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BEFORE DYING: VOICES AND REPRESENTATION OF THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.

Antonio Gramsci

Abstract

After Nelson Mandela took the position of president in 1994, new narratives like Deon Meyer's have become the very essence of the post-colonial changing process that the South Africa is still undergoing. In *Dead Before Dying* (1999), each character feels differently towards the new, post-apartheid regime, and brings a new outlook to modern South African society. As the author portrays it in this novel, South Africa must be understood as an open-ended, creative dialogue of subcultures, of insiders and outsiders, of diverse factions. In this way, as readers, we witness the struggle of a new generation of South Africans in a transitional age in which white, black,

Resumen

Tras la llegada de Nelson Mandela a la presidencia de Sudáfrica en 1994, una nueva narrativa como la de Deon Meyer se ha convertido en la esencia del proceso de cambio poscolonial que el país está experimentando. En la novela *Dead Before Dying* (1999), cada personaje siente de una manera distinta el nuevo régimen pos-apartheid y tiene una perspectiva diferente de la sociedad sudafricana. Según la representación del autor en esta obra, Sudáfrica debe ser entendido como un diálogo abierto de subculturas, de los de dentro y los de fuera, de procedencias diversas. En este sentido, como lectores, podemos observar la lucha de las nuevas generaciones de sudafricanos en una época de transición en la que blancos, negros y

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and colored men and women try to reconstruct their lives and come to terms with the traumatic past and the abstract notion of who is the Self and the Other. They are the voices of a new country and a new narrative.

Keywords: South Africa, post-apartheid, new voices, identity, change.

mestizos, tanto hombres como mujeres, tratan de reconciliarse con un pasado traumático, reconstruir sus vidas y adquirir un nuevo concepto de la idea abstracta de quién es el "yo" y quién es el "otro". Estos personajes representan las voces de un nuevo país y una nueva narrativa.

Palabras clave: Sudáfrica, pos-apartheid, nuevas voces, identidad, cambio.

Murders and robberies aside, in *Dead Before Dying* (1999) Deon Meyer uses the voices of his main characters to paint a picture of the "New" South African society. Each character feels differently towards the new post-apartheid regime and brings a particular outlook based on his or her background and experience. In this way, South Africa must be understood as an open-ended, creative dialogue of subcultures, of insiders and outsiders, of diverse factions in a dynamic process. As readers, we get a well-rounded picture of the New South Africa by witnessing it through the eyes of Meyer's many speaking subjects located in a field of multiple discourses. The different perspectives presented come primarily from the main character Mat Joubert and his psychologist Hanna Nortier, but also from minor characters such as Bart De Wit and Leon Petersen. These are the voices of a society in a process of transition. In *Dead Before Dying*, Deon Meyer provides readers with a holistic portrait of the new post-colonial South Africa through the eyes of the South Africans themselves.

After Nelson Mandela took the position of president in 1994, new narratives such as Deon Meyer's, Zake Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995) or Jonathan Morgan's *Finding Mr. Madini* (1999), among others, have become the very essence of the post-colonial changing process that the country is still undergoing. As scholar Michael Green indicates: "The new South Africa is fertile ground for the recalling of forgotten, bypassed, and suppressed stories, and the invention of new stories, historical and fictional. Indeed, the New South Africa is nothing if not its own new story, in whatever way one story may be said to hold together the many and often conflicting stories" (1999:122). Symbolically labeled as the Rainbow Nation by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1990, South Africa adopted a radical form of multiculturalism that made possible a reconciliation of opposed forces that were tearing the nation apart. As Melissa Tandiwe Myambo points out, "South African multiculturalism evolved from the progressive stance of the African National Congress (ANC) on nonracialism to include peoples of all heritages in the struggle for freedom" (2010:95). This transition, however, from apartheid to multiculturalism, was not free of violence and turmoil. As hard as Mandela strived

for healing and reconstruction, the long history of racial separation stubbornly manifested itself.

