People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

8 MAY 1945 UNIVERSITY / GUELMA — **جامعة 8 ماي 1945/قالمة**

FACULTY OF LETTERS AND LANGUAGES — **كلية الآداب و اللغات**

DEPARTMENT OF LETTERS & ENGLISH LANGUAGE — **قسم الآداب و اللغة الإنجليزية**

Option: Literature

Identity in the Post-Apartheid Novel: A Case Study of Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Language and Culture

BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Chairwoman: Dr. BOUALLEGUE Leyla	**(MCB) University of 8 May 1945-Guelma**
Examiner: Dr. CHIHI Soraya	**(MCB) University of 8 May 1945-Guelma**
Supervisor: Dr. BOUALLEGUE Nadjiba	**(MCA) University of 8 May 1945-Guelma**

Submitted by

Hamoudi Nourhane

Zouai Wassim

Supervised by

Dr. BOUALLEGUE Nadjiba

Verified: 7/7/2025

June 2025

Dedication 1

In the Name of the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious

*To the one who taught me how to be strong no matter what, to always look up and never give up, my mother **Naima Herbadji**, I can only hope to become one day the incredible woman she is.*

*To my brother, **Chihab Eddine**, who has always been there for me and with whom I always felt heard and seen.*

*To my sister **Rahaf**, who drives me insane sometimes, yet is the first to hug me when my heart cries.*

*To my little **Iline**, my baby sister who feels like a daughter to me, I carry you in every step and always strive to make you proud of me.*

*To my friends: **Rofaida**, **Amira**, **Maimouna**, **Malek**, **Selsabil**, **Hala**, and **Djomana**, my college family and my voice of reason throughout this journey.*

Thank you…

Nourhane

Dedication 2

In the name of the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious

To those who came before me, whose resilience and sacrifices made this path possible.

To my mother and father

For their unwavering support, selfless sacrifices, and the values they instilled in me

Your quiet strength and constant presence have carried me through.

To my friends, ***Akram****,* ***Islam****,* ***Ahmed****, and* ***Aissam***

Thank you for making this journey not only possible, but wholesome, filled with encouragement, and shared purpose, your companionship brought ease, humor and balance to this journey

Thank you…

Wassim

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Allah (SWT) for giving us the strength and guidance to carry out this work.

This work would not have been possible without the support, guidance and encouragement of our supervisor throughout this journey.

Dr. BOUALLEGUE Nadjiba provided unwavering guidance, insightful advice, and valuable information, and offered motivation and clarity at every stage of the work. Her encouragement made a lasting impact, while her thoughtful input and steady support helped refine our ideas and strengthen the overall direction of this piece.

We would also like to thank **Dr. BOUALLEGUE Leyla**, and **Dr. CHIHI Soraya** for taking the time to review our humble work, their attention and feedback are much appreciated.

Abstract

This study examines how identity is shaped by the apartheid regime in South Africa, drawing on postcolonial and psychoanalytic theories. Using Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995) as a case study, it highlights the complex, evolving nature of identity during the nation's transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid society. The dissertation emphasizes the struggle for self-definition amid the lingering psychological and sociopolitical effects of apartheid on both individual and collective consciousness. Mda portrays a society grappling with instability and caught between tradition and modernity, where communal rituals often clash with the realities of urban life. His use of nonlinear narrative techniques mirrors the fragmented experience of memory and trauma, reflecting how both personal and collective suffering disrupt linear notions of time and healing. The study argues that this dual trauma is negotiated through communal mourning, which becomes a vital process for both individual recovery and national reconciliation. These rituals not only honor the dead but also restore hope and cohesion in a fragmented society, fostering a renewed sense of unity and shared identity.

Key words: Identity, Post-apartheid Novel, *Ways of Dying*, Trauma, Mourning, Funeral Rituals.

Table of Contents

Dedication 1…….……I

Dedication 2……II

Acknowledgments……...III

Abstract……...……IV

Table of contents…….…..…V

Introduction……...……1

Chapter I: The Historical and Theoratical Background of South African Apartheid…..4

I.1. Historical Background of Apartheid in South Africa**……...4**

I.2**.** Beyond Fixed Categories: The Intersectional Construction of Identity**……...6**

I.3. Representation of Post-Apartheid Identity in Fiction**…….……12**

Chapter II: Identity and the legacy of Apartheid in *Ways of Dying*…….17

II.1. The Struggle for Personal Identity**……...17**

II.2. The Impact of Apartheid on Community and Collective identity**……24**

II.3. Mda's Narrative Technique and Its Impact on Identity Representation**……...28**

Chapter III: Trauma and Healing in *Ways of Dying*: Personal and Collective Dimensions

…….….33

III.1 Collective and Personal Trauma in Fragments: Memory in a Nonlinear Path**.....33**

III.2 Funeral Rituals as Collective Healing**……...40**

Conclusion…….…...45

Works Cited……..……48

الملخص

Résumé

Introduction

In the aftermath of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, literature has become a crucial medium for confronting the psychological, social, and cultural consequences of institutionalized racial oppression. Post-apartheid fiction, in particular, offers a reflective space for engaging with themes such as memory, violence, and trauma, and for tracing their enduring effects on individual and collective identity. Among the writers who have powerfully engaged with these issues is Zakes Mda, whose novel *Ways of Dying* (1995) gives voice to marginalized communities and silenced histories. Through the lens of grief, trauma, and identity reconstruction, Mda explores the fragmented realities of life in the early years of South Africa's democratic transition. His depiction of mourning and storytelling becomes a form of resistance and survival, especially among the urban poor—those left most vulnerable in the wake of national liberation.

This study seeks to examine how identity is constructed and reimagined under the dual pressures of apartheid-era trauma and the unstable conditions of post-apartheid society in *Ways of Dying*. It aims to explore how identity is shaped by systems of historical violence and renegotiated through trauma, memory, and collective healing. In Mda's novel, identity is not treated as a fixed or essential trait, but as an evolving, intersectional process embedded in social marginalization and historical memory. Through its symbolic language and nonlinear narrative, *Ways of Dying* portrays identity as something remapped and reconstructed through everyday acts of mourning and communal resilience. The characters' identities, shaped by historical wounds and systemic exclusion, are ultimately reclaimed through the restorative power of collective storytelling and shared grief.

Despite South Africa's political transformation, the lived experiences of poverty, homelessness, violence, and emotional displacement have persisted for many, undermining

the idealized promises of democracy. This study responds to the gap in literary scholarship that overlooks how identity continues to be shaped and reshaped under the lingering weight of apartheid trauma. Furthermore, the identity of post-apartheid remains underexamined within the academic context of our institution, making this research both relevant and timely.

The distinctiveness of this research is further emphasized by its interdisciplinary and thoughtfully chosen theoretical approach, drawing on postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, and intersectionality. Foundational thinkers, such as, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Homi K. Bhabha inform discussions of identity formation, othering, and hybridity. The intersectional framework provided by Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge is essential in examining how race, gender, and class intersect in the construction of postcolonial subjectivity. bell hooks' critique of Black invisibility and marginality also informs the analysis, particularly in relation to the erasure of the urban poor. Finally, Kai Erikson's theory of collective trauma is employed to understand how trauma is socially experienced and remembered, shaping not only individual consciousness but also collective identity and healing practices.

This dissertation is structured into three chapters. The first chapter lays the historical and theoretical groundwork by providing an overview of apartheid's systemic violence, the sociopolitical context of post-apartheid society, and key theoretical concepts such as identity, trauma, and segregation. This chapter highlights how literature functions as a powerful medium through which post-apartheid identity is expressed, negotiated, and reimagined. The second chapter offers a close literary analysis of *Ways of Dying*, focusing on three dimensions: the struggle for personal identity, the impact of apartheid on community and collective identity, and the novel's use of nonlinear narrative techniques to reflect fragmented identity formation. Moreover, the third chapter delves into the themes of trauma, mourning,

and healing, divided into two parts: the first section examines how trauma—both personal and collective—is represented and remembered; the second section explores funeral rituals and communal mourning as essential processes of healing and identity reconstruction. Together, these chapters argue that *Ways of Dying* reveals how the negotiation of trauma through memory and ritual becomes a crucial path toward reclaiming fragmented identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter I: The Historical and Theoretical Background of South African Apartheid

This chapter provides the historical and theoretical framework for understanding South African apartheid, organized into three sections. The first section examines the historical context of apartheid in South Africa, exploring apartheid and post-apartheid as distinct terms and within their South African context, alongside discussions of post-apartheid racism, segregation, and violence. The second section delves into theories analyzing the complexity of identity within South African society. Finally, the third section explores the representation of post-apartheid identity in fiction.

I.1 Historical Background of Apartheid in South Africa

South Africa's rich history traces back to the indigenous Khoisan and Bantu-speaking peoples, who settled in the region over 2,000 years ago. European contact began in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established the Cape Colony as a supply station for ships traveling to East Africa, India, and the Far East. The British later occupied the colony in 1795. The discovery of gold and diamonds in the 19th century spurred significant economic growth and fostered the rise of labor unions. This period of transformation culminated in the founding of the National Party (NP) in 1914, shortly after the establishment of the Union of South Africa. Following the general election of 1948, the NP rose to power and instituted apartheid—a systemic program of racial segregation and oppression—enforced by the White minority upon the non-White majority (“History of South Africa” 14-16)

In "The Lasting Effects of Apartheid," Rashondria Daniel defines apartheid, drawing from *Britannica*. The term, meaning "apartness" in Afrikaans—a South African language derived from Dutch—refers to a policy designed to control relations between White and non-White populations in South Africa. This racially motivated system enforced segregation, with a predominantly Black majority subjected to the dominance of a small White minority, who wielded superior control over laws and governance with a poor selection of professions for the

indigenous population. Ranging from maids and meat markets to gold mines. Rooted in racist doctrines, apartheid's enduring impact continues to shape South Africa's political and social landscape well into the twenty first century (89).

Under the National Party, which formally implemented apartheid after coming to power in 1948, Black South Africans faced severe oppression in their own land. Far-right policies enacted by the party subjected the indigenous population to relentless scrutiny and systemic injustice. In contrast The ANC Youth League, comprising the youth wing of the African National Congress, emerged as an opposition to the NP, fostering many future leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu ("History of South Africa" 16-17). Racism persisted not only during apartheid but also throughout the transitional period and into the post-apartheid era.

Henning Melber and Christopher Saunders assert that the transitional period spans from the end of apartheid in 1990 to the first democratic elections in 1994, following extensive negotiations between de Klerk and the ANC in February 1990 (10). This era marked a significant sociopolitical transformation, characterized by upheaval and change. The release of Nelson Mandela, after nearly three decades of imprisonment, and the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) symbolized the beginning of this critical phase. It is also defined by rising tensions between the armed ANC forces and that of the NP. In fear of a brewing civil war de Klerk held negotiations "de Klerk could have held on to power for at least another period of years had he wished to do so. In first withdrawing from Namibia and then moving to formal negotiations in South Africa itself, the apartheid regime was looking for rewards and hoped to be able to manage change believing that any alternative was less desirable" (Melber and Saunders 11).

