

# The Unconscious Manifestations of the Image of Youth Characters in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) and *NiqMhlongo's After Tears*(2007)

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**Abstract:** The image of youth characters portrayed in South African literature has traditionally focused on their manifest responses to the political issues of the different moments of the country's history, with little attention on the interiority of the concerned individuals' being. Unlike their counterparts in the apartheid regime, the post-apartheid generation of youth has lived in a supposedly freer environment, yet some have continually exhibited errant behaviour. Guided by the theory of psychoanalysis, this study investigated other possible psychological drives behind such behavior against the background of the prevailing post-apartheid environment of the selected novels. Through their coping mechanisms, dreams and stream of consciousness, we are able to access the characters' unconscious mind. Findings revealed that individuals' actions and behavior exhibited are mainly unconscious expressions of psychic emotions of disappointment, anguish, guilt, regret, and suppressed unpleasant experiences suffered in childhood.

**Key Words:** *Youth, Post-apartheid, Psychoanalysis, the Unconscious Mind*

## Introduction

Youth is a crucial phase of life, a time when decisions made and actions undertaken impact the life of individuals in irreversible ways. Youth are a people still in the course of trying out possibilities in life in order to forge a future for themselves, and the environment they live in largely determines the kind of choices they make (McLeod (2013). This resonates with psychologist Erikson's view about youth as a phase of life during which a young adult, through free role experimentation, may find a niche in some section of his society (Erikson, 1968). In the context of the selected novels, the youth include university students, job seekers, and individuals whose lives are directly affected by the prevailing post-apartheid circumstances. The youth have played a fundamental role in shaping the history of South Africa. Specifically, the struggle for freedom from apartheid was a project of the youth (Gouws, 2016). Their continued

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struggle for restitution and inclusion in the present democratic space remains significant, yet literary representations of the image of the youth characters mainly trace their manifest responses to the political environment over time. As such, there is less critical attention on the psychological impact that the prevailing social-political and economic circumstances have had on the behavior of youth characters. Literary analyses depict the youth as an angry generation, constantly engaging in protest to agitate for change. Their frequent engagement in violence, xenophobia, crime and debauchery can be interpreted not only as indicators of dissatisfaction, but also as pointers to other underlying emotional problems. A psychoanalytic reading of the novels therefore provides the basis for exploring the extent to which the behavior of the youth is a manifestation of their unconscious mind, thereby enhancing a clear understanding of their personality and image.

### **The Image of the Youth in South African Literature**

The youth are a unique group in as far as South Africa's history is concerned. Their role in the fight against apartheid and continued search for justice and equity in the current regime sets them apart. Apartheid policy perpetrated dehumanizing crimes against blacks until 1994 when it was officially abolished (Mattos,2012; Sefoto,2015). However, the question as to whether the constructs of apartheid were eliminated remains an emotive subject to especially the blacks. Apartheid discrimination and oppression formed the basis for youth agitation for change. In recognition of the crucial role played by the youth in the struggle for independence, South Africa commemorates 16<sup>th</sup> June as Youth Day (Inngs, 2014:414). This is an important date in history when the Soweto Uprising marked the height of youth activism and resilience in the political struggle that resulted in liberation from apartheid. It is worth noting that some of the youth depicted in the novels may not have directly taken part in the struggle, but are descendants of the heroes and are therefore heirs apparent to the 'fruits of the freedom'.

In an analysis of the literary representation of the youth over the different historical periods of South Africa, Nyamnjoh (2004) observes that the achievements made in affirming the integrity and humanity of the oppressed black masses through the struggle seem to have backtracked under the present democratic dispensation in South Africa. Mattos (2012) affirms that the end of apartheid only marked the collapse of legislated identities. While according to Crowell (2012), young and poor blacks make up the majority of South Africa's population, yet they are not being integrated into South Africa's social and economic spheres effectively because of current domestic policies. These arguments imply that even though the transition yielded some progress, numerous challenges have persistently defined the lives of the young people, majority of whom are blacks.

Gouws (2016) avers that the current generation of youth is a reminder of the promises that were not kept, and a community that was not created. This implies that the born-frees, the first generation of children born or growing up after apartheid was outlawed, are not benefiting from the fruits of the struggle, resulting in disillusionment. Poverty, poor quality education, unemployment and the large gap between the rich and the poor has created resentment and anger among the youth in the country, leading to an increase in youth-led protests, violence and crime. It is such marginalization and imbalances in the society that have bred hegemony and violence in the public sphere( Neocosmos,2008; Ramphela,2012).As a result, a number of youth characters have suffered anxiety and psychological conflicts displayed through defense mechanisms and other neurotic behaviour. In extreme cases, youth characters have resorted to acts of self destruction such as suicide, as is the case in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001).