Behind the official introduction of apartheid by the Afrikaner National Party in 1948, there was the attempt to regulate South African citizens' lives by taking control over the economic and social system, and, literally to ensure a white superiority based on the so-called "white purity" while extending racial separation. The population was thus divided into races and tribes to keep them apart: whites would occupy the cities and non-whites the black townships. Apartheid, furthermore, promoted the "legal culture of prejudice," not only concerned with the body of formal laws, but also with the cultural rules and expectations. These rules, as L. Athiemoolam puts it, "touched every aspect of social life and in consequence the attitude toward race. For example, not only was marriage prohibited between whites and non-whites, but the Immorality Act forbade any sexual contact between blacks and whites. In addition, certain jobs were classified as for whites only" (2001:4). Understandably, after more than forty years of institutionalized discrimination, these embedded laws and cultural practices came to influence importantly the new South Africa.

In this way, *Dead Before Dying* is like *Ways of Dying* and *Finding Mr. Madini*, part of the post-apartheid literature that revises the old apartheid boundaries and portrays the conflicts of the new transitional era. As Richard Samin comments, it is a literature that "moves beyond the concept of binary opposition" (2005:83). It concentrates on breaking down borders and collapsing boundaries because that is what apartheid was, a theory of circumscribed spaces –me, here, you over there. *Dead Before Dying* is in this case a novel that presents through its characters the birth of a new narrative that shows the struggle of South Africa coming to terms with its past, its pluralism and the process of reconstruction. But such a conception of history can have serious implications for the processes of remembrance and commemoration since it becomes "a speech of wounds" of an internalized trauma (Gutorov 2011). The same as in *Ways of Dying*, Zake Mda depicts the hardships of the main characters, Toloki and Noria, overcoming the pain for Vutha's murder (Noria's son), and struggling to rebuild a new place to live in a new nation, in *Finding Mr. Madini,* eleven survivors of the new South Africa find their powerful voice. It is a novel that started as a book that the psychologist Jonathan Morgan wanted to write about homelessness in Johannesburg. Through a series of events, however, the book becomes a book written by him and a group of eleven homeless writers for whom he runs a workshop in which the writers bring up their own experiences as a narrative therapy. All these different individuals convey the interaction of multiple discourses and perspectives that we also find in *Dead Before Dying.* As we will see, in Deon Meyer's work, what Mat Joubert, Bart De Wit,

Leon Petersen, and Hanna Nortier have in common is that all four attempt to forget the traumatic past, to start a new life and negotiate a new identity.

The hero of the novel, detective Mat Joubert, stands out as a representative of the New South Africa. After the death of his wife Lara, who was also a police officer, Joubert becomes empty inside. He was deeply in love with her and so her death absolutely shattered him. It is understandable that losing a loved one takes some time to heal, but at the start of the novel, Mat Joubert still has not made any progress at all in overcoming his grief. It has been two years and three months since her death, and he is still mired in a depression, contemplating suicide. One section in the opening chapter states "Joubert didn't really care. He no longer wanted to know. Either about death, or life" (Meyer 1999:5). This chapter is aptly named 'Purgatory' and it describes Joubert's frame of mind perfectly. It is stated several times throughout the story that Joubert feels like having a grey veil between him and the real world (Meyer 1999:1). Joubert appears to be stuck in his own purgatory –a place between life and death. He does not feel like he really exists without Lara, so he just bumbles along through life; just as the death of his wife shattered his personal life, it also destroyed his work life. According to Cathy Caruth, "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (1996:2). In this way, the term trauma must be understood "as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 1996:3). Joubert lives in such a mess that literally nothing matters to him; not his life, nor the lives of others. He is what Ross Chambers refers to as a melancholic character for whom mourning can never really be complete for the reason that trauma is never over" (quoted in Gutorov 2011:5). Joubert is indifferent to his work, and for that matter, indifferent to everything. It stays that way until New Year's Day 1996, when everything starts to change.