The post-apartheid period in South Africa began in 1994, marked by the country's first democratic elections and Nelson Mandela's presidency. The African National Congress (ANC),

legalized in 1990 under President F.W. de Klerk, emerged as the dominant democratic party, spearheading efforts to dismantle the racial hierarchy entrenched during apartheid. A new constitution was introduced, aiming to ensure equal rights and representation for all citizens. However, despite these foundational changes, the legacy of apartheid persisted, deeply rooted in colonial agendas. Disparities in employment, education, and wealth distribution remained pervasive, highlighting the enduring effects of systemic inequality and oppression (Greffrath 167).

In “Exploring the Salience of Intergenerational Trauma Among Children and Grandchildren of Victims of Apartheid Era Gross Human Rights Violations”, Cyril Kenneth Adonis addresses that these oppressive practices not only inflicted profound trauma on those who lived through these periods of strife but also left a lasting legacy of intergenerational trauma. The repercussions of apartheid continue to shape the lives of descendants, perpetuating the psychological and social scars of the past.

I.2. Beyond Fixed Categories: The Intersectional Construction of Identity

Identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct, rooted in self-perception, human experience, and cultural frameworks. According to Michael S. Merry in his article titled 'Identity,' identity often entails the varied and complex forms of self-expression. It illustrates how a person connects and forms attachments to their historical, social, and cultural surroundings over a lifetime. People, knowingly or unknowingly, prioritize and commit to these sometimes conflicting bonds formed with others and their environment (2). Identity and its complexities cannot be confined to a single, solid definition. Its multifaceted nature has led many scholars and theorists to explore it through various lenses, emphasizing that identity is shaped by the intersectionality of multiple factors. Theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha, Michel Foucault, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks have all contributed to this ongoing discourse.

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge note that intersectionality has been widely used across various fields, from scholarly work to policy-making, with diverse groups like activists and government officials adopting the term to fit their needs. In *Intersectionality* (2019), the authors define it as:

> Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences . . . people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (2)

This framework highlights how multiple, overlapping systems—such as race, class, and gender—shape unique experiences of marginalization and privilege, urging against single-axis analysis.

Collins and bilge argue that identities are formed through overlapping systems of power, such as racism, patriarchy and capitalism. They write, "intersectionality as an analytic tool illuminates how power relations are intertwined and mutually constitutive" (2). In post-apartheid context these power structures help explain how apartheid's racial hierarchies still persist, shaped by legacies of racial discrimination, gender-based oppression, and economic policies that negatively effect black women and poor communities. These intersecting factors of class, gender sexuality and race, all intertwine in the formation of identity.

Alongside shaping identities, class, gender and race also contribute in creating what Spivak calls the subaltern. In the study of "Investigating Identities, Hybridity and Resistance: A Critical Study of Postcolonialism Studies", Spivak's subalternity "refers to the underrepresentation of some voices in colonial and post-colonial discourses, particularly women and other oppressed groups" (Khan et al. 308). She argues that the subaltern, women in

particular, are not only oppressed within colonial structures, but are also restricted by patriarchal hierarchies and class-based societies which contribute to shaping identities. The intersections of these factors force the identity of these marginalized groups invisible and suppressed. In order to give a voice to these silenced voices and identities, contemporary narratives particularly those within postcolonial studies, must confront this crisis directly. Therefore, Spivak asserts that "postcolonial literature ought to shift towards centering those silenced voices and take back their agency by firmly rooting them within the context of a post-colonial world" (qtd. in Khan et al 308). As khan et al. highlight that the issue of identity remains at the heart of postcolonial literature (308).

The complexity of identity is thoroughly examined by Homi K. Bhabha who explores the intricacies of identity through his three major theories, hybridity, third space, and mimicry. His ideas challenge rigid binaries such as colonizer/colonized, Self/Other and emphasize the fluid, contested nature of identity and culture. In his book *Nation and Narration* (1990), Bhabha argues that identity is not fixed; rather it is fluid and subject to change over time as a result of various factors such as, colonialism, slavery, displacement, or immigration. He contradicts the notions that nations exist as one unit suggesting instead that they are dynamic and constantly evolving. In this matter, he argues:

> The nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor. Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the 'middle passage', or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people (291).

Through this argument, Bhabha argues that concepts of identity, home, and belonging are not fixed constructs; rather they are fluid marked by constant transformation.

Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity, which he defines in his book:

> "Hybridity is the perplexity of the living as it interrupts the representation of the fullness of life; it is an instance of iteration, in the minority discourse, of the time of the arbitrary sign — 'the minus in the origin' — through which all forms of cultural meaning are open to translation because their enunciation resists totalization" (314).

This notion of hybridity is crucial within postcolonial discourses, as it challenges the rigid boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized. This process establishes a third liminal space in which identities are formed. In other words, Bhabha suggests that there is an in-between space where emerging new identities are negotiated, asserting that "what emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (4). In alignment with Bhabha's perspective, Mohammed in his study "Hybridity in Homi K. Bhabha's Theory and its Relevance to *Absalom and Achitophel*," explains Bhabha's concept of hybridity as a dynamic process of cultural mixing that blurs fixed cultural boundaries. It challenges binary divisions like colonizer/colonized and center/periphery by focusing on the fluid, in-between spaces created through cultural encounters (1731).

Hybridity creates a sense of ambivalence when it comes to shaping identities, illustrating that identities are not static but are always in flux. This ambivalence is primarily influenced by what Lacan refers to as the Other. Drawing on psychoanalysis concepts, Bhabha has applied Lacan's ideas about the concept of the Other to demonstrate that identity is shaped by both internal and external forces. The ambivalence then arises when the colonizer admires and simultaneously resents the influence of the colonized. Bhabha posits that identity "is constituted through the locus of the Other which suggests both that the object of identification is ambivalent" (313).

Furthermore, this liminal space leads to what Bhabha calls mimicry. He defines it in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) as “the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (122). Bhabha asserts that the use of mimicry by colonial powers creates ambivalent identities that both imitate and subvert colonial authority. This imitation creates a gap, or slippage as Bhabha notes “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (122). Henceforth, mimicry undermines and exposes the fragility of colonial powers, producing identities resistant to such powers. Khan et al. argues that mimicry is inherently never perfect, this act of imitating the colonizer in fact paves the way for resistance (312). Consequently, “the ambivalence of mimicry subverts this colonial authority in the sense that the colonized subject could never quite actually become like the colonizer himself and, therefore, continually destabilizes the colonial power dynamic” (312). In this context, resistance evokes what Freud calls the uncanny, described in *The Uncanny* (1919) as “the terrifying that leads back to something once very familiar” (1-2). Bhabha links the uncanny to mimicry, explaining that it emerges from the repression of a 'cultural' unconscious—a liminal state where archaic elements resurface within modernity, fueled by psychic ambivalence or intellectual uncertainty. Freud associates the 'double' with this uncanny process, involving the splitting and interchange of the self (295).

Bhabha’s idea posits that certain fears and aspects of cultural identity are repressed within the cultural unconscious where societies suppress undesirable truths and aspects of history. However, these repressed elements may resurface in moments of transition, resulting in a double or liminal space where the boundaries of identities become fluid. This process inevitably creates a fragmented and unstable identity.

In addition, Bhabha elaborates on the notion of the unhomely describing the dislocation of identity and belonging in colonial/postcolonial contexts. This concept reflects the

psychological trauma of being at home yet estranged by a system built on oppression and aggression. Bhabha notes “the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunction of political existence” (15). The unhomely encapsulates the fragmented diasporic nature of those caught between cultures. Manifesting in experiences and challenges that establish complex identities.

Building on the concept of multifaceted identities, bell hooks delves into the intricacies of Black masculinity, offering a critical lens through which to understand the intersections of race, gender, and power in shaping lived experiences. Black masculinity in American context is shaped by systems of racial discrimination, capitalism, patriarchy and class exploitation. hooks in her book titled *We Are Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* (2004) writes:

> Imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is an interrelated system of domination that will never fully empower black men. Right now that system is symbolically lynching masses of black men, choking off their very life, by making it all but impossible for them to learn basic reading and writing skills in childhood; by the promotion of addiction as the free enterprise system that works to provide unprecedented wealth to a few and short term solace from collective pain for the many; By widespread unemployment; and the continued psychological lure of life-threatening patriarchal masculine behaviors (xi).

hooks highlights the systemic nature of discrimination and the ongoing struggle for economic survival among Black men.

hooks argues that the situation of Black women is more dire than that of Black men. She examines W.E.B. Du Bois, a proponent of women’s rights, who nevertheless adhered to patriarchal definitions of masculinity. Addressing gender equality, hooks writes, “black males seem to see the necessity of black females participating as co-equals… with the implicit

understanding that once freedom was achieved, black females would take their rightful place subordinate to the superior will of men" (7).

hooks also critiques the role of Black women, noting that despite their greater success in education, employment, life expectancy, and lower rates of imprisonment compared to Black men, the broader societal view remains one of disadvantage. This presents a difficult truth: Black men are often more privileged than Black women, even though many Black men still struggle in their pursuit of advancement (hooks 125-126).

Michel Foucault, a renowned French philosopher, explores the complexity of identity through power, discipline, and surveillance. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), he introduces the concept of 'docile bodies,' which are cultivated through discipline. He argues, "discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies…increasing the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishing these forces (in political terms of obedience)" (138). Institutions like schools and prisons impose discipline, shaping identities according to societal norms.

Surveillance plays a crucial role in enforcing power. Foucault writes, "Surveillance, capable of making all visible… had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception" (214). This mechanism of power, the panopticon, ensures continuous self-regulation: "The major effect of the Panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201).

In conclusion, Foucault emphasizes that identity is shaped by power structures and institutional discipline, especially through surveillance, which makes people internalize control and regulate their own behavior.

I.3. Representation of Post-Apartheid Identity in Fiction

The brutal events of the apartheid regime in South Africa had left the country wounded. People were racially discriminated and displaced; families were torn apart, and natives were killed because of this system of segregation and separation. The end of this system did not mean the end of injustice and racism; rather, it raised other issues and crises that fell under the legacies and consequences of apartheid. Identity was one of the main crises in this post-apartheid nation. South African writers, therefore, felt the need to demonstrate this theme in the literary world throughout their writings. In her study, "Depiction of Post-Apartheid Identity in South African Literature: An Examination of Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hilbrow*", Malesela Edward Montle states: "In the light of South Africa attaining democracy, identity-crisis appears to be one of the most undesirable and circumvented apartheid legacies. The majority of post-apartheid South Africans' lives were and are still shaped by the hardships that prevailed over the course of apartheid" (3557).