The policy of segregation of homelands during the apartheid regime also created the migrant labour system where most men remained separated from their families. This absence divorced them from actively taking part in the upbringing of their children, resulting in

negative social and economic implications for most families. The children, especially the sons growing up in violent times and without a father figure became a common phenomenon in South Africa (Rakometsi, 2008). In their article, *The Relationship between Individual's Perception and Father's Parenting and Formation of Object Relations and Defense Mechanisms*, Habibi, Nooripour and Fatimeh (2016: p. 66-7) argue that the absence of a father in the early stages of a child's growth hampers their personality development. Affected individuals are likely to suffer low self-esteem and high frequency of anxiety, mistrust and inability to sustain stable relationships in adulthood. The culture of single parenting, prevalent in the selected novels has evidently had a number of psychological effects on the youth, as depicted in Mhlongo's novel *After Tears*(2007) and Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*(2001) in which the youth are brought up by struggling single mothers. This does not however underestimate the role played by single mothers in the society, the South African context having its exemption rooted in its distinct history of apartheid.

Post-1994 South African writing is credited for shifting focus from apartheid the system to how its legacy is affecting the now free nation. The post-apartheid writers are equally dwelling more on the interiority of people's ordinary lives, rather than the exterior manifestations of their circumstances, as was the case with protest writing (Ibinga,2004; Fai,2014). In their article, *Conceptualizing 'post-transitional' South African Literature in English*, Mackenzie and Frenkel (2010) acknowledge that South African literary production over the last decade has made significant contributions to issues that are of interest to the youth in the contemporary society. Some of the authors who have highlighted such concerns are NiqMhlogo and PhaswaneMpe. The novels under study have psychological plots in which most events 'happen' within the characters' mind. Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), for example, reads like a reminiscence of the episode of the protagonist's entire life.

In a study that assessed the social formation of post-apartheid South Africa, Rotich, Illieva and Walunywa (2015) also trace the portrayal of youth over different historical periods. They conclude that at the moment, literature mainly captures the frustration at the slow pace of change in South Africa and how the youth, caught up in this, have reacted. Their discussion of Mhlongo's first novel *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) describes youth who are excited in the optimism of independence, but are sooner given to acts of protest, violence and immorality. However, their analysis does not delve into the interiority of the characters' unconscious mind for other possible psychological explanations to such behavior.

The democratic government is under criticism for failing to effectively dismantle the apartheid policies that have continued to haunt the blacks, such as those that deny them quality and affordable education. In the view of Remphele, "Verwoerd continues to triumph from his grave." (Ramphele, 2012:173). This indicates that the segregationist education policies founded by Verwoerd still determine the lives of the present generation of youth. Mhlongo's *After Tears* depicts a number of youth who are school drop-outs, and have taken to drug abuse, alcoholism and crime. The protagonist, Bafana (whose name denotes the young people), opts out of the university after losing interest in his academics and failing in the examinations.

The foregoing discussions point to the fact that the aspects that determine the behavior of the youth characters in the post-apartheid set-up are as numerous as they are ambiguous. In the view of Adamu (2016), the young generation is confronted with a limitation of humanity whose main cause is yet to be clearly established. Adamu observes that earlier, rebellion and violence had a justification: the struggle for liberation and equality, but at the moment, the cause remains ambiguous. Ambiguity here indicates a lack of clarity in as far as the motivation behind the behavior of the youth is concerned. Similarly, Seekings (1996:115-116) suggests that attention be shifted from the 'youth problem' to the actual causes of the problems facing the youth. On the same note, Ndebele (1988) advocates

for an investigation into the characters' interior manifestations of behavior, which, therefore calls for a shift of focus from the manifest responses of characters to the interiority of their unconscious actions.

Psychoanalysis explains external human behavior as a manifestation of the subconscious. According to Tyson (2006), psychoanalysis touches our most private being and reveals us to ourselves and to the world. Corey (2013) explains that characters who have experienced emotional turmoil suffer personality problems such as mistrust of others, fear of intimacy and inability to sustain meaningful relationships. This study mainly delves into the characters' private lives through their thought processes exhibited in their coping mechanisms, dreams and stream of consciousness. The concept of premeditated suicide is treated as a response undertaken by characters who cannot naturally alleviate their internal conflicts through the psychological coping mechanisms.

### **Theory and Methodology**

This study is guided by the theory of psychoanalysis, with specific focus on Erikson's psychosocial concept and Freud's theory of personality. Psychoanalysis recognizes that childhood experiences influence the functioning of individuals in their later life (Freud, 2010), and offers explanations on why individuals react differently to circumstances around them (Friedman & Schustack, 2011). Psychoanalysis theory also provides guidelines for analyzing the human mind and understanding the behavior of individuals. Erikson's psychosocial concept incorporates cultural and social aspects into Freud's biological theory. He draws a relationship between one's self-concept and the role of socio-cultural environment in personality development (Schwartz, 2001). Psychosocial theory explains how the social relationships and an individual's environment influence their actions and behavior (Erikson, 1968).

Freud explains that the mind is divided into three psychical segments: conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious (Tyson, 1999). The unconscious being the storehouse of past experiences, emotions, fears, desires and wishes, as well as unresolved conflicts, most of which we do not want to remember for the fear of being overwhelmed by them (Tyson, 2006). To Freud, the unconscious is the substantially greater part of the human mind whose content is not easily accessible, but can be inferred from an individual's behaviour.