Some people believe that a special date such a new year, a birthday or the first day of a new government, is an opportunity to wash the past clean and start over again. That was the case for South Africa in 1994 when Nelson Mandela became its president and gave a new beginning to the country. Nevertheless, as Dennis Walder points out, "despite the overwhelming endorsement of the reform process by an all-white referendum, the feelings of all races remained at best mixed about the 'the new South Africa'" (1998:153). This is also the case for Mat Joubert in the novel regarding his own state of mind. There were several tell-tale indications that he was about to enter a transitional period in his life, but none was more evident than one line describing his attempt to fall asleep one night: "Somewhere on the borderline of sleep he realized that life wanted to return. But he crossed over before fear could overcome him" (Meyer 1999:14). His state of mind is similar to the transition from white minority rule to a non-racial, democratic state in South Africa, which remained a time of trauma, confusion and violence (Walder 1998:153). In a way,

South Africans were all survivors and, as Gutorow puts it, "survival, abuse and trauma are deeply entangled with each other" (2011:2). According to Caruth, it is like a

> wound of the mind –the breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world– [that] is not, like the wound in the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that […] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor. (1996:4)

Joubert's mind is clearly starting his struggle to unveil that grey cloud in which he is immersed; however, the very knowledge that he has the potential to leave his state of depression shows that the ensuing events help bring him back to life. In the novel, this breakthrough would not have been possible without the arrival of Bart de Wit and the changing of the guard in Joubert's police department on New Year's Day. De Wit replaces the previous colonel of Murder and Robbery in Cape Town, and he ignites a chain reaction of events that completely changes Joubert's personal and work life.

Symbolically, we learn that De Witt was appointed by "the new black minister of law and order. As of January 1, the Murder and Robbery Squad was officially part of the New South Africa" (Meyer 1999:16). This clearly illustrates the changes that Mandela introduced in the country in an attempt to eradicate discrimination and promote a multiracial democracy based on assimilation among all South Africans (Walder 1998:44). In this line of thought, Colonel De Witt emphasized the idea of change in his first speech to the group and when meeting with Joubert, he stated:

> "You see, Captain, this is the New South Africa. We've all got to make a contribution. Shape up or ship out. There are people in disadvantaged communities who have to be uplifted. In the police service as well. We can't keep deadwood in officers' posts for sentimental reasons. Do you understand?" (Meyer 1999:25)

Under De Witt's new administration, health tests were required for all officers, and certain officers were recommended for psychological help. Mat Joubert fit into both categories seeing that he was overweight and had been lapsing in work since Lara's passing away. The initiation of these two programs changed Joubert's lifestyle drastically. Since he was forced to meet with a psychologist once a week, he was forced into meeting Hanna Nortier, the woman who would help him change both emotionally and professionally. After meeting with her several times and discussing matters such as Lara's decease and the arduous relationship he had with his father, he is able to weep for the first time in 17 years. At this point, it is evident that Joubert is slowly coming out of his emotional shell.

This progress can be compared, again allegorically, to South Africa's new era in which, as Lynn Meskell and Lindsay Weiss indicate, "one of the major tasks for the new generation is to pursue a notion of 'transparency' in the new democratic ethos, including the opening up of records and of new arenas for public expression and ecologies of experience" (2006:95). Certainly, as one ventures throughout the novel we see the protagonist's constant battle to open up, to bring to light his distressing memories and change into the person he eventually ends up becoming. Thus, during one of Joubert's first sessions with Dr. Nortier, we learn that Joubert's father was an extremely racist policeman, who grossly mistreated black or colored criminals and colleagues alike. He explains that his father came from another era, the era of apartheid (Meyer 1999:79) in which he and many like him believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized (Tyson 2006:419). Likewise, we find out that his views differ greatly from those of his progenitor. He explains that his father

> Had a racial slur for every hue, for every racial classification in the crazy country. The Malay people were not coloreds to him. He called them hotnots. To their faces. His hotnots. 'Come along, my hotnots.' And Xhosas and Zulus were not blacks. They were kaffers. Never 'my kaffers.' Always 'bloody kaffers.' In his time there were no blacks constables, only black criminals. More and more as they moved in from the Eastern Cape looking for work. He hated them. (Meyer 1999:79-80)