Among the many works that engage with the complexities of post-apartheid identity, Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998), stands out for its profound illustration of this theme. Magona narrates a fictionalized account of the murder of Amy Biehl, who is a young white American anti-apartheid activist. Mandisa, the killer's mother, tries to give explanations to the mother of the deceased for why her son killed her daughter. In doing so she takes the reader through flashbacks, not only to her son Moxlis' past, but also to her own. So that the reader would be able to sympathize with both the murderer and the mother who raised him (Burmanje 24). Mandisa describes to Amy's mother the disturbing events her son experienced during the apartheid, depicting how her son's identity was shaped by personal and communal factors. From the abonnement of his father to the heartbreaking event of witnessing his friends getting killed by the police with his own youthful eyes.

In Gugutku, the impoverished town referred to as "the Godforsaken place" (*Mother to Mother* 48), Mandisa was forced to live with her family, deprived of land for farming or access to education. Poverty profoundly shaped both her childhood and adulthood, becoming a central factor in her experiences and struggles. This pervasive poverty fueled the anger, violence, and resentment directed toward the oppressive system under which Mandisa and her son lived. It also contributed to the rise of disillusioned and violent youth, shaped by the corruption and hardships of their environment.

In his study, "Accounts of violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Transition towards Democracy in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Nadine Gordimer's *The House Gun*", Ross Burmaje states, "With Mother to Mother, Sindiwe Magona paints a picture of the life of black South Africans during apartheid and puts emphasis on the fact that even in the transitional years after apartheid, violence, crime and racism persisted" (21). Thus, Magona uses Mandisa's perspective to illustrate how identity in the post-apartheid era is shaped by both intergenerational trauma and the socio-economic injustices left as a legacy by the apartheid regime. As a result, both Mxolis and Amy lost their lives and youth; as Mandisa says, "Your daughter. The imperfect atonement of her race. My son. The perfect host of the demons of his" (140).

Alongside *Mother to Mother*, Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit* (2001) also explores the theme of identity through the lens of individual and familial issues. It follows the story of the Ali family, who suffered under the oppressive system, apartheid. Their suffering began nineteen years earlier when François du Boise, a white police officer, raped Lydia. This traumatizing event marked the start of dissolution in the Ali family, through a long, painful journey in which each member was in search for his own identity. The story illustrates how apartheid left families, individuals, and communities scarred, using violence, in its many forms as a tool for terror and control. In her study, "The Past in the Present: Personal and Collective Trauma in

Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*" Ana Miller states, "Lydia's rape is a racially and politically located act of sexual violence that is a specific act perpetrated as part of the apartheid system's endemic use of violence as a tool of terror and control" (150).

Lydia, forced to live with her trauma silently, grew distant from her husband, Silas, creating a cold, uncommunicative marriage. As Miller observes that she "cannot speak to Silas, he makes [her] pain his tragedy" (*Bitter Fruit* 127). Her rape serves as a substantial violation of her selfhood (Miller 151), influencing and reshaping who she was and who she would become as a colored South African woman. Silas, in contrast, suppressed his trauma choosing to deny it, by suspecting that Mickey, their son, is not his, but refuse to believe this suspicious.

Lydia's rape did not only represent a form of torture against her as a woman but also an indirect attack on Silas as a man. Rape, in the apartheid regime, served as a weapon to break bonds between families and communities (Miller 151). Thus, Silas' identity is profoundly influenced by the suppressed trauma, which resurfaced when he encountered du Boise, the white police officer, who raped his wife, after the end of the apartheid.

Finally, Mickey, unaware of the events that had created the coldness and distance between his parents, uncovered the truth through his mother's diary. Lydia had left to build a new life far from her husband and son, as both reminded her of the traumatic incident. Meanwhile, Silas, having lost his job, was struggling to find new ways to move forward. These revelations prompted Mickey to embark on a journey of self-discovery, seeking to understand his identity by exploring his ancestral roots. He ultimately found a sense of belonging at the mosque, where he connected deeply with his grandfather.

Through its characters, *Bitter Fruit* examines the theme of identity in a scarred country. Dangor portrays individuals who struggle with the lack of belonging and miss a sense of belonging as "they negotiate conflicting racial and religious heritages and struggles to fit in anywhere" (Miller 158).

Turning to Nadine Gordimer, a renowned South African writer and political activist, she is celebrated for her works addressing critical issues during apartheid and the subsequent democratization. Her novel, *None to Accompany Me* (1994), published after the end of apartheid, explores the theme of identity, particularly in relation to gender, and examines how the transitional period reshaped women's roles in the emerging democratic nation. As noted in Montle and Mogoboya's study, "Reconstructing Female Voices and Identities in the Democratic Arena: A Study of Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*," the democratic era witnessed women rising to reconstruct their identities, amplify their authentic voices, and thrive in spaces previously dominated by men (104).

Through her characters, Vera and Sibongile, Gordimer skillfully illustrates the complexity of identity, encompassing political, cultural, and gender dimensions. In the study "Crossing Borders: Identity and Place in Nadine Gordimer's Novels", it is observed that both the nation in *None to Accompany Me* and the characters themselves embark on a quest for identity within a political framework (Tecucianu 7). Vera Stark, a white lawyer dedicated to rebuilding her newly reformed country, "aims to redefine women's identity in the democratic society" (Montle and Mogoboya 111). As she navigates life as a white woman in a post-apartheid South Africa, Vera faces the challenge of reconciling her personal identity with a society still grappling with the legacies of apartheid, while also trying to balance her roles as a wife and mother in a society that demands she adhere to traditional expectations.

Similarly, Sibongile, who returns from exile to hold a powerful position in society, also undergoes an identity crisis as she redefines her role and status as a Black woman. However, both she and Vera face numerous challenges that constantly remind them of their gender. Women in positions of influence and power, like Sibongile, are often scrutinized more harshly, with any mistake they make reflecting not only on themselves but also on all women aspiring to hold such roles (Montle and Mogoboya 105).

In conclusion, apartheid did not truly end in 1994, as history often suggests; its influence continued to shape the lives of South Africans in every aspect, including their sense of self and belonging. Writers such as Gordimer, Dangor, and Magona effectively address the theme of identity in their literary works, portraying it as a complex and evolving issue that is shaped by the political, cultural, economic, gendered, and racial dynamics of a society.

Chapter II: Identity and the legacy of Apartheid in *Ways of Dying*

The second chapter is analytical, it explores the theme of identity and the legacy of apartheid in Zakes Mda's *Ways of dying*. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on the character of Toloki and his quest for his own personal identity, which unfolds while he is serving others in their mourning rituals as a professional mourner while dealing with his own internal struggles. The second section examines the impact of apartheid and its divisive structures on the formation of community collective identity. Finally, the last section analyzes Mda's narrative techniques including the use of the first-person plural, narrative, fragmentation, and irony—and how these narrative choices shape the representation of identity in the novel.

II.1. The Struggle for Personal Identity

In a country still bleeding and recovering from the apartheid system, South Africa struggles to redefine itself. Freedom did not bring instant peace. South Africans continued to pay for the violence they had to endure, even after the apartheid. This raised an important question that is "who are we?" (Montle 3557). As a result, South Africans found themselves facing an identity crisis; a society swinging between apartheid and post-apartheid. They are torn between the freedom of reclaiming what once was theirs, and doubting whether they could truly own it again. Post-apartheid was a period of transition during which South Africans had to "re-evaluate and re-define themselves, their concepts, their ideals" (qtd. in Thackwray 26). This

crisis was not merely individualistic but also deeply tied to the entire community. Thackwray, in her study "Storytelling and Social Commentary in a Comparison of Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995) and *Black Diamond* (2009)", suggests that "identity has been defined as not only personally, but also publicly, determined. It is not only individualistic, but affected by significant others, or formed by the interaction of the self with society" (23). Shaping personal identity is deeply tied to one's relationship between the self and the world, between personal choices and interactions within a society.

Post-apartheid literature captures such ambiguity, crisis, and challenges during this transition. As Farhat Mohammad Mustafa explains, post-apartheid literature "explores how individuals forge their identities in a society that often marginalizes and stereotypes them based on race" (161). *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda stands out for its deep exploration of these struggles. In "Death Here I am: Violence and Redemption in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*", Eze argues that the novel "represents an indeterminate grey area of dawn and dusk. It is a book of grief, but also of hope; a book of hatred, but also of love" (88). Similarly, Barnard asserts that Mda forces the reader to examine this critical period in South Africa history, which is "the demise of the apartheid regime-in an antic and even grotesque fashion, and as part of an ongoing and far from straightforward process of decolonization" (279). Mda challenges the readers to think critically about the end of apartheid as a complicated process of decolonization.

Through Toloki, Mda presents the longing for personal and individual identity in a country that is still defining itself. Toloki faced rejection and alienation since childhood, from his father and community. His father, Jwara, described as "a towering handsome giant" (29), was a blacksmith who lived for shoeing horses and crafting figurines, "strange people and animals that he had seen in his dreams" (29). Noria was admired by the whole village and was also Jwara's inspiration to create his figurines by singing. Noria also recognized her special

talent since she was a young girl, she "was ten years old, but considered herself very special, for she sang for the spirits that gave Jwara the power to create the figurines" (29).

Unlike Noria, Toloki was not a good-looking child, he suffered marginalization by his community, abuse and devaluation by his father who often called him "ugly" and "stupid boy" as it is mentioned repeatedly throughout the novel. As a result, "Noria received all the attention, and Toloki none" (31). This dynamic caused Toloki to feel jealousy and bitterness towards Noria, because she took the love that was supposedly meant for Toloki. Mda here depicts the coexistence of "ugliness and beauty, oppression and love. Jwara is the source of Toloki's anguish, but Noria embodies the image of the oppressor" (Eze 94). Toloki's appearance brought constant rejection from his father and avoidance from people of his village. He is always reminded of how much ugly he is compared to Noria, "[he] looks like something that has come to fetch us to the next world" (72).

