

ABSTRACT

The image of youth characters portrayed in South African literature has traditionally been focused on their manifest responses to the political issues of the different moments of the country's history. Protest literature portrays the youth as agile freedom fighters while in the early years of transition to democracy, they are celebrated heroes. At the moment, the youth are depicted as victims of lingering apartheid legacies on the one hand, and as a lost generation on the other. Unlike their counterparts in the apartheid regime whose engagement in violent protests had obvious justification, the present generation of youth has lived in a supposedly freer environment. There is therefore need for investigation into other underlying psychological drives behind such behavior. It would further be necessary to assess the manner in which the shifting post-apartheid circumstances have transformed the image of the youth in the contemporary society. The study therefore aimed to establish the underlying causes of the variant behavior of youth characters in the post-apartheid environment of the selected novels. The objectives of the study were to analyze the psychological impact of the post-apartheid environment on the personality of youth characters in the selected novels; interrogate the extent to which the personality of youth characters in the novels is a manifestation of their unconscious mind; and to examine the authors' literary stylistic choices and their effectiveness in the portrayal of the image of youth characters. The study was guided by the theory of psychoanalysis. Erikson's psychosocial premise and Freud's theory of personality provided the insight for exploring the personality of youth characters in the selected novels. Qualitative analytical research design was adopted. Population of the study comprised all post-apartheid novels authored by the three black writers and published in the first quarter of the twenty first century. Purposive sampling was used to determine the three texts under study: Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, and Mhlongo's *After Tears*. Qualitative data was collected through textual analysis. Content analysis was employed in coding the data. Data was critiqued using the theory of psychoanalysis. Findings revealed that although apartheid was outlawed, its legacy continues to manifest in subtle ways that have contributed to psychological turmoil in a number of youth characters in the post-apartheid environment. Other cultural aspects including family background and social relationships have equally influenced the behavior of characters in significant ways such that the actions of individuals and exhibited behaviour are mainly unconscious expressions of psychic emotions of disappointment, anguish, guilt, regret, and suppressed unpleasant experiences suffered in childhood. The post-apartheid writers under study have also effectively employed dreams, stream of consciousness, the first and the second person narrative perspectives thereby allowing the reader unlimited access into the preoccupations of the characters' unconscious mind.