From the way Joubert speaks of his father's racist behavior, it is clear that our protagonist has radically different views as to how one human being should treat another. While his father embodies the colonialist ideology, by which the colonizers see themselves as the proper "self" at the center of the world and the native peoples as the 'other' at the margins (Tyson 2006:420), Joubert represents a new generation of South Africans that acknowledge difference without fearing it. Joubert recalls his father hatred for any South African who was not the same race as his, for he considered them underdeveloped, and then states "I also did at first, because he did. Before I started to read and had friends whose parents had different views. And then I simply […] despised my father, his narrow, simplistic point of view, his useless hate, It was part of a […] process" (Meyer 1999:80). The way Joubert grew out of his initial hatred for those of other races is a very powerful reflection of that generation of white South Africans and a clear rejection of the politics of the past. For example, Joubert states, "He said 'hotnot' and 'kaffer' and 'coolie.' I addressed them all as 'mister'" (Meyer 1999:81). Joubert thus condemns the deprivations of colonialism in South Africa. Such colonialism, as Meskell and Weiss explain, constituted a

> long history of oppression and discrimination that found its logical and evil outcome in apartheid. It was not simply the immediate horror of the National's Party's racial solution for the nation, […] but the invidious history of European

> invasion, colonization, and long-lived genocide that ultimately hardened into the politics of 'apartness' witnessed in the 20th century. (2006:88)

In this regard, we can see that the author's personal views on apartheid have a very similar foundation as Joubert's, basically an adverse reaction to the ignorance and assumption of superiority of his father. According to an interview with Deon Meyer (Reyes 2011), both he and Joubert, as snapshots of a generation, have positive acceptant attitudes towards blacks and coloreds in the New South Africa. Their tolerance stems directly from their search for truth while growing up in a divided South African society, as they came to realize that the attitudes of their respective fathers were nothing more than blind hatred.

In his work on trauma and representation, Dominick LaCapra has suggested the concept of "empathetic unsettlement" to define the position of the witness in more precise terms. Both Meyer and Joubert are witnesses of a reality they condemn. As LaCapra points out, empathetic unsettlement does not and should not mean full identification with the victim's position. Instead, empathy is a notion that rather implies an "affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other" (2001:212). Thus, it provides for a kind of experience of other positions, through which one "puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (LaCapra 2001:87).

Another character that represents a different viewpoint of the New South Africa Colonel is Bart de Wit. As a former member of the ANC (African National Congress), he was exiled for several years due to his political beliefs. De Wit initially tries to impress his new colleagues with his resume:

> In exile among a valiant band of patriots, I had the privilege of continuing my studies. And in 1992 I was part of the ANC contingent that accepted the British offer for training. I spent more than a year at Scotland Year. [...] And last year I did research at Scotland Yard for my doctorate. So I'm fully informed about the most modern methods of combating crime now being developed in the world. […] And you will all benefit from that experience. (Meyer 1999:17-18)

In spite of this, however, it seems as though in his attempt to make a good first impression and make clear that he obtained the job due to his own merits and not to his former political affiliation, he triggers uncertainty among the majority of his colleagues in the Murder and Robbery Squad (Meyer 1999:17-18). Although it was not uncommon for white Afrikaners to be members of the ANC, there were not actually many and those who were members drew a lot of attention as well as suspicion. As Meskell and Weiss highlight, one of the concerns at the time included "fear of a reversal of history, in which either the populist ANC vision of the past will supplant all others or modes of rewriting will become triumphalist, celebratory

accounts that simply replace white centrality with Afrocentric agendas" (2006:95). In fact, based on Simon Gikandi's approach, a subsequent problem here could be that the emergent new government was composed of many voices that were marginalized for so long in South Africa. Gikandi explains that "for the majority of people in the ex-colonies the most attractive moments are led by forces that wave the banner of cultural or religious fundamentalism. [...] the old time (of 'tribe', of the protonation, and Heimat) coexists with the new time (of globalisation, of newness, of the unhomely) [...]" (2002:640). In other words, they might be willing to embrace homogenization instead of cultural heterogenization. This, along with the fact that De Witt was in exile during the years of apartheid, makes it difficult for him to establish his role in the New South Africa, where his political party may be in power, but that certainly does not make him a popular person.