However, Toloki admired his father's creativity and wanted to create art himself. He drew beautiful pictures of flowers, mountains, huts and horses that made his village admit that he has talent despite his ugliness (32). Yet, his father refused to admit his son's talent. When Toloki proudly ran to his father to show his success, he dismissed him saying: "So, now you think you are better? You think you are a great creator like me?" (68). Jwara believed that no beautiful things would come out from an ugly stupid boy (68). Even though, Jwara was cruel to Toloki and his mother yet Toloki still wanted to have what his father has: creativity and power. Toloki's admiration of his father and his attempts to be like him, reflects Homi K. Bhabha's concept of colonial mimicry which is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Toloki's admiration of Jwara reflects the colonized ambivalent desire to mimic the colonizer. Toloki's mimicry, however, brings no acceptance from his father. Rather, it leaves him wounded and alienated, driving him to leave his village in search of "love and fortune" (60). Throughout

Toloki's struggles between family and society rejection, Mda reflects on the broader struggles black South Africans went through during apartheid, by being racially discriminated. Lingle notes that: "Apartheid in its various forms has involved numerous restrictive laws to protect whites from the social and economic competition of black" (234). Toloki is avoided simply for being different despite his attempts of mimicking his father and community, exactly like black South Africans were under apartheid. Jwara treated his son based on his appearance instead of seeing who he is as a person, reflecting by that the behaviors of the colonizer. While Toloki being the colonized who is treated based on his race rather than on his humanity.

After being beaten by his father, Toloki fled vowing never to return to his village (59). Wyk argues that "the fact that his father stifled his creativity, and never gave him any recognition for his achievements in art, intensify his oedipal identification with the father" (85). The Oedipus complex is what Freud explains as "the boy's desire to replace his father as his mother's partner" (qtd. in Canli 140), Feud continues to explain that a child who identifies with the father desires to take his position (qtd. in Canli 140). However, the conflict between Toloki and his father has created a gap in Toloki's identification with Jwara. This rejection as Thackwray adds, provoked his identity crisis (28).

Arriving in the city, Toloki becomes what Thackwray describes as "a subject of transition" (26), navigating urban life in a post-apartheid society still in turmoil. He is now a "postmodern subject, whose identity and culture [are] in constant flux" (Thackwray 28). His first job was "a malayisha at a mill, which meant that he loaded and unloaded bags of maize and mealie-meal" (61), ended unexpectedly when the man, who offered him the job, was burned alive by a white man in a "deadly game" (64). The city proved to be no less cruel than his village. Then, without seeking anyone's help, he started his own business, a boerewors maker (121), "He applied for a hawkers permit from the city council, and bought himself a trolley for grilling meat and boerewors" (121). Temporarily, he earned money and friends, but once his

trolley was taken; they abandoned him. The narrator remarks that Toloki “could not maintain his life-style, the friends who loved him very much began to discover other commitments whenever he wanted their company” (123).

Toloki did not give up and sought to find a new job. He approached Nefolovhodwe, "the furniture maker," a wealthy former villager. However, Nefolovhodwe pretended not to recognize Toloki or his father: “Toloki knew immediately that wealth had had the very strange effect of erasing from Nefolovhodwe’s once-sharp mind everything he used to know about his old friends back in the village” (129). Despite his disgust for the old man and how he was treated, Toloki pleaded for employment (129). He was assigned to guard cemeteries against thieves stealing coffins—a task that soon ended in failure. Disappointed, Toloki returned to his shack, feeling that this man had wasted months of his life for nothing (133).

Out of disappointment and hardship, Toloki resolved to abandon all human desires and to fully embrace death, figuratively speaking. He conceived the idea of becoming a professional mourner. Eze elaborates on this by stating:

> Because his life is damaged from the cradle onward, marred by abuse and the denial of love, it is no surprise that he would embrace death, if only figuratively. He knows the pain of rejection, from which he has gleaned some wisdom. He has acquired the ability and the willingness to put himself in the position of those who suffer. From this wealth of empathy, he chooses to embody the pain of the community by mourning every death that he can. This is a Clintonesque way of saying to everyone, “I feel your pain” (94).

In this role, Toloki becomes a bridge between past and present, mourning the horrors of apartheid while reflecting the nation’s ongoing need to grieve. Thackwray notes that “as the nation descends into a period of severe civil unrest, saturated with violence and death, Toloki invents for himself the occupation of a Professional Mourner, fulfilling the harsh communal

words spoken over him as a child" (29). His mourning rituals serve both the community and himself, offering a symbolic space for processing trauma. As Koç explains, mourning functions as "a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society" (294).

After his encounter with Nefolovhodwe, Toloki chooses to distance himself from his homegirls and homeboys from his old village, who have also settled in the city (13). He retreats into isolation, dedicating his life to mourning and finding a kind of solace in solitude. Secluded in a waiting room, he fills his time with memories, reflecting on the past as a way to cope and make sense of his present (41). In his search for identity, as Thackwray observes, Toloki deliberately adopts "a lifestyle resembling more closely his former traditional, rural lifestyle" (33), such as sleeping "in the foetal position that is customary of his village" (15) His ongoing quest for "love and fortune" is marked by a constant state of flux. Thackwray describes his multifaceted identity as encompassing "both rural and urban dweller; artist and entrepreneur; self-sufficient and destitute; observer of traditional African culture, beneficiary of Western capitalist culture and appropriator of Eastern religious culture; representative of life and death" (30).

This arduous journey continued until he reunited with Noria at her son's funeral. Despite Toloki's bitterness, he approached Noria and to his surprise she also recognized him: "Toloki! You are Toloki from the village!" (12). Their reunion warmed Toloki's heart. After she invited him over to the squatter camp, he "walks away with a happy bounce in his feet" (12), and welcomed his old friend with flowers of zinnias which symbolizes strong friendship, and helped her rebuild her shack.

Though Toloki isolated himself in the city, Thackwray noted that he "does not belong - nor does he want to belong" (42). Isolating himself in a waiting room, a liminal space reflecting his unresolved identity. He "is alienated from his rural roots, as well as in his new urban

context" (42). He tells Noria that he "cannot live with anyone but [himself]. That's why [he] decided to live alone in waiting rooms" (115) or what he calls a headquarter that is a public place in which he spends most of his nights (14). These waiting rooms embody a liminal space, as Bhabha argues that "these 'in between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity" (2). Thackwray expands on this arguing that Nefolovhodwe is a character who symbolizes neo-colonialism, signifying Toloki's refusal to assimilate (43), meaning that even though Nefolovhodwe is still influenced by previous colonial powers even after independence. However, Toloki refuses to assimilate like him by rejecting to be a part of the old system, apartheid. She adds that Toloki's choice to reside in a "waiting room" symbolizes a liminal space—a physical and metaphorical location that underscores his sense of not fully belonging anywhere. As Thackwray notes, he inhabits an "'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur" (43).

By becoming a professional mourner, Toloki adopts a monk-like existence—"a man with a vocation." Surrounded by death in post-apartheid South Africa, mourning becomes both his identity and his purpose (115). As Yalom poignantly observes, death is "always with us, scratching some inner door, whirring softly, barely audible, just under the membrane of consciousness" (qtd. in Koster and Hughes 2). In a society where death is a daily reality, Mda warns, "there is death out there. Soon we shall experience the death of birth itself if we go on at this rate" (20). Ironically, it is through this pervasive presence of death that Toloki finds both meaning and a means of survival in an economy undergoing profound transition (Chang 29).

Toloki's profession serves both as a form of personal healing and as a national service. He becomes deeply committed to his role, envisioning its expansion and imagining a future where more professional mourners grieve not only individual losses but also "the loss of the ground upon which the homeland was founded" (Koster and Hughes 9). His work as a paid mourner can be seen as a symbolic act—what Chang describes as "a quasi-spiritual, cathartic

or omnipotent representation of mourning, hopes and transition in relation to South African society as a whole at this time" (18). Toloki's profession endows him with a spiritual essence which has a healing power. On the link between spirituality and healing, Bouallegue argues that spirituality has the power to heal individuals subjected to violence ("Spirituality in the Black Arts Movement" 61).

II.2. The Impact of Apartheid on Community and Collective identity

Apartheid in South Africa shaped not only individual identities but also the collective consciousness of communities. This transformation is poignantly explored in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, set during the country's transition from apartheid to democracy—a period marked by political violence, poverty, and social dislocation. The novel reflects the pain and uncertainty of a society attempting to rebuild itself. Through the lives of ordinary characters like Toloki and Noria, Mda illustrates how communities grapple with loss, trauma, and the uneven journey toward a new national identity. As Mda writes, "Normal deaths are those deaths that we have become accustomed to, deaths that happen every day. They are deaths of the gun, and the knife, and torture and gore. We don't normally see people who die of illness or of old age" (157). This quote underscores how normalized violence—whether political, ethnic, or gender-based—has become part of everyday life, shaping how people perceive death, survival, and identity in post-apartheid South Africa. In this regard Yuan Chin Chang writes in "Transitions of Meaning: Life, Death and Identity in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*":

> The ambiguity attached to the term "ethnicity" is connected throughout the novel to issues associated with not only racial performativity but also social cultural and gender issues. Apartheid was, of course based on a binary division of "race"; the hierarchies associated with apartheid officially fell in the 1990s but various ethnic groups in South Africa since sought to reclaim historical borders to their specific homelands. (18)

Chang asserts that Toloki—the protagonist of *Ways of Dying*— works as a professional mourner and attends funerals every day to console bereaved families. Families who have lost loved ones whether to acts of violence motivated by poverty, crime, or racial hatred. The idea of mindless violence illustrates a type of collective mentality or psychology that frequently arises in transitional times, and the text makes clear how violent and polarizing such a moment is (20).

In his work, Zakes Mda demonstrates that apartheid did not merely enforce physical separation, but also left a lasting imprint on how people think, feel, and relate to one another. These deep-rooted divisions shape every aspect of Noria's and Toloki's lives—most notably their sense of identity and belonging in a post-apartheid society. On a physical level, apartheid's spatial policies forcibly relocated Black South Africans to overcrowded townships on the outskirts of towns or in remote areas, often leading to violence and the destruction of community life. Toloki's journey through these spaces highlights the fragmented and damaged landscapes left in apartheid's wake. Similarly, Noria's move to the city reflects the disillusionment experienced by many rural migrants, whose dreams of urban prosperity clash with harsh realities. As Mda writes, "[she] had a rude awakening when she arrived. There were no diamonds in the streets, nor was there gold. Only mud and open sewers. It was like nothing she had seen in her life, nor anything she had imagined" (135–136). This passage underscores the disparity between expectation and reality, and how apartheid's legacy continues to shape both the physical environment and the inner worlds of its survivors. From a psychological perspective, apartheid deeply influenced how people perceived themselves and others. Toloki is initially portrayed as an outcast, mocked and rejected by his own community. Mda writes, "people willingly move away from him… they cover their noses and mouths with their hands as they retreat in blind panic" (8). This reaction illustrates both the physical and symbolic distance that society maintains from Toloki, rooted in his appearance and unconventional

profession. His marginalization reflects not only personal rejection but also the broader internalized attitudes shaped by apartheid—where individuals were conditioned to devalue themselves and others who did not conform to accepted norms. These ingrained social divisions are further exposed in a funeral procession, where Mda contrasts two groups: “We are a procession of beautiful people, and many posh cars and buses, while yours is an old skorokoro of a van and hundreds of ragged souls on foot” (11). This stark juxtaposition reveals the persistent class and status prejudices in the urban landscape, showing how apartheid’s psychological and social hierarchies continue to divide communities even in the post-apartheid era.