Psychoanalysis also explains defense mechanisms as ways in which we unconsciously repress the unpleasant and painful experiences from our conscious mind to alleviate anxiety. Without the defense mechanisms, the conscious mind would be much more vulnerable to negatively charged emotional input such as loss, fear, anxiety, guilt and sadness (Feist & Feist, 2003). It is worth noting that defense mechanisms do not effectively provide relief to traumatic experiences in all individuals. In extreme cases, trauma annihilates the sense of continuity, making affected persons to resort to self-destructive behavior such as suicide (Van der Kolk & McFarlane (1998: 494). This study interrogates the aspect of self-destructiveness by suicide in Mpe's novel *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.

Another aspect of the theory of psychoanalysis that applies to this study concerns dreams. Dreams are a window to the unconscious mind, representing the condensed version of some of our thoughts, wishes and life experiences. According to Freud, we express unconscious contents of our mind through dreams, jokes and slips of the tongue (Tyson, 2006).

Psychoanalytic criticism therefore allows the researcher to gain understanding of the youth characters' behavior by investigating their psyche and actions in the prevailing post-apartheid circumstances of the selected novels.

This study adopted analytical research design. This was significant in aiding the researcher to review literature, collect and analyze qualitative data from the selected texts. Primary qualitative data was collected through textual analysis of the selected novels:

NiqMhlongo's *After Tears* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*. Secondary data was collected mainly through reading of relevant literary journals, articles, books and other publications in the libraries and on the internet.

Qualitative content analysis technique was employed in data analysis. This is appropriate whenever a researcher intends to make interpretation of meaning from a book, and it enables one to gather information about how characters make sense of their world in the texts (McKee, 2004). Content analysis involves reading the texts to identify the relevant themes through analysis of stylistic devices of narrative such as the overt and discreet meaning of authorial comments, statements by characters and descriptions of the characters (Krippendorff, 2004). Commonly occurring themes, aspects of characterization and style that cut across the selected texts were identified and analyzed.

## DISCUSSION

The psychoanalytic premise that external human behavior is a manifestation of the subconscious is key to the analysis of characters' behavior in this section. This study first looks at the coping mechanisms employed by the youth characters in Mhlongo's novel *After Tears* (2007), it then examines the aspect of self destructive behavior through suicide in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001). The dream episodes and stream of consciousness are later assessed.

### 1.1 Coping Mechanisms in NiqMhlongo's *After Tears*

The defense mechanisms that youth characters have unconsciously employed to play out their conflicted, repressed emotions and to alleviate anxiety include: avoidance, reaction formation, projection and rationalization.

Mhlongo's novel *After Tears* (2007) depicts a university student, Bafana, whose failure and eventual drop-out from the university sink him deep in guilt, regret and self incrimination. Guilt is a product of intra-psycho conflict between the Id and the Superego as a result of the Ego's failure to regulate the demands of the Id and societal expectations. When guilt sets in, an individual experiences emotional turmoil characterized by feelings of anguish and inferiority. Coming from a deprived family background, failure becomes quite costly for Bafana to bear. He is caught up in a complex emotional dilemma on whether to confess or remain secretive about his failure. This leaves his life oscillating between lies and regrets. To alleviate the anxiety that comes with this, he unconsciously employs coping mechanisms, as discussed below:

#### i. Avoidance

Avoidance entails staying away from people or situations that are likely to make us anxious, especially when being close to them stirs up some unconscious repressed experiences or emotions. A person therefore finds it more relieving to opt out or stay away from situations or people that cause them anxiety. However, this only provides temporary escape from the problem but is not in itself a solution. In *After Tears*, Bafana leaves Cape Town after learning that he has failed in his examinations. He confesses that everything he had earlier found beautiful in the city had all of a sudden turned ugly. He leaves for home :Chiawelo in Johannesburg (Mhlongo, 2007, p.7). When the truth about his failure and the ploy of a secret marriage to a girlfriend, Vee is discovered, Bafana is unable to withstand the guilt. Upon being busted by his mother, the shame and embarrassment is so overwhelming that he leaves for Diepsloot on what he refers to as a self imposed exile. He further severs links with all friends and family members. This would give him the much needed space to candidly reconnect with the self. He says, "Feelings of failure, guilt and exposure battled furiously in my head. I needed to escape it all as quickly as possible. I needed to escape Mama and sis Zinhle and Vee" (Mhlongo, 2007, p.215). He gets this escape by moving away from home and cutting links with all relatives and friends. In a flashback, he reflects on all the drama that his

life has been, and confesses of how his troubled mind wandered over everything that had happened to him (p.216). This experience grants him a unique opportunity to learn his life lesson:

I had convinced myself that I didn't deserve to suffer any more. ... Through the window, I stared out into the fading light, thinking of my bad fortune, which was unquestionably well deserved...No one had been able to track me down...as I had changed my cell phone number.