A third voice to take into account is that of Police Lieutenant Leon Petersen, one of the few colored men of the Murder and Robbery Squad. The fact that he is having difficulties adjusting to the New South Africa symbolizes how in a society with not only a long and antagonistic history of racial division, but a predominantly binary one (black versus white), colored people stand as the alienated racial minority. At the time one of the major fears was to remain marginal to the nation's political functioning even if they fully participated in the post-apartheid discourse. As Grant Farred highlights, "for coloreds, the task was to define themselves against the hegemony of the '*bi*racial' –the black and white, not the hybrid– nation state" (2001:185). They were, for this reason, especially mindful of the prospect of public censure, ridicule, disrespect or even disenfranchisement. We see a clear example of this when Leon Petersen loses his temper when whites disregard him or do not show him the same respect they would to a white police officer. This situation takes place when he and Joubert pay a visit to Oliver Nienaber, a murder suspect that happens to be a well-known businessman in the area. At some point, in their initial talk, Petersen prompts him to tell them about his whereabouts that day in the early morning:

> 'Think carefully, Mr. Nienaber,' Petersen said.
> 'Heavens, Sergeant, I know where I was.'
> 'Lieutenant.'
> 'Sorry, Lieutenant,' Nienaber said, and there was a lot of irritation in his voice. (Meyer 1999:264)

At this point, Petersen is only bothered by Nienaber's (presumably intentional) slip, but the scene escalates when it becomes obvious that Nienaber is hiding something and is taken to the police station for a more thorough interrogation. Once there, Nienaber keeps lying; his stories are even more childlike and absurd, and Petersen can barely put up with him. "'Fuckin' rich asshole whitey is lying, Captain,' Petersen said, the whites of his eyes huge. His hands were shaking" (Meyer 1999:271). Nienaber's reaction is to call Petersen a "hotnot" and inevitably

"Petersen [jumps] over the attorney and [hits] Nienaber on the cheek in one, smooth, quick movement" (*ibid.*:272). This situation involving disrespect, an accusation, a racial slur, and a punch during the interrogation allows readers to witness Petersen's constrained anger towards whites. He seems to be having an especially difficult time adjusting to the New South Africa, because he still lacks the respect of many of the whites he must deal with on a daily basis. Much like another colored character in the novel, Miriam Ngobeni, Alexander MacDonald's housekeeper, he believes that there is a particularly "white" personality: difficult, threatening, and accusatory (*ibid.*:232). In Farred's words, "coloreds appear to be ideologically unmoored in the new dispensation. […] Possessed of a more fragile sense of belonging, they are simultaneously trying to write themselves into and against post-apartheid national sameness" (2001:182). In the eyes of Petersen and so many other South African coloreds like him, the oppressive whites from the days of apartheid still largely maintain an unfair and disrespectful attitude towards them. At the same time, they are not fully integrated in the black community either.

After Nienaber is gone, Joubert tries to calm Petersen down and then he explodes. He rants,

> My wife wants to leave me […]. She says I'm never at home. She says my daughters need a father […]. And she says in any case there's never any money for anything. You work like an executive and get paid like a gardener, she says […]. And now Bart de Wit tells me I must spark because blacks must get up the ladder, show it's not just affirmative action. Now, suddenly, I'm a black. Not colored anymore, not Cape Malay or brown, but black. Instant reclassification. And I must spark. Now I ask you, Captain, what else do I do? I've been sparking for fucking years but my pay slip is still waiting for affirmative action. And not just mine. All of ours. White, black, brown. All the troubles, all the murders and deaths and rapes, all the long hours with fuckers shooting at you and rich whiteys who act as if you're not there and your boss who says your must spark and the union which says don´t worry, things will be fine, and a wife who says she wants to leave you […]. (Meyer 1999:276)

As Petersen sees it, the New South Africa has simply transplanted the problems of "Old" South Africa under a new government. The reclassification does not remove the problems of the past, but creates new problems of its own. Now Petersen is being pressured to succeed by de Wit, who is most likely feeling similar pressure from his former political party, the ANC, to support the black community within the police force in the New South Africa. The struggle of Leon Petersen within South African society offers readers a perspective of what it must be like to be a non-white living in New South Africa. Significantly, although both Petersen and De Witt are adjusting differently to the new regime, they both feel the pressures to "spark," as Petersen puts it, they both struggle to gain the respect and recognition of their colleagues and criminals alike.

