being. Put another way, silence signifies Radisene's estrangement from his culture, epitomized by his inability to remember the values and customs of his village. In this novel, silence is a fitting metaphor for trauma in consideration of the violence that characterizes Radisene's rejection of his roots.

Mda also uses repetition to depict traumatic memory. This is noticeable in *She Plays with the Darkness* where Mda employs recurrent memories about violence to signify trauma. Frank Ochberg states that it is often the case that the victim or witness of violence "persistently [re-experiences] … the traumatic event … as recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections" (Ochberg 7). In this novel, Radisene repeatedly recalled or spoke about being whipped by Trooper Motsohi for breaking the curfew implemented by the government during the coup of 1970. In the light of Ochberg's assertion, Radisene's inability to forget these events demonstrates trauma.

To represent social memory, Mda uses the narrative voice and oral traditions. In *Ways of Dying,* the omniscient, communal narrator represents social memory. The narrator emphasizes that "the community is the owner of the story" not the individual (Mda 8; ch. 1). To illustrate this, the identity of the narrator shifts throughout the novel so that different members of the community share stories about the protagonists' lives. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, on the other hand, Mda uses oral traditions such as songs, poetry and story telling to depict social memory. In this novel, women sing "of husbands who have been devoured by the city of gold" while *sefela* poetry is used to "lament about … the blood of men that was being drained by the mines" (Mda 1, 58; ch. 7, ch.5). It is important to note that Mda does not simply depict oral traditions, but attempts to capture the rhythmic pattern of traditions that are recurrently told throughout the years. He does this by having his characters repeatedly and formulaically use the same "groups of words … to express" the past (Petrov 80).

Unlike social memory, individual memory is characterized by the protagonists' testimonies and thoughts about the past. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, both the narrator and characters testify about the past. In *Ways of Dying*, on the other hand, the central protagonists do not provide first-person accounts about the past. Instead the protagonists' testimonies are co-opted and told in the third-person by the communal narrator. As has been said, Mda uses this technique to represent traumatic memory.

In the light of the themes and aesthetics discussed above, one could characterize *She Plays with the Darkness* and *Ways of Dying* as fictional projects on the representation of memory. Mda represents memory as a vehicle through which African societies can be reconstructed after violence. For Mda, the restoration and preservation of African societies depend on the memory of African culture. Likewise, he represents the expression of memory as a practice that can relieve victims of violence from the experience of trauma. Like memory, Mda also suggests that through art and a commitment to the community, African societies can counteract the debilitating effects of violence.

CONCLUSION

Violence continues to be a dominant theme in Black South African literature. *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* overwhelm the reader with stories about domestic violence, political violence, the destruction of African traditions, rape, coups and other brutal acts, capturing the paralysis imposed on life in African societies laboring under these circumstances. By focusing on these issues, Mda broadens the thematic discourses in Black South African literature, shifting our attention away from the violence of apartheid. His endeavor to creatively narrate the experience of violence through allegory and satire also sets his novels apart from literary works in which Black South African writers tended to utilize realism to depict violence. In his commentaries on violence, Mda focuses on the theme of redemption, exploring ways through which societies and individuals can be redeemed from violence through memory, testimony and art. Like Black South African writers who recurrently wrote about the atrocities committed against Blacks under the apartheid regime, Mda confirms that much can be said about violence and of the suffering it engenders.

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After months and months of fighting me and Tracey were just about to break up, it didn't happen because she told me she was pregnant and after that even though I didn't want the relationship with her I felt that I needed to stay because I didn't want my baby growing up like me without a father so I stayed. It eventually happened and we broke up, it was such a horrible and heart destroying break-up. I felt like I had no hope and no reason to live. Tracey took my son away from me and spread lies about me which the police then got involved and told me I'm not allowed within a 100feet of her. She ... My Overdue Testimony The World Needs To Hear. I grew up in a divorced family. I was the youngest of four. Eyewitness testimony is an important area of research in cognitive psychology and human memory. Juries tend to pay close attention to eyewitness testimony and generally find it a reliable source of information. However, research into this area has found that eyewitness testimony can be affected by many psychological factors In other words, people store information in the way that makes the most sense to them. We make sense of information by trying to fit it into schemas, which are a way of organizing information. Schemas are mental 'units' of knowledge that correspond to frequently encountered people, objects or situations. They allow us to make sense of what we encounter in order that we can predict what is going to happen and what we should do in any given situation. Other false memories implanted with this methodology include having an unpleasant experience with the character Pluto at Disneyland and witnessing physical violence between one's parents (Berkowitz, Laney, Morris, Garry, & Loftus, 2008; Laney & Loftus, 2008). Importantly, once these false memories are implanted—whether through complex methods or simple ones—it is extremely difficult to tell them apart from true memories (Bernstein & Loftus, 2009a; Laney & Loftus, 2008). To conclude, eyewitness testimony is very powerful and convincing to jurors, even though it is not particularly reliable. Identification errors occur, and these errors can lead to people being falsely accused and even convicted.