

## Postcolonial Reading of Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

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### Abstract

Zakes Mda is a South African playwright, novelist and patron for the Elisalat Prize for Literature. His Mda's *Ways of Dying* is a novel about a professional mourner during the instable, dominant transition between the apartheid and post-apartheid period. It sets in the unnamed South African harbor district during 1990 to 1994. Mda textures the novel with characters who try to fit into new democratic society. He demonstrates grotesque with dream-like images throughout the narration as Toloki, the professional mourner often respected for certain aspects and equally segregated from society. The narration often switches the period from the present new democracy and the flashbacks representing the repressive era. It deals with the issue of town violence which tolls the deaths of civilians. The characters are in the novel often confused between the reality and fantasy. He has used magical realism to enforce the postcolonial voices. This paper tries to read *Ways of Dying* in a postcolonial attribute to unearth the textures of postcolonial fragments and the characters that experiencing 'Otherness'.

**Keywords:** magical Realism, Postcolonialism, apartheid, grotesque, post-Apartheid, segregation

## Introduction

Zakes Mda's full name is Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda born in 1948. He belongs to Eastern Cape of South Africa. He is a novelist, playwright and poet. His work *Ways of Dying* is a work of fiction that sets in imaginary unnamed village. The novel is a work of Mda's grotesque ability and his endeavor to practice magical realism. The novels set in a period between the Apartheid and Post-Apartheid era. The fiction tries to bring out the comprehensive world with little fantasy coupled with tragedy and fantasy. The whole work not given importance to one particular character but to three and more and it brings out the common thread 'How to live? But the novel satirizes the death is more pleasing than living as death give the characters somekind of split-space: the space between cherish and perish in living in the world of uncertainties where anything can happen at any time: "Death lives with as every day. Indeed our ways of dying are our ways of living. Or should I say our ways of living are our ways of dying?"(Mda, 112).

The plot of the fiction is about Toloki, who is a professional mourner. Toloki is the pioneer for creating a profession out of death mourning. He believed one day He can be an entrepreneur and lead a company for professional mourning. The professional mourning is a need of the hour as the death of the new township grew day by day due to the migrants attack on the informal settlers for their support to the Young Tigers, on the other hand the undercover executions of the government officials who are mostly Whites and to worsen the situation the dead games of the Whites on the Africans. There are deaths in the dead mourning: "Death was therefore profitable" (Mda, 133). While on the other hand the Noria, a homegirl of Toloki encountered him in her second child Vutha's obituary on Christmas. Noria falls for Toloki because she believes Toloki "knows how to live" (Mda, 144). The story ends with hope that the New Year will bring Life not death: "Tyres can burn for a very longtime. The smell of burning rubber fills the air. But his time it is not

mingled with the sickly stench of roasting human of flesh” (Mda, 212).

### **Third Space**

The whole fiction have a theme to represent it is the creation of a new order for the Apartheid as they didn't long for the past but to become a potent partner for the Whites whom now their equal citizens. This attitude of the characters in the fiction prompts violence over the 'others'. The 'others' sometimes become 'the self' as the characters doesn't want their old self. This tendency defined as 'Third Space' by Homi K. Bhabha,

“The theoretical recognition of the spilt-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is in inbetween space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves” (Bhabha,38).

The Characters in the fiction tries to become the citizens of the third space, the space created for the Post-Apartheid where the colonized dwells with colonizer but the old colonizer is no more but the new colonizer were indeed the colonized. The tribal chief and the Young Tigers fought with each other through the colonized. The tribal chief used the migrants to bring out the violence in the supporters of the Young Tigers. But the Young Tigers also vicious enough they wouldn't allow a Woman like Noria to get political power from the informal settlers, they killed her Second Vutha for friendly with the hostellers whom got the information of the execution plan of the tribal chief by the Young Tigers. The Tribal chief and the leader of the Young Tigers have a motif to become the political icon for the new democracy by conquering the majority Africans. M.T.Twalo points out this as “The double standards of the nationalists is revealed in their opposition to colonialism and apartheid theoretically for the liberation of all the oppressed but practically for the benefit of the elite” (Twalo, 78).The Post-Apartheid era the place where the old Whites are not seen as the

‘Other’ but a prosperous part of the third space whom got Land, Money, power and government jobs. In the old order there was no violence in the train stations but the Whites plays rat games with Africans which made Toloki to quit his job on his exodus to the city from his village: “Toloki would have a decent house there as well if he had not decided to follow a new path that involved sacrifice, self-denial and spiritual flagellation” (Mda, 119).