(Mhlongo,2007: 216-217)

In this case, avoidance provides Bafana temporary escape from embarrassment, and a moment of reflection, but not a solution to the cause of his anxieties. His mind remains shuttling between guilt and self incrimination, which are forms of self punishment inflicted by his superego. The life of deception has not served him reprieve as he expected. He has instead been suffering psychological trauma and guilt, which have gnawed his mind and soul to the point of making him resolve that he did not deserve to suffer any more.

## ii. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation refers to conversion of dangerous thoughts, feelings and impulses into their opposites such that the actions and conscious feelings exhibited are the opposite of what is buried in the unconscious. In *After Tears* during a visit that Bafana makes with his mother to Advocate Ngwenya's office, Bafana not only regrets having allowed himself to fail in his examinations but also admits that he was jealous of this man who had successfully gone through education and become an advocate. But he carefully conceals his envy, and what he exhibits from the outside is respect and admiration for the lawyer. He narrates:

It was difficult to penetrate Mama's mind as she hadn't uttered a single word all morning, but her silence was becoming oppressive, sending my mind on a long journey across all the great opportunities that I had wasted by failing my degree. ...I saw a piece of paper that had been pinned to the wooden door of Mr. Ngwenya's office. It had his name typed on it, as well as the word *Associate*. Out of nowhere jealousy went through me like a sword. (Mhlongo, 2007: 70)

Here, Bafana reveals how he is struck with jealousy at Lawyer Ngwenya's success. Coincidentally, this happens when Mama's silence is already torturing Bafana's mind with feelings of guilt and regret. From a psychoanalytic perspective, guilt and regret are punishment by the Superego for our unpleasant actions. Even though Bafana expresses admiration and respect outwardly, he is jealous on the inside, and mentally troubled by the reminder of his past failure and inability to be successful in life, and to live to his mother's expectations. The Superego, governed by morality, quests for perfection and morality. Our conscience makes up the superego. The superego is also related to psychological rewards and punishments; the rewards including feelings of self-love, while punishment include feelings of guilt, shame, remorse and inferiority (Feist & Feist, 2009; Corey, 2013, p.65). Bafana's past failure has deprived him of self-love, his conscience is clouded in guilt and regret. It is interesting how, through reaction formation, he feigns admiration and respect for the lawyer he is jealous of.

## iii. Projection

This is a defense mechanism whereby people conveniently see their own unpleasant actions and weaknesses in others in order to avoid a negative evaluation of themselves (Tyson,2006). In Mhlongo's *After Tears*, Bafana is confronted with a painful reality: he has



failed in his university examinations. Bitterness and guilt torture his mind, and whenever this happened, he projected on his uncle Nyawana and his friends. He finds negative description for their personality. At the bus stop where they have come to receive him, Bafana's haughty attitude reveals in his description of his uncle and company:

...I couldn't help but see Uncle Nyawana...flashing his dirty teeth at me....Dilika had been my teacher at Progress High School. He couldn't seem to bring himself to begin a sentence without saying, "read my lips", a phrase that had quickly become his nickname...PP was a notorious carjacker in Soweto and his name alone carried terror in the township. His neck and both his arms were covered with grotesque tattoos of a praying mantis, a lion and a gun... As soon as he saw me, my uncle tucked his wooden crutches under his arms and limped towards me with a smile...He smelled of a combination of sweat, booze and cigarettes.

(Mhlongo,2007:11)

This description reveals Bafana's loathsome attitude towards uncle Nyawana and the other friends, which he camouflaged by treating them well. On arrival from the city, Bafana has brought his uncle a T-shirt, and even buys him and his friends a drink, not out of concern but to fend them off. He says, "To stop them from arguing, I bought a bottle of J&B whisky at the Dakar bottle store next to the parking lot." (Mhlongo, 2007, p.13) This repulsion is motivated by the emotional conflict within.

That Bafana kept PP, Uncle Nyawana and the other people's company without betraying his contempt for them is dangerous. He distracts our attention such that we forget his failure and only have the negative images of those around him in our mind. Disappointment, guilt and bitterness within motivated this hatred.

#### **iv. Rationalization**

This occurs when an individual unconsciously gives themselves a false explanation of their behavior. One creates logical explanations for their action, which are not the true reasons for their engagement in such behavior (Freud, 2010). In *After Tears*, Bafana seems to rationalize his guile lifestyle when he blames his ways on his mother's strictness, and his uncle's fallacy that alcohol offered solace to a desolate soul. He says:

I was sure that I couldn't continue to stay with Mama. I had slowly come to realize that Mama was very strict and I was sure that if I stayed much longer with her in Naturena, she would discover that I had failed my degree. I missed Uncle Nyawana and the freedom I had enjoyed at our house in Chi... At least he had had time...to teach me that alcohol and dagga were a wonderful way to transcend unhappiness...Although I was not a great fan of jazz, the music was easing my mind, allowing me to think clearly about my situation...(Mhlongo, 2007:178-179)

In Freudian sense, rationalization occurs when one does not realize they are lying. It comes out here that Bafana is unconsciously evading the truth. His inability to surrender to Mama's principles of discipline makes him to term her as too strict. The leeway he enjoys around his uncle, whom he secretly hates, does not add any tangible value to his life, yet he uses it to justify the fact that he had to leave and stay away from home. He also reveals his indulgence in alcohol and drugs, which are Id driven pleasures.