Emotionally, the pain of apartheid remains ever-present, with death serving as a constant backdrop in the lives of the characters. For Noria, this is especially evident through the traumatic loss of her son Vutha—killed by Black militants—and the passing of her mother, a figure symbolic of traditional rural life and communal values. These losses render her emotionally detached, a response shaped by repeated exposure to violence and grief. As Chang notes, “death is understood not only as a physical phenomenon but also, potentially, the ability for a character to be emotionally or spiritually deadened by constantly dealing with trauma and violence, with resulting numbness or fear responses” (28). This insight captures how Noria, like many others, becomes emotionally numbed—her detachment a psychological defense in a world marked by constant loss and instability

In his essay “Living Memory: Building Communities and a Life-in-Common in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*”, Englund Orn discusses the breakdown of community in the novel, particularly in the story of the Young Tigers. The Tigers’ murder of Vutha and their leaders’ failure to publicly apologize to Noria exemplify the kind of injustice that South Africa’s post-apartheid government aimed to address through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (25). showcasing a complete lack or law and order, Mda writes:

> The villagers were numbered by their actions. They had become the persecutors, judges and executioners. But every one of them knew that the village would forever be shrouded by the smell of burning flesh. The community would never be the same again and the rest of their life its people would walk in a daze (66).

Violence and funerals became deeply communal experiences that shape identity, memory and survival of post-apartheid South Africa. Eze highlights how Mda's story commences with a tragic death of a five-year-old child, a death that was deeply troubling not only due to its gravity but due to its perpetrators. Not of the traditional enemy that is the white man nor an accidental one, but rather a black-on-black crime (92). Illustrated in the Nurse's speech in Mda's work: "This little brother was our own child, and his death is more painful because it is of our own creation" (7). This shows to what extent the apartheid regime has fragmented communal togetherness of black South Africans, to a point of betrayal by their own kin.

The cumulative effect of apartheid's divisions results in a fractured sense of belonging and identity for both Toloki and Noria. For Toloki, his profession as a professional mourner, and his strained relationship with his father reflect an ongoing search for meaning and recognition in a society still grappling with the aftermath of systemic oppression. His legitimacy is openly questioned: "Ha! You think you are going to convince her behind our backs to engage your services? I can tell you we have no fees to pay a Professional Mourner. We can mourn just as well" (9). This illustrates the struggle to find purpose and dignity in a context where traditional roles and new forms of identity are still in conflict. Similarly, Noria faces emotional alienation from her mother, a figure who represents traditional rural values and societal expectations. Her relationship with Napu—a Black man from a different social class and cultural background—elicits shame and disapproval. Noria's mother states, "[you] have shown us how much you don't respect us. Your people did not even come to appease us, and negotiate with us, after you had kidnaped our daughter" (80). This quote reveals the deep-rooted cultural

and communal tensions in a transitioning South Africa, where old norms collide with new realities. Ultimately, both Toloki and Noria navigate identities shaped by dislocation, emotional estrangement, and the desire for renewal—whether it is Noria's break from rural traditions in pursuit of a better life, or Toloki's redefinition of self-worth in a fractured society.

II.3. Mda's Narrative Technique and Its Impact on Identity Representation

The use of narrative techniques is crucial for conveying a specific message. These techniques enrich the story and establish a connection between the fictional events and real-life experiences. Thackwray notes that South African storytelling often features distinct traits, including "the focus on the communal or popular experience" and "a participatory narrator" (56). *Ways of Dying* is narrated in the first-person plural, representing the collective voice of the community, which claims, "we live our lives together as one" (12). As Chielozona Eze observes, this communal voice, "the eternal spirit of the 'we,' knows and sees everything" (93).

The community decides to tell the story and to own it "the way it deems it fit" (12), after having witnessed countless deaths and killings that shook the very core of the country's future. This communal realization, as Eze argues, is "the literary justification for the first-person-plural narrative" (92).

The community chooses to be the eye that watches Toloki on his journey, Johan van Wyk argues in his study "Catastrophe and Beauty: *Ways of Dying*. Zakes Mda's Novel of the Transition" that the third-person omniscience "embodies the omnipotence of the group. It focuses on Toloki in the village as well as the city" (84), claiming his story as their own by narrating it the way they want. Eze explains that: "The "we" narrator takes him through the violent landscape of South Africa. Toloki's life and position as Professional Mourner reveals everything that has gone wrong in South Africa" (93). Toloki as an individual, suffers in his attempt to find his sense of self in a shattered society. Thus, telling his story through a

communal voice depicts that identity is shaped not only from within but also through external forces. This "we" spirit "makes use of narrative, which creates identities and shapes existence" (Eze 93). The community also represents "the collective alter-ego of Toloki" (Wyk 84). This eternal spirit of the "we" embraces his journey while also expresses guilt for trying to suppress him by calling him stupid and ugly. While at the same time admits his talent. The voice also incriminates itself in the crimes and violence committed by the community itself. Taking the responsibility for the country's situation in post-apartheid that its own people had a hand in it:

> "Toloki opens his eyes. Boxing Day. One of those senseless holidays when we do not bury our dead. Like Christmas Day. Instead we go for what we call a joll. All it means is that we engage in an orgy of drinking, raping, and stabbing one another with knives and shooting one another with guns. And we call it a joll. We walk around the streets, pissing in our pants, and shouting, 'Happee-ee-e!' Thats what Christmas is all about" (25).

Another technique is the use of fragmantation through flashbacks and shifts in time, showcasing that identity is not a linear process, but rather one that is fragmented and constantly in flux. As Naidoo notes in his study "Magic Realism *in Zakes Mda's Ways of Dying* (1995) and *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995)", the narrator in *Ways of Dying* "moves through different periods in time and follows the characters as they experience their respective destinies" (152). This temporal disjunction reflects the political reality of South Africa and how it continues to affect the shaping of individual and communal identities.

Mda also uses dreams as a form of narrative fragmentation, blurring the lines between past, present and future and how they shape one's understanding of self and society. For instance, Jwara relied on his dreams and Noria's singing to inspire the creation of his figurines. These dreams become a narrative bridge when in the present Jwara appears in Nefolovhodwe's dream, requesting that the figurines Jwara used to create should be passed down to Toloki (208).

This moment connects the past to the present, throughout making the figurines a reminder of the past, symbols for identity formation, and healing for the future.

Toloki and Noria decide to keep "one of the figurines in their shack, next to Toloki's roses, to remind themselves where they came from" (211). Through this dream, a new narrative space is opened, allowing the past to exist in the present in a transformed form—bringing "pleasure to the children in the same way that Noria gave pleasure to the whole community back in the village" (210). In this way, dreams function as a narrative technique that both shapes and preserves identity.

Mda utilizes irony extensively to reflect the reality of constant death and the ways in which modern societies process mortality. A reality that ultimately redefines traditions that once anchored communal identity, distancing communities from the togetherness of tradition. And reshaping personal ties of characters to their community in the process.

Furthermore, research on the use of irony in literature entails that it is a powerful tool used to convey an idea by expressing something contrary to what is actually meant or expected. Writers use irony to highlight contradictions, emphasize contrast, or lay out thought provoking statements that may clash with societal norms. In this regard Kishor Singh "Irony, in its broadest sense, is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or event characterized by incongruity, or contrast between reality (what is) and the appearance (what seems to be). Verbal, dramatic, and situational irony are often used for emphasis in the assertion of the truth" (67). Mda employs irony to expose the contradictions within South African society and the stark gap between political ideals and the lived realities of ordinary people. He skillfully utilizes all three forms of irony, beginning with verbal irony—"the contrast between what is said and what is meant" (Singh 67). This is evident in Toloki's role as a professional mourner, a seemingly noble occupation that ironically glorifies funerals. Through this, Mda critiques the normalization of death and violence in post-apartheid South Africa, where loss has become so frequent that it

now constitutes a legitimate profession. As Mda writes, "[he] says that unfortunately at the moment he is still the only Professional Mourner, and being only one person, he cannot divide himself to attend all the funerals" (204). This statement, delivered with dark humor, highlights the absurdity of a society overwhelmed by death. Toloki's ironic approach to mourning does not trivialize death but rather serves to humanize grief, offering a means of emotional survival through performance and humor. As Chang observes, "In Mda's works there is an ironic or humorous approach to the topic of death, which equates laughter as a sort of death and vice versa" (20). In this way, irony becomes a tool not just for critique, but for resilience—finding moments of levity amid the trauma of everyday life.

Another form of irony Mda employs is situational irony, which Singh defines as "the most common in literature. It is the contrast between what happens and what was expected (or what would seem appropriate). Because it emerges from the events and circumstances of a story, it is often more subtle and effective than verbal or dramatic irony" (67). Mda uses this form masterfully to reveal the tragic contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa. A striking example occurs during a confrontation between a funeral procession and a wedding celebration. Traditionally, funeral processions are afforded the right of way out of respect for the deceased. However, in this scene, the newlyweds and their lavish entourage—traveling in luxury vehicles—refuse to yield to the mourners, who are on foot and in a dilapidated van. Instead, the wedding party drowns out the mourners with loud, rhythmic singing as the confrontation escalates (10–11). The irony lies in the reversal of expectations: a moment meant to symbolize joy and unity instead becomes one of disrespect and conflict. This scene mirrors broader societal contradictions, where the supposed progress of post-apartheid transformation coexists with deep inequality and the erosion of traditional values.

The contrasting vehicles—the wedding guests' luxury cars versus the mourners' worn-out van—visually underscore the economic disparity that persists despite political change. As

Chang notes: “Death is everywhere in *Ways of Dying*, ironically providing Toloki a means of earning a living in a transitional and informal economy. Terror fulfills structural functions in the narrative… as violence is a means of attaining or increasing power by the state, individuals, or groups” (29). In this context, death becomes both a symbol of societal failure and a means of survival. Toloki’s ability to profit from widespread grief is a darkly satirical commentary on a broken system—one in which violence is normalized and the marginalized must find ways to live within, or off, the very tragedies that devastate their communities.

Chapter III: Trauma and Healing in *Ways of Dying*: Personal and Collective Dimensions

This chapter explores trauma in both collective and personal contexts and the process of healing in *Ways of Dying*. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section addresses trauma as both a collective and personal experience, highlighting how a non-linear narrative technique reflects the fragmented nature of trauma. It also emphasizes the importance of rites and traditions in processing this trauma. Building on this, the second section delves into healing through mourning and funerals rituals, illustrating how characters begin their journey towards emotional healing.