From a post-colonial perspective, this "transitional" context in which South Africa found itself particularly during the first years of the post-apartheid era is problematic because it cannot be assigned to a definite category. It is, rather, as Alison Jones and Domoka Lucinda Manda argue, "a condition of becoming 'modern', 'developed', and so on. Deployment of 'transitional' qua ontological category thus feeds into a binary configuration of 'self' and 'other' since the 'other' is undergoing a process of becoming the 'self'" (2006:198). In this way, Deon Meyer's portrayal of South Africa in *Dead Before Dying* triggers questions of the possibility of this society, being a post-colonial nation in formation, to cope with those emergent voices –the representatives of the traditional figure of the other becoming the self– who claim for agency, cultural presence and acceptance. Is it plausible for all South Africans, regardless of their background and skin color, to expect to be treated as the figure of the self?

Regarding the notion of a new self, Stuart Hall in his essay "Old and New identities, Old and New Ethnicities" raises the following questions: "If there are new globals and new locals at work, who are the new subjects of this politics of position? What conceivable identities could they appear in? Can identity itself be re-thought and re-lived, in and through difference?" (1991:41). Just as history is subject to constant and unpredictable alterations, it stands to reason to come across the emergence of a new self and the existence of new identities. It is incongruous as a result to believe that the self goes on being the same. And this happens too with the general concept of the great collective social identities that were formed by long historical processes produced by the modern world. Hall states that:

> [Collective social identities] were staged and stabilized by industrialization, by capitalism, by urbanization, by the formation of the world market, by the social and the sexual division of labor, by the great punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private; by the dominance of the nation state, and by the identification between Westernization and the notion of modernity itself. (1991:45)

But these collective social identities cannot be approached any longer in the same homogenous way. They cannot be used as a reference to define someone's identity as it happened in the past, especially because identities, Hall argues, are never complete, "[t]hey are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process" (1991:47). They do not operate like totalities. In the same way, the South African characters in Meyer's novel are individuals in constant development whose identity is subject to change depending on the new circumstances that surround them.

Last of all, another character who Meyer uses to represent an alternate viewpoint of the New South Africa is Hanna Nortier (whose real name in the past had been Hester Clarke). Starting from the night that Hester Clarke was stripped of

her innocence and her life, Hanna Nortier's existence can be seen as an allegory for the old South Africa evolving into the new. Her rape, notably by all whites, can be seen similarly as the crimes committed against the non-whites during the years of apartheid. Under such system, force took a form of violence that, figuratively speaking, was realized most completely in the act of rape. According to Grace Musila, the African nation in this sense can be regarded "as the feminine victim of an aggressive colonial master, a metaphor that implicitly profiles colonial powers as male and aggressive" (2007:51). In this way, rape is presented as a social problem. It is not the result of a few pathological individuals but rather stems from a system of male dominance and from cultural beliefs and practices that objectify and degrade non-white individuals and especially women (Odem and Clay-Warner 1998). When Hester Clarke "died" that night, Hanna Nortier was "born out" of that horrendous event; much like the New South Africa emerged from the hateful years of apartheid. We hear Hanna say, after being raped:

> I was woken by the birds the next morning and the sun shining. Just another day. I just lay there. At first I could only hear. The birds. I couldn't smell. I couldn't feel. I lay there for a long time. When I moved it hurt. Then I looked. It wasn't my body any longer. I no longer knew it. They weren't my breasts, and my stomach and my legs. I didn't want to wash it because it wasn't mine. My body is clean. (Meyer 1999:445)

