

Post-apartheid South Africa and Patterns of Violence in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

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Abstract

*J.M. Coetzee and Phaswane Mpe are among the first South African writers to bring global attention to the condition of South Africa after apartheid. In *Disgrace* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the two writers highlight the overwhelming internal pressures exerted on the new South African society by centuries of apartheid and the wider legacy of colonialism, just as they explore the volatile explosive history of the post-apartheid era wherein total anarchy has replaced the old oppressive racist forces. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate that J.M. Coetzee and Phaswane Mpe in *Disgrace* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* respectively try to rectify the popular misconception of a post-apartheid South African nation as an Eldorado or sanctuary as implied by the new dispensation of 1994. This is understandable from the opinions of Ernest Renan (1990), Benedict Anderson (1983), Kevin Harrison, Tony Boyd and Seton-Watson (2003) about the nation as a perception that is more imaginary than real. In this regard, the prospect of a "new South African nation" after the end of apartheid would be more of a vision than a fact. Therefore, the frustrations of Coetzee and Mpe's characters manifested through different forms of violence result from their misconstrued dreams and expectations. R.K. Merton's Strain theory (2002) also clearly points out that people brought up in a society that predisposes them to various forms of strain whether political, economic, social or psychological leave them with no option but to embrace a subculture of violence. Coetzee and Mpe consequently view post-apartheid violence in South Africa not only as a result of political shortcomings but also of historical, economic, social, geographical and global circumstances since political change alone cannot magically transform the plight of a country caught in the chaotic aftermath of centuries of racial oppression. The study concludes that for Coetzee and Mpe, the hope of a post-apartheid South Africa that is free, just and prosperous lies in a gradual ensemble of efforts furnished by both South African and non-South African citizens in a global context because any egocentric or precipitated drive for instantaneous solutions only generates violence as demonstrated by the characters in the novels under study.*

Keywords: apartheid, post-apartheid, disillusionment, violence, effort, globalisation, hope

Introduction

Just as J.M. Coetzee was amongst the major creative writers that played a major role in bringing apartheid to global attention, he and Phaswane Mpe are also amongst the first creative writers to bring world attention to the condition of South Africa after apartheid. What distinguishes post-apartheid literature from apartheid literature is primarily its thematic focus. Although race is a current in the works of this category, post-apartheid literature foregrounds the themes of poverty, assault, rape, bloodshed, xenophobia, homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic amongst others. Coetzee and Mpe in *Disgrace* and *Hillbrow* respectively interpret escalated violence in post-apartheid South Africa not as a strange phenomenon but a logical maturation of the pressures of long years of racial segregation as well as the precipitated expectations of the post – apartheid era.

Narrated with austere clarity and brutal honesty mostly from the consciousness of major characters (which allows readers access not only to spoken words but also to unspoken thoughts) Coetzee and Mpe employ a complex scheme involving constructed narratives and the insertion of phrases from other languages, painting a frightening picture of post-apartheid South Africa while at the same time subtly suggesting alternative scales of values.

Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Vestiges of Apartheid

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the National Party (NP) government which was the ruling party of South Africa from 1948-1994 under whose rule the majority black inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and Afrikaner minority rule was maintained. Racial segregation in South Africa began in colonial times under Dutch and British rule. However, apartheid as an official policy was introduced following the 1948 general elections. New legislation classified inhabitants into separate racial groups and residential areas were segregated sometimes by means of forced removals. Non-white political representation was completely abolished in 1970 and black people were deprived of their citizenship.

Through a series of Acts and laws, the government segregated education, medical care, beaches, public services, and provided black people with services inferior to those of white people. Apartheid sparked internal resistance and violence. Since the 1950s a series of popular uprisings and protests met with the banning of opposition and imprisoning of anti-apartheid leaders. As unrest spread, became more effective and militarized, state institutions responded with repression and violence. Mounting opposition, violence and international isolation forced President Frederik Willem de Klerk in 1990 to begin negotiations to end apartheid culminating in the multi-racial democratic elections of 1994 which were won by the African National Congress (ANC) under Nelson Mandela. Although this event officially marked the end of apartheid, its vestiges still shape South African politics and society today.