III.1 Collective and Personal Trauma in Fragments: Memory in a Nonlinear Path

Apartheid in Mda's work left behind more than just shared traumatic experiences; it inflicted deep psychological wounds that persist at both collective and individual levels. Erikson distinguishes between these two dimensions of trauma, "two closely related but nonetheless distinct facets: individual trauma and collective trauma" (153). This duality is evident throughout Mda's narrative, as personal suffering often mirrors, and is amplified by, communal pain.

Before examining how Mda's novel represents these two dimensions of trauma, it is important to first define personal and collective trauma. Kai T. Erikson defines individual trauma as follows:

> By individual trauma I mean a blow to the psyche that breaks through one's defenses so suddenly and with such brutal force that one cannot react to it effectively . . . They suffered deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and, as so often happens in catastrophes of their enormity, they withdrew into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone (153-154).

This quote succinctly captures individual trauma as a sudden, overwhelming rupture that leaves one numb, isolated, and unable to cope—emphasizing its deep psychological effects. *Ways of Dying* illustrates this through Toloki's life, constantly steeped in sorrow. From early childhood, he is subjected to emotional neglect and physical abuse—particularly from his father, Jwara: "'What is it that I hear about you and the church?' Toloki stutteringly tried to explain that he had merely testified as others were doing. But even before he completed a sentence, Jwara kicked him again and again" (103). This abuse sets the tone for a life shaped by marginalization and emotional isolation. Toloki's profession as a mourner, sustained by the constant presence of death, reflects both his personal grief and the broader atmosphere of collective loss in the community.

One of Mda's characters, Noria, is also undergoing continuous trauma. The brutal death of her young son, killed by a mob under the suspicion that she was a police informant, exemplifies the distorted sense of justice enacted by the so-called people's court. Mda writes: "She tells him that the local St. committee had promised her that the leaders would publicly make a statement at the meeting, apologizing for the death of her son … Instead, they called her privately, and added insult to injury by saying that her child, who was only five years old, was not completely blameless" (177–178). The cruelty of this act, compounded by Noria's subsequent public shaming and social ostracization, reveals the unraveling of communal values in a society disfigured by violence and mistrust. Noria's experience reflects not only the personal costs of trauma, but also the failure of a fractured society to uphold solidarity in the face of shared suffering.

In addition to personal suffering, collective trauma arises in post-apartheid contexts, referring to psychological impact experienced by a group or community following a shared traumatic event. Erikson developed the term collective trauma, arguing that trauma is not

experienced at the individual level alone, but can also affect entire communal lives and livelihoods. In this regard, Erikson writes:

> By collective trauma, on the other hand, I mean a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of community. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma". But it is a form of shock all the same, A gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that's an important part of the self has disappeared. (154)

Erikson explains that as individuals gradually emerge from the emotional shelters they have withdrawn into, they come to the painful realization that they are now isolated and must depend solely on themselves. Although their sense of self ("I") endures, it is often wounded or deeply changed. The presence of others ("you") remains, but they seem distant and difficult to reach. Most notably, the collective sense of belonging—the "we"—has disappeared, leaving no meaningful connection to a shared community or unified group (154). Elaborating on Erikson's definition of community, the "we" in Mda's work reflects a society fractured by apartheid. Community, understood as a network of interdependent relationships, is portrayed as deeply scarred by systemic violence and collective trauma. Through Toloki's role as a professional mourner—a profession sustained by the unending death toll—Mda foregrounds a society trapped in perpetual grief. The novel opens with the killing of a young boy during a Christmas celebration in a township, shot by security forces. This sets the tone for the community's lived reality of relentless violence. Mda deliberately centers the communal voice—"we" rather than "I"—to emphasize that trauma is not an individual burden, but a shared, collective experience.

The intersection of personal and collective trauma becomes a central concern in post

apartheid literature, much of the characters' suffering is in consequence to societal judgment. As it plays a central role in shaping both Noria and toloki's identities and influencing how they are perceived by others. Yogita Goyal argues, Noria represents both suffering and resilience. She transforms her past, once marked by sex work, into a life of service by committing herself to the care and support of orphaned children within her community. In contrast, Toloki often remains outside the bounds of community, choosing distance over engagement. Yet both are profoundly marked by trauma and rejection, albeit in different ways. Goyal writes: "Both Noria and Toloki are stuck in their respective moments of trauma and cannot come to terms with rejection despite their vastly different ways of dealing with it. Both are scarred by a past too difficult to comprehend. Only by coming together and finding a way of making meaning out of their painful memories can they find peace" (151).

The formation of personal and collective trauma influences the narrative structure, manifesting in a non-linear chronology. That mirrors the fragmented and disjointed experiences of traumatic memory. The narrative becomes fragmented, marked by shifts between memories, past events, and glimpses of the future. This nonlinear structure showcases the nature of trauma and memory, particularly under the prolonged oppression of apartheid, where collective trauma is rarely processed or recalled in a straightforward, chronological manner. In this context, Pretti Asati and Dr. Soumya Tiwari observe that trauma often resists articulation through conventional language, as it disrupts standard narrative and cognitive patterns. Literature reflects this disruption through disjointed storytelling, narrative silences, and temporal gaps. The distortion of time and memory caused by trauma frequently manifests in non-linear narratives, capturing the fragmented experience of those who have lived through such events (39).

This narrative strategy emphasizes how recollection is not merely a reproduction of events, but a continual reconstruction aimed at understanding suffering. As Volkan notes in

relation to collective trauma: “It suggests that the tragedy is represented in the collective memory of the group, and like all forms of memory, it comprises not only a reproduction of the events, but also an ongoing reconstruction of the trauma in an attempt to make sense of it” (qtd. in Hirschberger 1). Recalling trauma is not merely a recollection of events but rather a gateway towards healing.

In *Ways of Dying*, the narrative deliberately disrupts linear chronology. Mda guides the reader through the past experiences of his characters, revealing landscape marked by violence, deprivation, and the psychological scars of trauma. By drawing on the memories of characters like Noria and Toloki—set even in the pre-apartheid era—Mda underscores the vital role of memory in making sense of trauma. Mda writes:

> Noria. The village. His memories have faded from the deep yellow-ochre of the landscape … Now, however, it is all coming back. Pale herdboys, with mucus hanging from the nostrils… Homesteads of three of four huts each, decorated outside with geometric patterns… His father, a towering handsome giant … was a blacksmith … Jwara, for that was his father’s name, earned his bread by shoeing horses. (28-29)

Rather than unfolding chronologically, Toloki’s thoughts are abruptly replaced with a beautifully detailed memory of his past, his father’s blacksmith shop and the surrounding village landscape. This break in chronology mirrors the fractured quality of traumatic memory, which surfaces at will and shatters linear perception. By immersing the reader in Toloki’s past, Zakes Mda demonstrates how trauma persists and is revisited through memory. Thus, the use of nonlinearity highlights Toloki’s needs in the psychological sense. A need to reassemble his identity by visiting the personal and communal past that shaped him.

In addition, Noria’s character undergoes the same nonlinear structure. Mda writes, “I am not making a mistake, Toloki. The first time I carried him for fifteen months… He was born,

and Napu fed him to the dogs. I carried him again for another fifteen months. He died for the second time when the Young Tigers set him on fire" (191). The nonlinearity begins from Toloki's present-day reflection on Noria's struggles, then it jumps backwards into a layered, collective memory of her past, as Mda details Noria's trauma in a non-chronological order. In doing so, it blends past experiences in one fluid memory. This backstory is told in vivid, immersive detailing, which displays how memory and trauma, can resurface abruptly and interrupt the linear time.

Another aspect of recollection in *Ways of Dying* is not merely through individual perspective alone, but also through the voice of the community. The narrator notes, "Noria was born a month after this incident with the doctor. Six months later, when that Mountain woman returned to our village with baby Noria on her back, we already knew everything about the scandal" (40). Noria's origin is narrated through the collective voice of the communal "we," embedding her identity within a past shaped by gossip, shame, and ridicule surrounding her mother, the mountain woman. In moments where Noria is too young to remember, the narrative reveals how identity is often constructed by the stories that others tell. This form of communal memory is a double-edged sword: while it reflects a shared history, it also becomes a vehicle for perpetuating trauma. Mda employs the community's fragmented and often disruptive storytelling to illustrate how collective narratives shape individuals—particularly women—and determine how they are perceived, known, and remembered.

Ultimately, both Toloki and Noria undergo profound emotional and psychological distress shaped by their individual responses to trauma. For Toloki, leaving his home and community is a necessary act of self-preservation—an escape from the sources of his deepest wounds. In contrast, Noria's path to healing involves returning to her roots, reconnecting with memories of a time when she was valued and respected within her village. Memory becomes a tool for Noria's healing, a way to reclaim a sense of self and dignity. For Toloki, escape

represents the possibility of reinvention and hope for a different future. In doing so, healing becomes the natural step forward.

Recovery, as Toloki and Noria's stories suggest, is a complex and ongoing journey. Traumatic experiences, while deeply painful, can also open the door to personal growth and transformation. Kaminer and Eagle note that one of the initial psychological outcomes of trauma is a shift in self-perception. Surviving trauma often leads to a sense of renewed inner strength and a greater awareness of one's vulnerabilities (73). These ongoing struggles—marked by loss, rejection, and resilience—ultimately contribute to the evolving identities of Noria and Toloki. Through their distinct but intertwined journeys, both characters demonstrate how trauma, when confronted and shared, can be a catalyst for healing and self-discovery. In this regard, Mda opts for traditional means in processing trauma.

Whether trauma is collective or individual, it often requires a communal response. In *Ways of Dying*, Mda illustrates this through the integration of indigenous practices used to cope with death—seen in Toloki's role as a professional mourner and in the presence of Noria's mother, a traditional healer, a role deeply rooted in South African cultural tradition. Kaminer and Eagle write:

> A further Interesting and somewhat unique aspect of trauma intervention in South Africa is the fact that traditional African healers play a significant role as traumatic stress practitioners . . . if such cultural attributions for traumatic events are dominant for an individual, they are likely to seek the assistance of a traditional practitioner who may help identify the source of the troubles and prescribe certain medicines, practices or rituals to overcome the adversity. (114)

This emphasizes the importance of culturally embedded healing practices, which offer not only psychological support but also reaffirm a sense of identity and belonging in the aftermath of

trauma. Healing through traditional mourning in *Ways of Dying* is the communal approach to loss, which opens the way for a transformative force in the novel.

III.2 Funeral Rituals as Collective Healing

In *Ways of Dying*, funerals are not used for their ordinary function of burying the dead. Rather, they become spaces where a fragmented nation comes together, reconnects, and confronts collective trauma. Apartheid was cruel; it deprived not only lives but also stripped people of their personal and collective identities. This regime broke bridges between families and disjoined ties within communities. Even after its end, things did not get any better. Violence persisted, often in new forms: "the country has slowly shifted from dealing with political violence, to dealing primarily with criminal violence" (Leff 14).