It comes out that in *After Tears*, the main character's emotions are unconsciously expressed through defense mechanisms when confronted with unpleasant experiences. The psychological defense mechanisms keep Bafana's mind healthy by attenuating negative emotions. Defense mechanisms help us maintain emotional homeostasis. However, when this fails, we slide into emotional turmoil

and acts of self destruction. This is what happens to Mpe's protagonist Refentse in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, who, for the lack of an alternative way for venting his anger and frustrations, plunges in depression that ends in suicide.

### 1.2 Premeditated Suicide in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*

Mpe's novel *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is a reflection of Refentse's life, told from the second person perspective. In direct addresses to Refentse, the narrator reveals to us the contents of both his (narrator) and Refentse's mind. We therefore get to know Refentse's fears, wishes, worries, pressures, and childhood memories, some of which drive him to depression and self destruction. Psychodynamic concepts of suicidal behavior include self-directed aggression, object loss, ego functioning disturbance, and pathological object relations (Freud, 1910). In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud avers that loss, loneliness, self-contempt, rage, feelings of abandonment and anguish are some of the intolerable psychic states that are suicide inviting, and that suicide is mainly as a result of hostility turned inward.

In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Refentse encounters pressure from his mother as well as the people of his home village Tiragalong. Their unrealistic expectations of Refentse make him have a strained relationship with them. The narrator reveals that Refentse also nursed feelings of frustration, guilt and bitterness that bottled within. Being an introvert, he does not share matters of his private life with other people. Some of the friends and relatives he happens to be close to are, unfortunately, the cause of his troubles. His attempts to vent out through writing are neither fruitful (Mpe, 2001:59), as he dies before completing his short story. For relief from the emotional conflicts, Refentse tries to find escape in suicide, as the narrator tells in his 'address' to Refentse:

Love. Betrayal. Seduction. Suicide. It was such things as these that you might have written about. Refentse, child of Tiragalong and Hillbrow, had you not chosen to exit prematurely from this world of trials. You know what a seductive subject suicide can be. Because when it seduced you, you found nothing in life to pull you away from the seduction. You had quarreled with your mother because you insisted on being in love with Lerato...

And since love, friendship and motherhood did not provide any possibility for sanctuary in your hour of need, you began to look increasingly at the positive sides of suicide. You looked until you found them. Relief was the sum total of the benefits you discovered. Relief from the pressure to succeed, with the weight of Tiragalong's expectations on your back. Relief from the constant financial strains and burdens. From the unending disappointments of life etched on your brain, with your mother, friend and lover as some of their embodiments. And relief too from your nagging sense of guilt over your own betrayal with Bohlale...

(Mpe, 2001, pp.38-40)

This indicates that Refentse was emotionally weighed down by a wide range of issues: a disappointing love relationship, unmet expectations from mother and village-mates, betrayal by friend Sammy, guilt from his illicit affair with Sammy's lover, and financial strain. The anxiety brought about by these burdens and lack of someone to confide in, all make Refentse to lose interest in life. He nurses these painful emotions for some time before resorting to end his life. This shows in the manner he becomes lonely, moody and melancholic. Suicide is viewed as an escape from a painful reality (Tyson, 2006). In the novel, the narrator reveals how Refentse's failure to vent out built up to his tragic end. He could not confide in those close to him because they were the source of his frustrations:



There were no outlets for your bottled-up feelings. You rarely discussed your private life with other people, and those to whom you might have confided your troubles were the very ones who were the source of your pain. With so much on your mind, suicide and relief could only be synonymous attractions...Refilwe could not know any differently, because you confided nothing in her. So she had no idea of the conflicts you were going through (Mpe, 2001,p.41)

That Refilwe and other people close to Refentse had no idea of the emotional turmoil he suffered is because, besides being introverted, he had managed to conceal his bitter emotions through reaction formation, such that he appeared happy from the outside. Reaction formation is a defense mechanism in which a character displays the opposite of their inner feelings (McLeod, 2013). Having been the first person from Tiragalong to obtain a Master of Arts degree at the University of Witwatersrand, to become a lecturer and a prospective writer, the people around him therefore only saw a self-actualized man (Mpe, 2001: 41). This is the opposite of what he suffered from within. Refentse was haunted by guilt and emotional turmoil which robbed him of the peace within.

Refentse's suicide leads to an unfortunate chain of other premature deaths in the novel. These include Refentse's own mother, and Lerato. Refentse's mother is killed by the violent villagers on suspicion that he bewitched Refentse, while Lerato commits suicide due to her guilt of betrayal. Freud explains that intra-psychic conflict arises when a weak Ego is unable to regulate the unrealistic impulses of the Id and the Superego, resulting to feelings of anguish and guilt (Feist & Feist, 2006). The psychological torture within Lerato's mind, brought about by blackmail contributes to her self destruction.