Coetzee's *Disgrace* and Mpe's *Hillbrow* grapple with the past and present South Africa but also subtly make projections into the future. Stated differently, the novels address the nation's apartheid and post-apartheid political and social contexts in terms of race, class and work divisions as well as the new monsters that are gradually getting revealed with every passing page: poverty, love, seduction, promiscuity, rape, betrayal, suicide, xenophobia, urban violence, witchcraft, scenarios of illegal drugs, the spreading of AIDS and the devastating consequences of gossip. *Disgrace* and *Hillbrow* are novels about a litany of violence perpetuated by both white and black South Africans between and within themselves but also against foreigners. It must be recalled that South Africa has a long history of violence. According to Gary Kynock (2000):

The failure of the colonial state to control urban townships and informal settlements and to provide effective civil policing created the space and incentive for the emergence of various criminals and vigilante groups that proliferated during the decades of apartheid. (2)

What Gary Knock stresses above is that criminal violence in South Africa proliferated in response to the policies of segregation that were passed by apartheid. Gangsters arose in black townships to challenge the system by openly denying work and opting to make quick money through crime and violence. Violence in South African major cities is a forceful means by the marginalised to reclaim stake in the economy and register subjectivity in a society that has denied their existence. This is supported by the Strain theory purported by R.K. Merton about violence as a culture that comes as a result of people who have either been exposed to it for a long time or have been offered no other alternative to express their grievances. Violence then becomes a vent for the expression of their anger and frustrations against rampaging injustice.

Although criminal and nationalist violence escalated mostly during the 1980s and 1990s when political parties particularly the ANC encouraged various forms of violence so as to render the apartheid state ungovernable, its germs had been engrained in the social fabric of South African society. Jonny Steinberg's (2004) invaluable survey of criminal violence in South Africa in his book *The Number* reveals that criminal violence was part of South African urban society as early as the establishment of the Rand in the 19th century. Van Onselen (1982), renowned academic and social historian has also, in his studies of the social and economic history of the Witwatersrand, traced the emergence of social vice (particularly crime, alcoholism and prostitution) back to the period following the discovery of gold in the Johannesburg area in 1886. The demand for male labor on the Rand attracted a huge influx of prostitutes, pimps, gamblers and other undesirable elements from all over the world. "Perhaps inevitably", argues, Van Onselen, "prostitutes and brothels attracted a huge number of petty criminals and gamblers to the city centre where they constituted something of a nuisance" (104).

Disgrace and *Hillbrow* as earlier said, are novels set in post-apartheid South Africa and grapple amongst other things with the vestiges of apartheid (particularly violence) that continue to linger into the present life of South Africa. *Disgrace* tells the story of David Lurie, a twice divorced, 52-year-old professor of communications and Romantic Poetry at Cape Technical University.

David believes he has created a comfortable, if somewhat passionless life for himself. He lives within his financial and emotional means. Though his position at the university has been reduced, he teaches his classes dutifully and while age has diminished his attractiveness, weekly visits to a prostitute satisfy his sexual needs. He considers himself happy. But when David seduces one of his students, he sets in motion a chain of events that will shatter his complacency and leave him utterly disgraced. *Hillbrow*, simply told, is the story of Referentse and several of his close friends and family members who move to Johannesburg, precisely to Hillbrow for education or a better life but Hillbrow becomes a menacing monster of violence, xenophobia, death, moral decay and broken dreams.

The two novels depict violence as a characteristic of life in post-apartheid South Africa just as was in the past – but violence unleashed in new ways between and among the different peoples that make up the present South Africa. There are no heroes but victims. This characterization of violence by both the “white” and the “black man” parallels feelings in post-apartheid South Africa where evil does not belong to the “other” alone. By resisting the relegation of each group into positive and negative poles, Coetzee and Mpe portray the wide range of human capabilities and emotions. The novels take their inspiration from South African contemporary social and political conflict, and offer a bleak look at a country in transition. This transition is represented in the change in power dynamics of groups that were solely dominate or subordinate and in the shift in material wealth.