The rise in crime can be seen as a trauma response. Bekkai, in her study "Historical Amnesia as a Response to the Impact of Trauma on South African Identity", draws on Freud's theory to explain how a trauma victim "not only remembers forgotten and repressed events but also reproduces them in his behaviour, often without being aware of it" (20). As crime increased, violence struck even more frequently, and death became a common reality. Mda captures this phenomenon in *Ways of Dying*, placing great emphasis on the rituals of funerals, not as events that tear people apart, but as occasions that bring people together, despite the violence and trauma response that lingered even after the apartheid legacy.

In the novel, funerals are not portrayed as purely negative and tragic events. They evolve into a way of life, as reflected in Toloki's statement: "Death lives with us everyday. Indeed our ways of dying are our ways of living. Or should I say our ways of living are our ways of dying?" (98). Thus, funerals are not only moments of mourning but also acts of remembrance and truth-telling. They allow individuals and the nation to grieve both personal and collective loss. In doing so, they generate "rituals and practices to mark and heal the impact of trauma, recognizing

that in addition to having individual effects, trauma damages interpersonal bonds and tests community cohesion" (Kaminer and Eagle 81). This emphasizes how shared mourning helps people come together again after trauma, repairing broken relationships and making the community feel more united.

These communal rituals, respected by various tribes, are vividly portrayed in the novel. Such as going to the house of the deceased to wash one's hands and eat the food prepared (10), the hair cutting after the funeral (156), and the practice of male relatives throwing soil into the grave "in order of their seniority, as with the cutting of hair" (160). These rituals symbolize not only grief, but also solidarity and connectedness within the post-apartheid nation. They serve as reminders that, for a society to heal, it must first remember the tragedies they faced during the apartheid regime. The Nurses in the novel are those who narrate how the deceased died in funerals. Their truth-telling in *Ways of Dying* represents this confrontation with memory, a necessary step to move forward and reconstruct identities.

The Nurses play a sacred role in telling the truth as it is. They are "the fortunate ones… Usually they are a fountain of fascinating information about ways of dying" (7). Through their testimonies, they expose the ongoing cruelty that South Africans endure, even after the formal end of apartheid. Their words call for justice and healing through confrontation, helping communities reunite after years of segregation and discrimination. Bekkai asserts that reconciliation and identity reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa are multidimensional processes, involving "processes of remembering and forgetting inextricably tied to the larger struggle for justice, healing, and unity" (IV). She further notes that "a society's ultimate reconciliation with its past requires a careful balance of remembrance and forgetfulness, highlighted by a dedication to justice and the recognition of historical realities" (IV). Reconciliation needs both remembering painful events and choosing to let go of what needs to be forgotten, in order to leave a space for healing.

In this sense, testimony becomes essential. LaCapra "posits that the act of providing testimony can play a pivotal role in addressing trauma and its associated symptoms" (qtd. in Bekkai 59). These acts of speaking out are part of healing the collective memory from amnesia, which is an essential step in reshaping identities. When shared memories, experiences, and knowledge within community are forgotten or suppressed, identities become unstable, and trauma persists (Bekkai 59).

Ultimately, such rituals help to restore what Victor Turner calls "symbolic communitas", "the feeling of connectedness to a larger symbolic community" (qtd. in Wouters 2). In other words, such rituals have both social and emotional dimensions: "they have the twin function of -one hand- diminishing the danger of succumbing to these intense emotions by raising a feeling of solidarity, and -on the other- of enhancing the sense of being connected to a larger community" (Wouters 2).

Furthermore, funerals in *Ways of Dying* reflect the concept of Ubuntu, a deeply rooted African ideology that emphasizes interdependence, empathy, communalism, and humaneness (Bekkai 88). At its core, Ubuntu asserts that no one exists in isolation: "there is no self- or I-identity without we-identity" (Wouters 3). The communal gathering at funerals strengthens the sense of empathy and shared humanity, creating space for healing and reconciliation with the past. Bekkai notes that Ubuntu "serves as a guiding tenet for the resolution of conflicts and the advancement of social cohesion" (88).

This idea is illustrated in the novel when Noria's neighbors come together to help her rebuild her shack following the fire and her son's funeral. Children and women from the settlement "are bringing all sorts of household items to the shack" (69). Noria later tells Toloki: "it is our life here at the settlement, Toloki. We are like two hands that wash each other" (69). This spirit of solidarity and generosity is central to Ubuntu, which calls for fair distribution of resources and collaborative efforts to build resilient, supportive communities (Bekkai 88).

Moreover, funerals allow Toloki himself to come to terms with his own past. Becoming a professional mourner is his way of healing, of confronting his pain and making a room for the present and the future. As a child, Toloki was deeply hurt by being called ugly all the time, a wound that affected his sense of identity. Yet he did not surrender to this pain. Instead, he transformed his personal anguish into a sacred vocation. People from his home village used to tell him he looked "like something that has come to fetch [them] to the next world" (72), and rather than letting that define him, he embraced his appearance as a source of strength. With his "saddest eyes" (113) and his sorrowful gaze he mastered "his famous graveside manner" (11). Mourning for Toloki became not only a job but a calling, one he hopes to pass down to future generations: "so that when he dies the tradition will continue. Then he will live in the books of history as the founder of a noble profession" (17).

Through his profession, Toloki reconciles personal grief through collective rituals. He listens to the Nurses, respect their role, values the truth they bring to light, and admires how they fulfill their role with courage. Toloki "belongs to the section of the crowd that believes strongly in the freedom of the Nurse to say it as he sees it. He has been to many funerals, and has developed admiration for those who are designated the Nurse at these rituals" (7). Mda uses Toloki to show that individual healing is deeply tied to communal grief, and not only expressing personal grief but also collective mourning. These rituals foster a sense of unity and solidarity, helping individuals reconcile personal sorrow through shared experiences. Wouters notes that:

> Today, old mourning rituals are sometimes believed to have been public expressions of individual grief. However, the prevailing code of that time prevented exactly such an expression. The rituals were quite fixed and uniform. Yet, they did offer a we–feeling, a feeling of connectedness to a larger we–group, the we–group of the faithful

> and that of society at large. Thus, they bestowed social recognition of loss and grief. They helped people in gaining and keeping control over their emotions, and also in demonstrating how courageously their loss was carried. (5)

Finally, Toloki's path crosses again with Noria's in her son's funeral. With Nouria, he rediscovers a sense of belonging. With her, he learns to feel emotions he once thought he was unworthy of. What he feels for Noria is "perhaps akin to what people have described as love" (51).

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda presents funerals as rituals that reunite individuals and remind them that their losses are shared and meaningful. Mourning, as Gennep describes, is "a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society" (qtd. in Koç 294). Thus, *Ways of Dying* portrays South Africans in a post-apartheid society, seeking meaning in personal trauma through communal gathering and shared experiences, which creates a path towards healing. They are survivors who "try to develop explanations for the traumatic event and to generate meanings that will allow them to make sense of the world in future" (Kaminer and Gillian 60). In addition, shared practices and rituals play a crucial role in helping both individuals and communities cope with emotional and psychological challenges. They also stand as a cornerstone in shaping identity, preserving continuity, and creating a sense of meaning (Arena).

In conclusion, *Ways of Dying* illustrates that healing from trauma, whether personal or collective is not a linear path. Rather, it is shaped by different factors, memory, mourning, and the act of coming together. Through Toloki's profession, Noria's resilience, and the effect of funerals rituals, Mda highlights how community is important in times of crisis, and how shared pain can help in shaping identities, reconstructing broken bonds, and creating hope in a wounded nation.

Conclusion

In South Africa today, the question of identity remains both urgent and unresolved for both individuals and communities. The dismantling of apartheid laws and enforced segregation did not immediately lead to the erasure of the deep psychological, cultural, and structural scars inflicted by this violent past. For many, identity is still formed through experiences of marginality, displacement, and collective trauma. Literature has become one of the most powerful means to explore these tensions, offering not only reflection but also resistance. Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* provides a rich and nuanced account of how personal and communal identities are negotiated in a society that is yet struggling to come to terms with the past.

This dissertation has examined the construction of identity, trauma, and healing in *Ways of Dying*, a novel that critically re-engages the enduring psychological and social effects of apartheid in post-apartheid South Africa. The study explored how identity is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed after organized violence and cultural displacement, particularly through the lenses of individual suffering, communal loss, and collective rites. In addition, it revealed that Mda's use of nonlinear narration highlights the fractured process of national healing, centering resilience and remembrance.

The first chapter highlighted the historical and theoretical ground for the study. It situated the novel within the broader context of apartheid heritage, emphasizing the ways in which state racism and political violence, undermined subjectivity and communal life. Drawing on key thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Homi K. Bhabha, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, and Sirma Bilge, the chapter illustrated how power, language and exclusion created identity.

Building on this foundation, the second chapter focused on the characters' personal journeys, especially Toloki's struggle to find a place in a violent, shifting society. His

transformation, from a ridiculed outsider to a self-defined professional mourner, symbolizes a reclaiming of dignity and purpose. This chapter also discussed the impact of apartheid on collective identity, seen in Toloki's withdrawal and emotional detachment, illustrating how structural violence had dissolved social bonds and cut individuals off from communal membership. Mda's narrative techniques and their impact on identity representation were shown to reflect this instability, reinforcing the idea that post-apartheid identity is constantly reshaped by violence, memory, and the struggle to rebuild.

The third chapter deepens the analysis of identity by addressing themes of trauma and healing. The first section showed that trauma in the novel transcends the individual, it is also communal, inherited, and ever-present. Drawing on Kai Erikson's theory of collective trauma, the section argued that *Ways of Dying* represents public grief and memory as interlinked. That was ultimately reflected in the nonlinear structure of the novel. The novel's non-chronological structure mirrors the fractured reality of traumatic experiences, using circular narration and repetition as literary tools to reflect disrupted memory.

The final section shifted to funeral rituals as acts of cultural resistance and collective healing. Mda presents these rituals not merely as acts of personal grieving, but as essential ceremonies that restore dignity, reclaim community, and confront silence by bearing witness to the tragedies of apartheid. Funerals, therefore, become symbolic acts of rebuilding, a space where grief is shared between groups, connections are renewed, and identity is reshaped.

Taken together, the three chapters of this dissertation demonstrated that identity in *Ways of Dying* is dynamic, complex, and deeply shaped by violence. It is continually refigured through storytelling, mourning rituals, and human connection. Mda presents memory and mourning as tools of survival, positioning narrative and cultural inheritance at the center of both resistance and healing.