Freud believed that our (unpleasant) childhood experiences were mainly responsible for our behaviour in adulthood (Tyson, 1999). This plays out in Refentse's case. We learn that he liked the song *See the World through the Eyes of a Child* because it filled him with nostalgic memories of his childhood. Memories he hasn't quite forgotten of rejection, loneliness and which in turn planted in him the fear of rejection even in adulthood. It is this very song Refentse plays just before he kills himself (Mpe,2001: 84).

This reminder of violent childhood and rejection can be closely associated with the South African atmosphere in the late '80s and early '90s that marked the height of widespread protests and youth agitation for change. This was a moment characterized by uprisings, killings and broken families. In the view of Rotich et al. (2015:138), the youth were growing up in extremely violent spaces, with missing father figures, which negatively affected most sons. This song, which Refentse often played, reminded him of such painful repressed childhood memories. This also explains why Refentse preferred solitude and kept his confidential matters to himself. The narrator makes no mention about Refentse's father, leaving us to conclude that he was brought up by a single mother. This may also explain his fear of rejection and loss, solitude, as well as his frequent emotional shifts to melancholy.

When Refentse's friend Sammy turns out to be a traitor, Refentse loses trust in him, and in all people around him. Mistrust of people is a personality problem that stems from painful past occurrences, especially when the Ego has not effectively blocked such experiences from becoming conscious. Refentse loses interest in life, and suffers low self esteem and guilt. His superego therefore punishes his conscience, and blinds him from finding any reason worth living for. He sinks into psychic depression before committing suicide. Psychic depression is demonstrated in the episodes of stream of consciousness through which the author further reveals the contents of Refentse's mind.

Mpe, however, indicates that suicide is no permanent solution to the problems the youth face. The author creatively presents a rare scene in heaven where Refentse's mind is in more turmoil than it was while he lived on earth(Mpe,2001, p 79). The explosion of the skull may symbolically mean Refentse's 'death' in the afterlife, which denies him the chance to find the anticipated sanctuary for his emotional conflicts in heaven. Freud explains that some individuals find escape from societal pressures and internal conflicts in

suicide. But the author's revelation here that Refentse has no afterlife peace even in 'Heaven' could be his way of challenging the young people to find working alternatives to the challenges they encounter in life rather than opting for suicide. Suicide is therefore not the end of (a miserable) life as it is traditionally viewed. Instead, it is transition to an afterlife, which becomes a moment for retrospection and divine retribution.

## 2. The Dream Motif

Freud's explains that it is through dreams that the unconscious is made conscious (Kirton-Els, 2013: 58). Freud believed that dreams are the main pathways to the unconscious. Some dreams also turn out to be fulfillments of individuals' wishes (McLeod, 2013). The subject matter of a dream, when interpreted, can also often reveal the traumatic experiences of an individual's past, which if not addressed effectively, can cause damage to one's psyche (Kirton-Els,2013: pp 65-7).

In this study, the youth characters encounter episodes of dreams that mainly relate to their day-to-day life experiences and interactions with immediate family members as well as close friends. The dreams turn out to be mainly re-enactments of their fears and anxieties. In Mhlongo's *After Tears*, Bafana narrates to his uncle Nyawana a dream he had encountered the previous night. Although the uncle wants to interpret the details of the dream for the betting game gains, the dream reflects one of the secrets Bafana kept from his mother: that he smoked. He says that in his dream, "Mama caught me smoking cigarette and she scolded me,...she called me a pig and broke my cigarette into pieces." (Mhlongo,2007,pp.41-2). Earlier in the story, Bafana had disclosed that only his uncle suspected that he indulged in drugs and drinking, and he wouldn't want his mother to know this (Mhlongo,2007,p.19). Through this dream, Bafana expresses one of his fears, of what Mama would do if she discovered that he smoked and drunk secretly. Concealing this from Mama subjects Bafana to numerous anxious moments. The happenings in the dream relate to what actually happens when Mama eventually discovers Bafana's failure in examinations, and his secret wedding plan. Mama angrily scolds, slaps, then disowns him (Mhlongo, p 214-215).

The dream therefore foreshadows what later happens to Bafana, and vindicates his fears. The pig symbol in the dream is representative of the dirty and evil life Bafana had taken to, making him rife in guilt, given the extent his mother had sacrificed to ensure he obtained education. The mess of his life at this point is characterized by Id driven behavior of indulgence in drugs and alcohol, opportunistic relationship with the Zimbabwean woman Vee, and keeping hopeless male company. This is definitely not what Mama expected of Bafana. By 'breaking the cigarette into pieces', Mama intends to put an end to Bafana's unacceptable behavior.

In another instance Bafana dreams of being mauled by his uncle's dog Verwoerd, while the rest of his family members and friends laugh at him instead of coming to his rescue. He narrates:

The whisky had freed me from the tension in my mind and, before the train reached Ladysmith, I fell asleep and dreamt of my uncle and his dog, Verwoerd. Verwoerd was trying to maul me, just as he had the first day I had come back to Chi from UCT, while my uncle, Mama, Sis Zinhle, PP, Zero, Dilika, Vee, Bunju, Nina and Baba Mfundisi stood around laughing.