One of the problems in this transition is sexual violence. *Disgrace* paints a disturbing picture of the protagonist’s sexual life. David’s sexual life is more or less cloudy and precarious. The author tells us; “for a man of his age, fifty-two, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well” (1). The question that comes to one’s mind is why sex should be considered a problem by David. We are also informed that he is twice divorced and lives a passionless life. His relationship with the black prostitute, Soraya is without passion. He describes their intercourse as being like the copulation of snakes, “lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest” (2-3). No wonder the prostitute finally sends him away. In David’s relationship with his student, Melanie, the latter’s opinion doesn’t seem to count as David never seeks her approval before sexual intercourse. Their sexual encounters appear like sexual harassment or rape. This would explain why Melanie lodges a complaint to the university authorities against David. But the latter explains that it was “not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core” (24-25). David believes too that in his relationship with Melanie, he was “a servant of Eros” and that his case rests on the rights of desire, on the God who makes even the small birds quiver” (52). If this is enough justification for David’s sexual behavior then his own daughter, Lucy also becomes a victim of rape towards the end of the novel when father and daughter are assaulted by a gang of criminals.

In like manner, Mpe in *Hillbrow* makes a radical presentation of intimate relationships in post-apartheid South Africa. Prostitution, betrayal, rape and the contraction of HIV/AIDS are the *modus operandi*. Talking about uncontrolled sex, infidelity and betrayal, Sammy betrays his friend, Referentse by having sex with his girl friend. This also is a replication of what Referentse himself had done to Sammy’s own girl friend, Lerato. Because of guilt, Sammy goes mad and Referentse commits suicide. Broken relationships, rape and betrayal go along with the spread of HIV/AIDS and death. The end of apartheid in the world of the novels then appears as an era of some kind of sexual “libertinage” where sex has no limits just like in the animal world. *The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* of 1949 and the *Immorality Act* of 1950 made sexual relations and marriage between persons of different races a criminal offence. With the abolition of apartheid these laws were also abolished. One is forced to wonder whether the abolition of sex prohibition laws have something to do with escalated cases of rape, uncontrolled sexual behavior and the spread of HIV/AIDS that have seemingly enveloped the post-apartheid South African society.

Other forms of violence represented by Coetzee and Mpe in their novels from long years of apartheid are assault, theft and xenophobia. When David goes to the Eastern Cape to see his daughter, Lucy they are assaulted and property is stolen. While David is still with Lucy in the country his own property in the city is also looted. Still disturbed by her own ordeal, Lucy’s asks her father: “But why did they hate me so? I had never set eyes on them.” Her father replies: “It was history speaking through them. A history of wrong. Think that way if it helps” (156). Here David is stating the facts really as they are. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. Lucy decides not to press charges, believing that this rape, in the South African context, is not “a public matter”. In the face of irresistible historical change - the collapse of a corrupt order - the claims of the individual are necessarily of secondary importance, even irrelevant. After father and daughter recover from the attack, David reflects on their good fortune: “Count yourself lucky to have escaped with your life.

Count yourself lucky not to be a prisoner in the car at this moment, speeding away, or at the bottom of a donga with a bullet in your head. Count Lucy lucky too. Above all Lucy” (98). David’s meditation here sends signals to the uncertainties and dangers of life in South African cities and now in the suburbs as well.

There used to be a contrast between city and country life. However, the latter is drastically being transformed by the post-apartheid epoch. The tranquility of life in the countryside is no longer there. Therefore, the terrifying moments David and Lucy live in the country are synonymous with the escalated violence that Mpe’s characters experience in Hillbrow. Lucy seems to have understood these new changes that are gradually absorbing the countryside: that to live in the country one must now tolerate brutalization and humiliation like in the city and simply get going: “Perhaps this is what I must learn to accept,” she tells her father. “To start at ground level. With nothing...No cars, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity...Like a dog” (205). In the course of the attack, David is burnt and blinded, temporarily, in one eye. This has a symbolic value because when he recovers he seems to have undergone some transformation as seen in his sudden compassion for unwanted dogs. There is recognition on his part that he had been blind to certain realities. If David actually reclaims some little dignity by the end of *Disgrace*, it is only because he gives up everything, gives up more than a dog ever could - his daughter, his ideas about justice and language, his dream of the opera on Byron and even the dying animals. He has learned to love without reservation, without thought for himself. David’s transformation offers a new platform for a rejuvenating South Africa.