This research contributed to post-apartheid literary studies by showing how literary form and cultural practice work together to process trauma and reconstruct identity. It revealed that *Ways of Dying* avoids official narratives of reconciliation, instead it tells the stories of the subaltern, foregrounding the emotional cost of violence. Even though the novel offers no easy solutions, it provides a literary account of collective pain, a pain that must be remembered, lamented, and transformed. In doing so, Mda reclaims literature as testimony, a way to preserve dignity, challenge silence, and imagine new ways of being.

Works Cited

Arena, Frank. "The Role of Community and Collective Comforting Rituals." *ResearchGate*, Jan. 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/387743571.

Arima, Cyril, and M.E. Baloyi. "Funerals and Family Care in the South African Local Catholic Church." *Pharos Journal of Theology*, vol. 104, no. 1, 2023, doi:10.46222/pharosjot.10413.

Asati, Preeti, and Soumya Tiwari. "Fragmented Narratives and Sudden Harm: A Comprehensive Study of Trauma in Literature and Unintentional Trauma." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2025, pp. 36–41, doi:10.33329/rjelal.13.1.36.

Barnard, Rita. "On Laughter, the Grotesque, and the South African Transition: Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2004, pp. 277–302. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40267596.

Bekkai, Selma. *Historical Amnesia as a Response to the Impact of Trauma on South African Identity*. Doctoral thesis, Abou Bekr Belkaid University of Tlemcen, 2024, doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.20523.14883

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Bhabha, Homi K., editor. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, 1990.

Bouallegue, Nadjiba. "Spirituality in the Black Arts Movement." *Hungarian Journal of African Studies / Afrika Tanulmányok*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2023, pp. 45–65. Publikon Publishers, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381514737.

Burmanje, Roos. “From the Inside: Accounts of Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Transition towards Democracy in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*, Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother* and Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun*.” MA thesis, Utrecht University, 2012.

Canlı, Mustafa. “Id, Ego, Superego, and Oedipus Complex in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*: A Psychoanalytic Study.” *n.d.*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388061401.

Chang, Yuan Chin. “Transitions of Meaning: Life, Death, and Identity in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*.” *International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 5, May 2017, pp. 17–22. ISSN: 2321-7065.

Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality*. Polity Press, 2016.

Daniel, Rashondria. “The Lasting Effects of the Apartheid.” *An Interdisciplinary International Journal of Concerned African Philosophers*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022, pp. 89–96.

Erikson, Kai T. *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. Simon and Schuster, 1976.

Ersöz Koç, Evrim. “Mourning and Healing: The Ritual in Wallace Shawn’s *The Designated Mourner*.” *ResearchGate, Sept. 2022*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370497191.

Eze, Chielozona. “Death, Here I Am: Violence and Redemption in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2013, pp. 336–362, doi:10.1353/jnt.2013.0009.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd Vintage Books ed., Vintage Books, 1995.

Freud, Sigmund. "The 'Uncanny.'" *Imago*, vol. 5, 1919. Translated by Alix Strachey.

Goyal, Yogita. "The Pull of the Ancestors: Slavery, Apartheid, and Memory in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and *Cion*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 42, no. 2, Summer 2011, pp. 147–169.

Greffrath, Wynand. "The Demise of Post-Apartheid and the Emergence of Post-Colonial South Africa." *Journal for Contemporary History*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2016, pp. 161–183, doi:10.18820/24150509/JCH41.v2.9.

Hirschberger, Gilad. "Collective Trauma and the Social Construction of Meaning." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9, 2018, article 1441, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441.

"History of South Africa." *Pocket Guide to South Africa*, n.d., pp. 13–14.

hooks, bell. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. Routledge, 2004.

Kaminer, Debra, and Gillian Eagle. "Trauma as a Crisis of Meaning." *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*, Wits University Press, 2010, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.18772/22010105096.7.

Kaminer, Debra, and Gillian Eagle. "Trauma Interventions for Individuals, Groups and Communities." *Traumatic Stress in South Africa*, Wits University Press, 2010, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.18772/22010105096.8.

Khan, Abbas, et al. "Investigating Identity, Hybridity, and Resistance: A Critical Study of Postcolonial Narratives." *Migration Letters*, vol. 21, no. 8, 2024, pp. 307–318.

Køster, Allan, et al. “Mourning as a Ground Attunement.” *Preprint*, Feb. 2025, doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.35274.48328.

Leff, Cathryn. “Intergenerational Trauma Due to Political Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Implications for Therapists Working with Trauma Clients.” *ResearchGate*, Apr. 2015, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274375054.

Mda, Zakes. *Ways of Dying*. 1st Picador ed., Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. Originally published by Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 1995.

Melber, Henning, and Christopher Saunders. *Transition in Southern Africa: Comparative Aspects*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2001.

Merry, Michael S. “Identity.” *Elsevier Ltd*, Jan. 2010, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264933405.

Miller, Ana. “The Past in the Present: Personal and Collective Trauma in Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*.” *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1–2, 2008, pp. 146–160. Johns Hopkins UP, doi:10.1353/sdn.0.0004.

Mohammed, M.A. Ismael Mousa. “Hybridity in Homi K. Bhabha's Theory and Its Relevance to 'Absalom and Achitophel'.” *Journal of Sustainable Studies*, vol. 6, no. 6, 2022, pp. 1728–1734.

Montle, Malesela E., and Mphoto J. Mogoboya. “Reconstructing Female Voices and Identities in the Democratic Arena: A Study of Gordimer’s *None to Accompany Me*.” *PalArch’s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt/Egyptology*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2022, pp. 103–116.

Montle, Malesela Edward. "Depiction of Post-Apartheid Identity in South African Literature: An Examination of Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*." *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, vol. 18, no. 7, 2021, pp. 3556–3565. ISSN: 1567-214X.

Mustafa, Faiza Farhat Mohammad. "Afro-American Literature and the Question of Identity: An Examination of Dual Consciousness." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2024, pp. 159–166, doi:10.33329/rjelal.12.3.159.

Naidoo, Venugopaul. *Magic Realism in Zakes Mda's Ways of Dying and She Plays with the Darkness*. PhD dissertation, University of Durban-Westville, 1998.

Nuttall, Sarah. "Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid." *Critical Arts*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2016, pp. 154–165. *SciELO*, https://scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1445-73772016000200005.

Samuelson, Meg. "Speaking Rape 'Like a Man': Achmat Dangor's *Bitter Fruit*." *n.d.* Manuscript.

Singh, Raj Kishor. "Humour, Irony and Satire in Literature." *International Journal of English and Literature (IJEL)*, vol. 3, no. 4, Oct. 2012, pp. 65–72. TJPRC Pvt. Ltd.

Tecucianu, Cătălin. *Crossing Borders: Identity and Place in Nadine Gordimer's Novels*. PhD dissertation, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, 2014.

Thackwray, Sarah. *Storytelling and Social Commentary in a Comparison of Zakes Mda's Ways of Dying (1995) and Black Diamond (2009)*. MA thesis, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, 2017.

van Wyk, Johan. "Catastrophe and Beauty: *Ways of Dying*, Zakes Mda's Novel of the Transition." *Literator*, vol. 18, no. 3, Nov. 1997, pp. 79–90.

Wouters, Cas. "The Quest for New Rituals in Dying and Mourning: Changes in the We–I Balance." *Body & Society*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2002, pp. 1–27, doi:10.1177/1357034X02008001001.

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف كيف تتشكل الهوية تحت تأثير نظام الفصل العنصري في جنوب إفريقيا، وذلك بالاعتماد على نظريات مختلفة مثل ما بعد الاستعمار والتحليل النفسي. توضح هذه الأطروحة الطبيعة المعقدة والمتعددة الأبعاد للهوية، من خلال استخدام رواية طرق الموت لزاكس مدا (1995) كدراسة حالة. تُقدَّم الهوية في هذه الدراسة على أنها مفهوم متحول باستمرار خلال المرحلة الانتقالية من مجتمع الفصل العنصري إلى المجتمع ما بعد الفصل العنصري. تستكشف الدراسة تمثيل الهوية في المجتمع ما بعد الفصل العنصري، مع التركيز على الصراع من أجل الهوية الشخصية، والإرث المستمر لنظام الفصل العنصري الذي لا يزال يؤثر على هوية المجتمع والجماعة. تسلط الرواية الضوء على التحديات التي يواجهها مجتمع ناشئ في حالة اضطراب، والتوتر بين التقاليد والحداثة. وهناك صراع دائم من أجل التوفيق بين الممارسات التقليدية والقيم المجتمعية والتحديات التي تفرضها الحياة الحضرية الحديثة. تعكس تقنيات مدا السردية، لا سيما السرد غير الخطي، التجربة المجزأة للذاكرة والصدمات، وتبرز الترابط بين الصدمة الشخصية والجماعية. تُظهر الدراسة أن هذا الصراع يُعالج من خلال طقوس الحداد، وهي عملية أساسية لتجاوز الصدمة، إذ توفر شعورًا بالإغلاق من خلال ممارسات حداد جماعية. لا تكرم هذه الطقوس الموتى فحسب، بل توفر أيضًا طريقًا نحو الشفاء من خلال استعادة الأمل في مجتمع ممزق. كما تُعزّز هذه الطقوس الروابط المجتمعية وتُسهم في بناء شعور بالوحدة على مستوى الأمة.

Résumé

Cette étude vise à explorer comment l'identité est façonnée par le régime de l'apartheid en Afrique du Sud, en s'appuyant sur différentes théories telles que le postcolonialisme et la psychanalyse. Cette thèse met en évidence la nature complexe et plurielle de l'identité à travers l'étude de cas du roman *Ways of Dying* (1995) de Zakes Mda. L'identité y est présentée comme un concept en perpétuelle transformation durant la période de transition entre la société de l'apartheid et celle de l'après-apartheid. L'étude examine la représentation de l'identité dans la communauté post-apartheid, en insistant sur la lutte pour l'identité personnelle et sur l'héritage persistant de l'apartheid qui continue d'influencer l'identité communautaire et collective. Le roman met en scène les défis auxquels est confrontée une société en crise, tiraillée entre les traditions et la modernité. Il existe une lutte continue pour concilier les pratiques traditionnelles et les valeurs collectives avec les exigences de la vie urbaine moderne. Les techniques narratives de Mda, notamment la narration non linéaire, reflètent la nature fragmentée du traumatisme et de la mémoire, et montrent comment les traumatismes personnels et collectifs sont liés. L'étude démontre que cette lutte est surmontée par le processus du deuil, qui s'avère essentiel pour surmonter les traumatismes, en offrant un certain apaisement à travers des pratiques de deuil communautaires. Ces rituels ne se contentent pas d'honorer les morts ; ils offrent également une voie vers la guérison, en restaurant l'espoir dans une société fragmentée. Ils renforcent également les liens communautaires et favorisent un sentiment d'unité à l'échelle nationale.