But in the Third Space the Whites were in the position of helping them, “He was fortunate that the white man who drove the train saved him” (Mda, 97). The colonized no more ashamed of their past as a character Nefolovhodwe’s words, “I have nine children of my own, some are ugly, and some are beautiful. But since they are all my children, they are all beautiful to me” (Mda, 127).

The fiction reminds the change of the Africans life even they change their way of sleeping while Toloki and Noria retained them in their exodus, “He curls upon the bench and sleeps in the foetal position that is customary of his village. Although he has been in the city for all these years, he has not changed his sleeping position” (Mda, 15). Noria who has been in the Third space for a while tries to be in the past by living with Toloki who she believes have a way of living but both Toloki and Noria were unaware they were in the Third Space where Toloki finds death is profitable so he can be a millionaire once the profession of mourn becomes the status quo, on the other hand Noria who didn’t left the squatter camp who extends support to the Young Tigers to vaporize the Tribal Chief.

### **Village versus City**

The fiction portrays the village as the past and the city as the present, the process of the colonized to pursue the new third space. The village is the place where everyone knows everyone. They also show the patriarchal view on Women. Noria’s mother was called as ‘That Mountain Women’, Toloki’s Mother as ‘Mother of Toloki’. Noria’s Mother is always scolded her husband Xesibe who is a wealthy shepherd as ‘Koata’ which means ‘uncultured’. Though Noria’s Mother was from a Mountain village she had the admiration of the city life and she pamper Noria with the thoughts of the city dwelling. Even She refuse Noria’s affair over Napu, whom also a

mountain village, she'll gone to the extent of aborting Noria's first Child if she disown Napu but Noria denied it. Noria soon prepared for the third space and worked with Whites in hotels for the upliftment of Vutha. Vutha the name of Noria's child christened as 'Vutha' by Napu and condemned by Noria's mother for its non-Englishness and She calls Vutha as Jealous Down and Xesibe calls him 'mistake'. Later she starts call Napu as Koata as her mother and Noria became a third space dweller. Napu drowned him in river when he killed Vutha by knotting in a bar where he was left as appetite for dogs in the city.

After Noria lost all she had a baby and she claims it come from nowhere but from dreams where the magic realism plays it role and she lost the second Vutha to the Young Tigers too. Noria was tired of the new third space and She find peace with Toloki's fantasy Villa with garden and She denied the proposal of Shadrack whom the owner of a shop and taxi because she didn't want the new order.

On the other hand Toloki who didn't like the attitude of his father left the home for the city where he believed got love and fortune. But he got only disgust as he witness the games of the Whites to kill the Africans brutally in the working places and the governments didn't care about the Africans he left the job of the Whites. Toloki never paid for what he doesn't deserve. He found Nefolovhodwe became rich by marketing his coffin skills and mutated to the city life: "...who have taken so much to the ways of the city that they sleep in all sorts of city positions" (Mda, 16) and Toloki followed him, he thought death is profitable. Toloki is the amalgamation as he eats beans which are bought outside the bakery where he bought Swiss rolls. He at last decided to trade the work of his father Jwara's figurines. He felt it was the depiction of the creativity given to Jwara from Noria whom sings besides him while blacksmithing. The obituary in the city has a depiction of the Third space as the professional mourning was introduced in the wealthy and middle class by Toloki who used a strange coat and hat he got by admiring outside a costume vendor for days and showing the silver saliva of him to the restaurant visitors. But in the squatters he was not allowed as the squatters is the in between space. But still the city has the old practice of speech from the 'Nurse', the person who saw the deceased for the last have

to speak about the deceased.

## Conclusion

Zakes Mda in *Ways of Dying* illustrates the Third Space created after the Postcolonialism where the postcolonials fought with each other to be in the new order where they even fought with their self like Noria, Nefolovhodwe and the postcolonials like Xesibe and Mother of Toloki who stayed in their old order. As Jaspal K.Singh points out, “Apartheiddepravations and their associative violence, although not strictly inter-ethnic, is constructed and represented as such in a transitional and neocolonial nation-state” (Singh, 94). The whole discourse tries to grab the tensions which build as postcolonial world where everyone is a colonizer and colonized respectively. Kiren M. Valijee accounts the work of Zakes Mda as “...address this oppression and death in a richly written oral narrative that allows them to accept it, embrace it, forgive it, learn from it, and keep moving forward with a new, more complex and dynamic identity”(Valijee, 34).

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