Mpe’s characters, like those of Coetzee, also move from misconstrued stereotypes to rational judgments. Refilwe, like Refentse, comes to see beyond her prejudiced stereotypes of foreigners:

“Hillbrowans were not merely the tiny section of the population who were brown and grew up in our Hillbrow, but people from all over the country, and other countries - people like herself, in fact- who entered our Hillbrow with all sorts of good and evil intentions”.(96)

Refilwe’s change in perception is catalyzed by a trip to England to read for her Master’s at Oxford. There she is exposed to the conceptions and attitudes of others towards Africans and South Africans and gains a more compassionate and open-minded understanding of those she had once despised as foreign. Refilwe’s transformation parallels Lucy and David’s recognition of the changes that South Africans especially the Whites must have to grapple with. The two novels therefore tackle South Africa’s long history of racial oppression as well as the larger themes of retribution, forgiveness and reversals of fortune.

The [I] Logic of Post-apartheid Violence in South Africa

Hillbrow and *Disgrace* are amongst the first novels to record the huge changes that have transformed South Africa especially its inner cities over the past years. The two novels differently tackle the struggle of South Africans to create a post-apartheid identity after the collapse of the old racial hierarchies. The process is however complicated by the arrival from elsewhere on the continent of thousands of more competent and educated immigrants. Many of the youth in post-apartheid South Africa especially the Blacks belong to the generation who grew up with the humiliations and deprivations of apartheid and expected to enjoy the fruits of freedom under democracy. Instead they are confronted by competition and new social ills such as unemployment, poverty and especially AIDS. The result is frustration, despair and outbursts of violence.

With the end of the history of radicalized oppression, freedom of movement and democracy, black migrants mostly from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Nigeria and Mozambique as well as black South Africans travelling from villages of Limpopo province and other provinces to the cities all struggled to leave poverty and apartheid behind them into prosperity and education in a Democratic South Africa. Black South Africans unable to face stiff competition with foreigners result in hatred, discrimination and violence. The cycle of hatred now shifts from whites to foreigners under a new name, xenophobia. Xenophobia becomes “apartheid” revisited in another form.

In *Hillbrow*, almost all the characters are involved in one form of violence or the other. The characters are young, talented, ambitious and hopeful but their hopes are shattered almost immediately by prevailing circumstances. According to Cazenave (2007), the lives of Mpe’s characters intersect, cross over, meet and come to a dead end. By the narrative’s end, he continues, each of the principal characters and even those more peripheral have either lost their sanity or died a violent death. They are either grappling with HIV/AIDS or have committed suicide. Through this canvassing of tragedies, life journeys and the rippling effects of suicides, accidents, ill-speaking and illness, the author develops a troupe of infection (2).

Cazenave's observation sends signals to a frightening future for the "new" South African nation after apartheid. This is because many South Africans expected immediate amelioration of their living standards after apartheid. They expected a new nation with vast opportunities that provide economic and social security for all and sundry. The only thing they failed to come to terms with is that such a situation needs time to come to fruition and that no nation has ever been transformed magically into a paradise within a short time lapse. The realization by many that their expectations might never be met becomes a bitter pill to swallow. The result is hatred and violence against their kith and kin which Coetzee and Mpe aptly capture in their works.

In *Disgrace*, Lucy, a well to do farmer, is now occasionally helped in her farm by the black farmer, Petrus, whose property abuts her own and who is rapidly consolidating his own recently won independence as a landowner. Now and then, David works for Petrus, relishing the "historical piquancy" of their role reversal. He also assists reluctantly at the animal clinic run by the "remarkably unattractive" middle-aged woman, Bev Shaw. One of Lucy's rapists - the young boy, whose name is Pollux - is related to Petrus and has recently become a member of his household. Petrus himself was suspiciously absent on the afternoon of the rape and refuses to comment on it. Realizing that she is at risk of another attack, but resisting what seems increasingly like a plot by Petrus and his family to force Lucy off her land, Lucy decides to cling to "the comforts of theory":