Hanna's body emerges here as a highly ambivalent site of both oppression and agency, as it negotiates its way around the rape experience which seeks to limit its scope of action and freedom. Significantly, Deon Meyer, like Zimbabwean novelist Yvonne Vera, shows how women's bodies are made to bear the material wounds of dominant male paradigms and catastrophic national violence. In her novel *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Vera discloses the horrible psychological and physical suffering that her main character, Nonceba, endures after violation. In a scene comparable to Hanna's rape, Nonceba's violation is narrated as a loss of voice. She is literally silenced by her aggressor, who cuts off her lips before leaving her for dead. But like Hanna, Nonceba eventually recovers and courageously struggles to find a voice to speak her trauma, to find "the language of all wounded beings" (Vera 2002:82). In the end, Vera does not claim for Nonceba a unified subject-position after her traumatic experience but celebrates her tremendous effort to survive despite the "wounds of war which no one can heal" (*ibid.*:86). In Hanna's case, she also tries to start a new life and decides to change her name. However, in this 'New' era, both she and the black South Africans face the new deadly obstacle of HIV. Perhaps, because no other crime is treated more poorly by the criminal justice system than rape (Odem and Clay-Warner 1998), Hanna takes it upon herself to dole out justice to her rapists by personally executing them. That is her way of claiming her agency, her way of finding justice. It is highly speculative as to

whether or not Meyer intended for this analogy to be made between apartheid and the character of Hanna Nortier, but it fits too well to be ignored. He portrays rape as an act of violence, as a form of domination and control that triggers helplessness and disorder.

Meyer thus represents a problem that has haunted South Africa for decades. Hanna Nortier symbolizes the voice of a woman that like many others in South Africa has suffered what Nhlanhla P. Maake refers to as "the culture of violation and violence" (1992:583), which includes not only rape but also the alarming statistics of HIV and AIDS. According to Helen Moffett, "South Africa has the worst known figures for gender-based violence for a country not a war [and] at least one in three South African women can expect to be raped in her lifetime" (2006:129). In her essay, Moffett argues that sexual violence can be seen as a consequence of the apartheid practices that legitimated violence by the dominant group against the disempowered. Likewise, she explains that rates of sexual assault rise alarmingly in periods of political restructuring. She states that:

> Under apartheid, the dominant group used methods of regulating blacks and reminding them of their subordinate status that permeated not just public and political spaces, but also private and domestic spaces. Today it is gender rankings that are maintained and women that are regulated. This is largely done through sexual violence, in a national project in which it is quite possible that many men are buying into the notion that in enacting intimate violence on women, they are performing a necessary work of social stabilization. (Moffett 2006:132)

Sexual violence is linked to patriarchal gender ideologies of the past. Apartheid in South Africa created extreme attitudes of superiority regarding race and gender in many South Africans –black, whites, and coloreds included. Since 1994 when Nelson Mandela took the position of president of South Africa, people have been trying to overcome the barriers set by the policies and the embedded culture of apartheid, but it is a battle that is slow to be won.

Dead Before Dying, written by Deon Meyer in 1996, only two years after apartheid ended, shows the changing ideas of race and changing roles that the different races play in South Africa's interregnum during those transitional years. Meyer represents the "New" South Africa as a developing, and better form of the "Old" South Africa, but also as a South Africa that is still slowly changing. In this way, when it comes to the representation of traumatic experiences, as LaCapra highlights, there is danger involved in responding to trauma with narratives that seek "facile uplift, harmonization, or closure" (2001:78). Meyer does not do this here. He does not attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit, for example, unearned confidence. He is not harmonizing or smoothing over a traumatic past by providing a neat narrative in which Hanna and Joubert heal their wounds and live happily. Instead, he is integrating the past into the present, showing history as a process of

overcoming violent events that are not fully grasped as they occur. While at the end of *Ways of Dying,* Toloki and Noria are trying to teach each other new ways of living by building a colourful shack because that is all they have, and in *Finding Mr. Madini*, Mr. Madini is still absent, Dead Before Dying finishes with Joubert having to face a future very different from what he had never expected.

By revealing the different perspectives of the New South Africa to readers through the various characters of *Dead Before Dying*, the author provides us with a holistic representation of the country through the eyes of the South Africans themselves. The characters of Mat Joubert, Bart de Wit, Leon Petersen, and Hanna Nortier can each be taken to represent a different demographic of South African society. Their enduring reflection might be that one must take one's lessons from the past; that the past must never, never be allowed to catch up and take over again. Let the New South Africa be born.

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