(Mhlongo, 2007, pp.217-18)

Bafana encounters this dream while on his way to Johannesburg, on a 'self-imposed exile'. He had been overwhelmed by embarrassment when his mother, relatives and the friends he mentions in the dream discovered that he had actually been living a lie. The dream is therefore a revelation of what was in Bafana's subconscious. It mirrors the entire drama that his life has been. The revelation only sets Bafana free from the burden of keeping the secret, but he has to contend with managing the truth and the manner in which it will henceforth determine his relationship with those around him, especially his mother. Having had to take whisky to free himself from the tension in his mind is an indication that Bafana's guilty conscience had thrown him into deeper conflict within. The act of being mauled by Verwoerd, his uncle's dog, symbolize the punishment he was destined to face as a consequence of failure in his education and the ensuing deceit. In his own words, "I stared out into the fading evening light, thinking of my fortune, which was unquestionably well deserved,"(Mhlongo,2007,p217).

Being mauled by Verwoerd also symbolically indicates that Bafana (and other youth in the society) is a victim of the Bantu Education policies, implying that his future is condemned to oblivion. The Bantu Education system was laid down by Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of apartheid was geared towards ensuring that the poor blacks provided cheap labour and continued to occupy subordinate places in the society (Rakometsi, 2008:60). Some formerly white universities that offered quality education have, to this day, remained too expensive for ordinary blacks to afford. In the view of Galiomee (2012:71), the ANC leadership has furthered Verwoerd's policy by keeping the black youth poor, uneducated and deprived. This further explains why a number of youth in the novel *After Tears* are school drop-outs, with dimmed futures. Relegating the name Verwoerd to their dog is one of the people's ways of expressing their mortal dread for the apartheid architect and the policies he initiated that have persistently scarred their lives to date.

In an instance of dream in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, a young man, Molori, experiences nightmares related to fearful superstitious beliefs that a witchdoctor had planted in his mind. Having been made to believe that his close cousin Piet had bewitched him, Molori experiences fear and anxiety whenever the cousin's image crosses his mind. In the dream episode, the suspected cousin assumes the image of a snake and threatens to maul Molori. His scary dream is related thus:

On the night following their strengthening, Molori could hardly sleep. Every time sleep encroached upon him he would see, in his dreams, a huge snake squeezing itself into his room through a tiny space between the door and the floor. The space was so tiny that no snake of any size, let alone such a big one, could ever hope to go through. Yet this one managed. Molori would wake with a start each time, just before it poured its venom into his heels through its bright fangs. He would imagine that the snake was Piet. Or Piet's mother. Or both, merged into one, the way things are possible in Dreamland...(Mpe, 2001, p77-78)

This dream is a manifestation of Molori's fear, suppressed in his unconscious mind. He believes that his cousin could have destroyed him were it not for the witchdoctor's revelation and protection, and that the 'strengthening' is what saves him from the snake's venom in the dream. But unfortunately, Molori's fear of death drives him to organize for innocent Piet's murder, a further indication that the anxiety was so deeply embedded in his mind, that no amount of the witchdoctor's assurance and medicine would guarantee him full security.

However, in a bid to prove wrong beliefs in witchcraft, the author exonerates Piet and his mother from Molori's suspicion. That Molori encountered such a nightmare just after the visit to the witchdoctor illustrates the vulnerability of the youth to the cultural beliefs of witchcraft and superstition in which the practitioners blackmail gullible members of the society. The result being intensified

enmity and conflict among family members, and the society at large. In Molori's case, Piet and his mother are victimized and punished on baseless falsehood.

These instances of dreams expose the characters' fears, wishes and emotions buried deep in their unconscious mind.

### 3. Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness technique is a narrative mode that seeks to portray an individual's point of view by giving the written equivalent of the character's thought processes, in connection to his or her actions. The technique involves a continuous flow of sense perceptions, thoughts, feelings and memories in the human mind, usually in an unpunctuated or disjointed form of interior monologue. Authors employ stream of consciousness to represent the flow of sensations and ideas, and to add to the depth of character portrayal (Hurley,1998).