What if rape is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves. (158)

The treatment that Lucy and her father receive from the Petrus family is similar to the treatment foreigners receive in *Hillbrow*. Many Hillbrowans hold the transplanted foreigners responsible for the area's decay. Referentse's superintendant for example tells him as soon as he settles in Hillbrow that "Hillbrow had been just fine, until those Nigerians came in here with all their drug dealing" (17). Cousin is more explicit, holding "such foreigners responsible [for crime and grime in Hillbrow]; not just for the physical decay of the place, but also the moral decay" (17). In the same line of thought the narrator remarks:

Makwerekwere knew they had no recourse to legal defense if they were caught. The police could detain them or deport them without allowing them any trial at all. Even the department of Home Affairs was not sympathetic to their cause. No one seemed to care that the treatment of Makwerekwere by the police, and the lack of sympathy from influential Department of Home Affairs, ran contrary to the human rights clauses detailed in the new constitution of the city. Ambiguities, paradoxes, ironies... the stuff of our South Africa and Makwerekwere lives... (23)

The extract above clearly paints the picture of the bitter feelings South Africans have against foreigners. In the novel, AIDS and xenophobia are interconnected. That is, the epidemic exacerbates xenophobia: "This AIDS was caused by foreign germs that travelled down from the central and western parts of Africa. AIDS route into Johannesburg was through Makwerekwere; and Hillbrow was the sanctuary in which makwerekere basked" (4). With such feelings, the vision of a new South African nation that is void of the mistakes of the past becomes an illusion.

According to Ernest Renan in 'What is a nation?' in *Nation and Narration* (1990), a nation is a spiritual family, the outcome of the profound complications of history; a spiritual family, not a group determined by the shape of the earth (18-19) while Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) argues that a nation is "... an imagined political community..." (15). Similarly, Kevin Harrison and Tony Boyd in *Understanding Political Ideas and Movements* (2003) define a nation as a group of people, who believe themselves to constitute a nation, have things in common with each other and share a sense of nationhood (48). In the same vein, Seton-Watson (1977) points out that "All that I can say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one" (5). What we gather from the above definitions is that people can only consider themselves as one entity belonging to the same nation if and only if they are willing to accept one another. If such a will is absent, then division and hatred become the norm as demonstrated by Coetzee and Mpe's characters.

The 1994 constitution of the post-apartheid South African nation that provided for the end of segregation of any kind, equal opportunity, equal distribution of wealth, and hope for all South Africans only fell within the realm of the nation as an imaginary concept.

Many South Africans and foreigners alike misinterpreted this constitutional dispensation as a new sanctuary or haven that would be created – a new land of milk and honey so to speak, forgetting that such a vision would need time to materialize through the creation of wealth by the combined efforts of all South Africans including foreigners. Equal distribution of wealth does not also mean dispossession of those who own a little wealth or what criminals call “redistributing wealth” in Mpe’s novel. In *Disgrace*, owning wealth unfortunately is tantamount to being a target of assault just as being a woman is reason enough to be raped. This is what troubles David:

A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go round, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them. (98)

What Coetzee suggests in the above extract is that South Africans together with foreigners only need to double their efforts and work together to produce wealth that will be able to meet the needs of a large majority of people rather than fighting over the little that is owned by a few people. South Africa is a country rich in natural and human resources and a few years of combined efforts can bring down poverty and raise living standards.

For Mpe and Coetzee therefore, the post-apartheid era is being wrongly managed by South Africans. They send signals that their treatment of fellow citizens and “foreigners” should be critically examined not only because of the inhumanness involved but also because of the ambiguities involved the transition from the past to the present. The transition requires concession on both sides. David for example realizes that he will never finish his opera about Byron, which appears more and more irrelevant in the new South African context. His face has been destroyed, signaling the end of his sexual identity. No longer attractive and equipped by the rape with a sickening new apprehension of the ways in which women can be used by men, he submits to a self-abasement not unlike that of his daughter by having a relationship with Bev Shaw, whom he does not desire. He also submits completely to the animal clinic, where he puts down unwanted and homeless dogs, becoming emotionally attached to one crippled dog in particular. The final scene of the novel shows David about to surrender this dog, bearing it “like a lamb” to the killing table.