In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe takes us through the mental turmoil the protagonist finds himself in, just before committing suicide, and later when in 'Heaven'. When Refentse finds his girlfriend Lerato and friend Sammy in their treacherous act, the narrator tells us of how the shock discovery caused Refentse's mind to sink in melancholy. The narrator tells us that Refentse sat alone on his twentieth-floor balcony, immersed in gloomy thoughts about love, friendship and the whole purpose of living. We are then taken to Refentse's thought flow:

And when you finally come to this part of your journey that ends in the blank wall of suicide...with the spinning of cars the prostitution drug use and misuse the grime and crime...the Department of Home Affairs moving from downtown Johannesburg into Braamfontein and *Makwerekwere* drifting into and out of Hillbrow and Berea having split into Berea from Hillbrow according to many xenophobic South Africans and their glamorizing media and into Braamfontein to sort out their refugee affairs and the streets...Overflowing with *Makwerekwere* come to pursue green pastures after hearing that the new president Rolihlala Mandela welcomes guests and visitors... (Mpe, 2001: 25-26)

This gives us the flow of thoughts in Refentse's mind, the stream of issues that plagued his society, and which he remained preoccupied with, including: infiltration of foreigners to the country and its attendant effects, violence, immorality, crime in Hillbrow, and xenophobia. In the view of Loncar-Vujnovic(2012), stream of consciousness technique attempts to portray the remote, preconscious state that exists before the mind organizes sensations These post-apartheid socio-cultural issues not only corrode his subconscious, but also stubbornly revolve in Refentse's mind as he dies.

The narrator takes us through another episode of Refentse's stream of consciousness, when he has died and joined the novel's heaven where he re-lives his life in retrospection(Mpe, 2001:61), in which Refentse's mind veers to his favorite song, the reminder of his painful, repressed childhood experiences. He emotionally links this to the strained relationships he had with Lerato, Bohlale, Refilwe and his own mother, which depressed him to the point of committing suicide. Psychoanalysis attributes inability to sustain meaningful relationships in adult life to troubled childhood. This manifests in Refentse's experience. The narrator then winds it up with the refrain, "If you were still alive now, Refentse...all of this that you have heard seen heard about felt smelt believed disbelieved shirked embraced brewing in your consciousness would still find chilling haunting echoes in the simple words... Welcome to our Hillbrow..." (Mpe, 2001: 62).The refrain, 'Welcome to our Hillbrow' is symbolic in the sense that Refentse had no moral justification of 'punishing' his perceived culprits by committing suicide, since he himself had sinned in more or less the same way. In the author's view, we all belong to 'our' Hillbrow in one way or the other, as a result of moral deprivation.

The last instance of stream of consciousness takes us to another young woman's unconscious mind. Refilwe had not only propagated xenophobic hatred against perceived foreigners, she had also fueled rumours about Refentse's death in a manner that enabled her to exact revenge. The narrator evinces an accusatory tone that makes us withhold our sympathy for the dying Refilwe. While in England, she realizes that she is infected with HIV/AIDS. She has to return home to die. She's well aware of Tiragalong's 'linguistic chisels' and 'human microscopes', and the manner in which these were going to exacerbate her situation through negative rumours. The narrator takes us through her stream of thought (Mpe,2001:113) through which Refilwe's most profound fears and regrets are revealed. She is ironically a victim of prejudices that she herself participated in perpetrating against innocent individuals. The author makes Refilwe's own conscience to punish her, long before Tiragalong people's gossips consume her away. Her stay in Oxford subjects her to nativism, alienation of a different kind. This makes her remorseful about the xenophobic prejudice she had exacted on innocent victims such as Lerato. The stream of consciousness indicates that Refilwe has her turn to experience the psychological pain of alienation, denigration based on prejudice and xenophobia. This affords her moments of introspection, and remorse. The author's point here is that humanity should transmute our imaginary boundaries of ethnicity, race or nationality, into brotherhood. Through this instance of stream of consciousness, the readers are equally involved in Refilwe's psychological journey of emotional transition; we reflect the past with her, empathize with her victims in Hillbrow/Tiragalong and those discriminated in Oxford, and to a greater extent, take sides with the narrator when Refilwe is made to atone for her sins.

The young individuals in these instances are experiencing emotional conflict and mental turmoil. As such, the unpunctuated prose in the stream of consciousness technique can be interpreted mainly as representations of their troubled state of the mind.

#### 4. Conclusion

Significant aspects of the behavior of the youth characters are dominated by repressed, unconscious impulses including unpleasant childhood memories, missing fathers, hostile relationships, unfulfilled wishes and trauma. Both Bafana and Refentse have no contact with their fathers in their early (and later) stages of development and this has negatively impacted on their behavior as young adults.

The two authors have employed various techniques that enable us understand the characters' unconscious behavior by examining their thoughts and actions through defense mechanisms, dreams, and stream of consciousness. These have revealed the protagonists' unconscious contents of the mind. It therefore comes out that characters' actions are expressions of frustrations, guilt, regrets as well as repressed emotions that stem from interactions with their immediate social, cultural and economic environment. The techniques employed also evince varied emotional responses from the reader such that we are actively involved in the characters' interiority and circumstances, rather than remaining as passive consumers of the stories of their lives.

In *After Tears*, the various coping mechanisms enable Bafana to alleviate the anxiety that stressed his mind due to failure and the attempt to hide the truth from his mother. The stream of consciousness technique in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* helps us to understand Refentse's cause of melancholy and mental turmoil. The sources of the depression he sinks in before committing suicide are also revealed: painful childhood experiences and rejection. It also shows the extent to which the socio-cultural issues of the time such as xenophobia, marginalization, poverty and social relationships, sank deep in the minds of individual youth characters, determining their behaviour.

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