The point Coetzee and Mpe both want to drive home is moderation on either side of the coin. While the ruling black majority may in a hasty drive to get out of long years of deprivation, or in an attempt to “redistribute wealth” plunge the country back to the old mistakes of the apartheid era, those who had lorded it over others for centuries (the whites) must bear the painful transition with equanimity as Lucy and David try to do. It is only this kind of moderation that can put escalated violence on check. These are the new set of values that must govern the transition. Coetzee and Mpe blame both the perpetrators of the old system of Apartheid and those South African citizens today who perpetuate xenophobia. Referentse, Mpe’s mouthpiece, points out parallels between migrants that wander from Tiragalong and the immigrants that have come from other countries:

There are very few Hillbrowans, if you think about it who were not originally wanderers from Tiragalong and other rural villages, who have come here, as we have in search of education and work. Many of the Makwerekwere you accuse of this and that are not different to us sojourners, here in search of education and work. (18)

There are many similarities that are drawn between South African citizens and the hated immigrant foreigners by the author. Furthermore, Mpe undercuts the prevalent xenophobic attitudes by drawing a fuzzy line between those considered “foreign” and “local”. When Refilwe tells Referentse to leave his Johannesburg woman “for her, Referentse answers: “Yes, some Jo’burg women are certainly terrible. But the same can be said of some Tiragalong women” (46). Foreigners ironically come from elsewhere in South Africa. There will always be a scapegoat, always someone “foreign” to blame. More pertinently, Referentse remarks to Cousin: “Hadn’t we better also admit that quite a large percentage of our home relatives who get killed in Hillbrow, are in fact killed by other relatives and friends - people who bring their home grudges with them to Jo’burg. That is what makes Hillbrow corrupt...” (20). This is shown in true force in the novel, as an alarming amount of characters die, but none of them at the hands of makwerekwere.

The attack on David and Lucy by their immediate neighbors and the traumatic experiences of foreigners in Mpe's novel paint a frightening picture of post-apartheid South Africa where the entire society seems to be breaking down in violence. This is a warning by the two authors that if South Africans are not Vigilant things would get out of hand.

Conclusion

Coetzee and Mpe's fictions are informed by an old-fashioned liberal humanist vision. Their novels demonstrate clearly that absolute power over the other, power without pity, is always asserted at great cost. *Disgrace* and *Hillbrow* are about a society in the process of being overhauled, in which morality has been "erased and reborn" and all the terms have changed. It is a world whose humanist values have failed to resolve the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized or bring harmony among the different entities that constitute post-apartheid South Africa. And yet these very values – respect for the individual, sympathy and restraint, become the measure of what is missing in human terms, in the revolution. Coetzee and Mpe try to identify with the oppressed irrespective of color or race as Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Writers in Politics* states that the writer has a responsibility not only to record injustice but also to help change oppressive systems. Using different narrative techniques, Coetzee and Mpe end their novels with deeply pessimistic horizons. But this is just a measure to call all South Africans to an ethical path.

Disgrace is unique stylistically because even though it is written by a third person narrator, David's point of view dominates the story. "Free direct discourse" and "third person limited" are terms that describe the mode of writing. The author's decision to use this technique gives the audience access even to the protagonist's thoughts or unspoken words. David's discourse which is distinctively academic in nature such as lingering over a word delving into its context, connotation or etymology reflects his detachment from the present South African society. It is a society with one expansionist force overcoming the other with punitive violence as its by-product. The scene of Petrus clearing the land, aided by David suggests a sudden reversal of fortunes. Petrus is recalcitrant and unyielding just as the former lords of the apartheid era had been obdurate and unbending. If Petrus becomes the symbol of the new South Africa, then the future is not promising for all. The right future is that represented by Lucy's unborn child – the fruit of the rape, representing an unavoidable harmony between white, black, the other races and even the foreigners.

Mpe, like Coetzee uses a unique style of constructed narratives and their violent effects on the lives of characters. These are narratives constructed by characters about their peers. Examples of the ways words shape and construct life are included in the substance of the story. Take for instance the description of the gossip that Refilwe spreads about Refentse after his death. "[Refentse] sent you hurtling towards your second death. She blemished your name more than anyone else could have hoped to do". In doing so, "Refilwe re-wrote large chunks of story that Tirangalong had constructed about you" (42-43). Mpe himself constantly highlights this concern through the use of second person narrative throughout most of the text, a device that emphasizes the omniscience of the narrator, and the controlling and manipulative nature by which snippets of information are tantalizingly divulged. With the narrator addressing and telling the dead Refentse what he did, the reader is alerted to Refentse's obvious manipulation by the writer. To complicate the structure further, Refentse himself is also a writer who constructs a short story about a woman who contracts AIDS and is later shunned by her village community. This "scarecrow" woman foreshadows the fate of Refilwe. Mpe uses this narrative device to force the reader to reconsider his own attitude towards foreigners.

This study that brings together Coetzee and Mpe gives Hillbrow – the city of violence, a symbolic value. This is because Coetzee's son, Nicholas, died in a motor accident in Hillbrow and it is the city where the play in which Melanie plays a part in *Disgrace* is set. It is also in Hillbrow that Mpe contracted the illness that finally took away his life. As the phrase "welcome to our Hillbrow" indicates, Hillbrow is more than just a geographical space within Johannesburg - it is a constructed space echoing its elsewhere, perhaps everywhere, in the world. Tellingly, the phrase also changes to include other place names; as we follow the characters through their lives, we too are welcomed to our Hillbrow, our Tirangalong, our England, our world. Within this journey Mpe shares insightful reflections on some of the biggest issues facing the world: AIDS, xenophobia, disillusionment (locally and internationally), life and death. Highlighting the tension that South Africans hold against foreigners, but placed in an extremely localized zone - be it Tirangalong or Oxford - *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* draws attention to Mpe's ideas that we are all foreigners, that home is not home for anyone of us, that we are all Makwerekwere.

Coetzee and Mpe in a way try to open the door for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence in post-apartheid South Africa. For this to happen they confront characters with their past to confirm Wole Soyinka's assertion that "the logic of truth and reconciliation however demands that the mind prepare itself for the spectacle of a penitent" (Odhiambo and Nkealah, 2008). For Coetzee, David's confrontation with the investigation committee at the University, his uneasy meeting with Melanie's family, the spectacle of the rape of Lucy and his final undesired liaison and clinical work with Bev Shaw, enable him to come to terms not only with his past but, perhaps even more importantly, with the magnitude of his past transgressions. Similarly Mpe uses Refentse and Refilwe to confront the past and present not only in South Africa but also elsewhere. Through this process, the truth about humanity in general is revealed. Coetzee and Mpe's projects are therefore not those of assigning blame but those intended to provide possibilities of reconciliation and entente through the transformatory powers or the materiality of memory. Thus, as S.L. Klein (1986) reminds us, "memory serves as a critical site for the generation and inflection of effective bonds" (130). Coetzee and Mpe's schemes are in many ways consistent with Wole Soyinka's comment on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) when he asserts that:

Now, it is possible that there is something about the magnitude of some wrongs that transcends the feelings of vengeance, even of redress in any form. A kind of crimino-critical mass after which wrongs and sufferings are transmuted into a totally different stage of sensibility from which can only derive a sense of peace, a space of truth that overawes all else and chastens the human moral dimension. It is not surrender to evil, not a condoning of wrongs; perhaps it is akin to a balm that comes after cataclysm of nature, even when clearly of man's making. It overrides grief and despair, diffuses rage, infuses one with a sense of purgation, the aftermath of the tragic apprehension. (Qtd: **Odhiambo and Nkealah 2008: 68**)

Soyinka's comments above suggest that for reconciliation to be accomplished the past no matter how painful it had been even if it had been one-sided should be completely forgotten and this can only be possible if the human moral dimension surpasses every other dimension. This is also Nelson Mandela's vision of a free, democratic and prosperous South Africa for all.

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