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THE POLITICS OF MOURNING AND RESILIENCE IN ZAKES MDA'S *WAYS OF DYING*: PSYCHOANALYTIC, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Dr Mamadou Abdou Babou Ngom
Gaston Berger University, Senegal (West Africa)
Faculty of the Humanities

ABSTRACT: *This paper sets out to get to grips with how one of the foremost postliberation South African writers, i.e. Zakes Mda, grapples in his fiction with two glaring societal features of the rainbow nation: mourning and resilience. Ways of Dying on which this research article is based is, doubtless, a reproach on democratic era South Africa. The author resorts to the pervasiveness of violence and its attendant string of deaths as a stepping stone to lay bare his gut-feeling that his country is, sad to say, continuously in mourning. On the flip side, Mda makes the contention that, for all its woes pertaining to crime and deprivation of any ilk, South African society is conspicuous by a mind-blowing bend for resiliency. Arguably, Mda's Ways of Dying represents a cautionary tale about the mind-boggling intricacies of the work of mourning and the driving necessity for a sense of bouncebackability in hostile world.*

KEYWORDS: Mourning, Resilience, Decathexis, Plastic Force, Trauma Loss Withdrawal

INTRODUCTION

Zakes Mda, born Zanemvula kizito Gatyeni Mda, ranks amongst the foremost postapartheid South African novelists who plough their own furrow in the exploration of the travails bedeviling the new South Africa. A painter, poet and academic all rolled into one, Mda rides the crest of four novels that have won him national and international acclaim. He commands a felicitous turn of phrase. Unsurprisingly, his percipient observation of the social woes facing the democratic South Africa compellingly plays out in *Ways of Dying*, a novel which came out in 1995, to wit, on the heels of the first democratic elections ever held in the rainbow nation, and on which this research paper is based.

A blockbuster fictional work, *Ways of Dying* is arguably a riveting window on a country caught between the painful memories of its harrowing past and the scourges that it has spawned. Two protagonist stand out in the novel: Toloki and Noria. The latter is a "Professional Mourner" in a city to all intents and purposes laid to waste by the rampancy of violence and the spate of wanton deaths attendant upon it; whereas the former is a homegirl of Toloki's. (The weirdness of Toloki's calling lies in the fact that he goes from funeral to funeral, with black costume and top hat, in the spirit of solacing bereaved families.) After having been separated for quite a long time, both protagonists were thrown together by some freak of fate. Actually, it is on the occasion of Noria's son's funeral that Toloki espies his erstwhile childhood friend. He then makes it clear to mourners that he "*want* [s] *to speak with her*" (WD, 9). Faced with "*members of the street committee's*" point-blank refusal to let him talk to Noria out of fear that he may mooch off her. (WD,9). Toloki has to resign himself to not seeing his homegirl. Eventually, he manages, though, to get his own way thanks to his howling role in quelling an incipient spat

between two processions as to which of them must have right of way: "*The driver of the van approaches him* [Toloki]. *'The mother of the child we have just buried wants to thank you for what you have done,*'" says the narrator (WD, 11). Since their reunion the fellow villagers have not parted ways. More significantly, Toloki becomes a shoulder to cry on for Noria and goes as far as sharing a flat with her towards the end of the narrative. The novel ends on an upbeat note as the two partners inch closer to marriage.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Owing to its paramountcy to human life, the notion of mourning reckons among the pet theories of psychoanalysts and philosophers alike. If anything, Sigmund Freud gave it his undivided attention with a seminal work entitled *Mourning and melancholia*. There the prime mover of Psychoanalysis defines mourning as follows:
Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.[1]

A leading psychoanalyst who wrote at length on issues germane to death, grief and mourning, namely John Bowlby, sees eye to eye with Sigmund Freud about the trigger of mourning:
"Mourning" will be used to denote the psychological processes that are set in train by the loss of a loved object and which commonly lead to the relinquishing of the object.'[2]

In the light of the foregoing quotation, the contention can be made that loss is the mainspring of mourning. One grieves because of the sudden and painful realization that someone or something we loved body and soul is no more. Understandably, the act of mourning carries an aura of excruciating sorrow coupled with a compulsive urge to publicly display the trigger of one's state of unhappiness. Hence Freud's theory that "*mourning involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life*."[3] Actually, "*an infinite number of misfortunes weigh us down every day*"[4] without us being driven by an overwhelming need to overtly show that we are snapping. Nonetheless, when it comes to bereavement, there is no concealing our frame of mind. Described by John H. Harvey as being "*the fundamental human experience that underlies many emotions, both negative and positive*"[5], loss may easily develop into trauma. The non-being, the physical disappearance of a loved one is, to be sure, a most traumatic experience; so, in the context of death, mourning affords a safety valve of sorts for sad and sorrowful feelings; over and above this, it, in Freud's estimation, brings closure on the emotional suffering that unfailingly crops up in the backwash of loss of a loved one: "…*mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and*

[1] FREUD, Sigmung, (1957). "*Mourning and Melancholia*" in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metaphysics and Other Works. Translated and edited by James Strachey. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, p.243.
[2] BOWLBY, JOHN, (1960) "Grief and Mourning in Infancy and early Childhood." In *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child,* 15:10.
[3] *Morning and Melancholia*, op.cit., p.243.
[4] KRISTEVA, Julia, *Black Sun: Depression and melancholia.* Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.4.
[5] HARVEY, J. H, *Perspectives on Loss and Trauma: Assaults on the Self*. California: Sage Publications, 2002, p.2.

offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live."[6] Also, in Freudian perspective not until the reality of loss has hit home does the mourning process come to an end:

Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises- it may be universally observed that man never willingly abandons a libido-position, not even when a substitute is already beckoning to him… The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day; nevertheless, its behest cannot be at last obeyed. The task is carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind… When the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again[7]

Interestingly, attachment withdrawal from the love object implies that the subject has drawn a line under his mourning phase. A normal, universal mourning process is studded by stages without the completion of which, the work of mourning remains scrappy. The case is worth while making, all the same, that the road to decathexis[8] is not a pushover by any means as it is beset by many a hurdle without whose clearing the mourning process never comes to an end. Helen Deutsch in "Absence of Grief" underscores the significance of grief expression as to the full materialization of successful mourning:

Every unresolved grief is given expression in some form or other.…The process of mourning, as a reaction to the real loss of a loved person must be carried out to completion. Al (sic) long as the early libidinal or aggressive attachment persists, the painful affect continue[s] to flourish, and vice versa, the attachments are unresolved as long as the affective process of mourning has not been accomplished.[9]

Still, unlike Sigmund Freud who extols the significance of detachment from the love-object with a view to putting an end to mourning, psychoanalyst Robert Gaines touts what he terms "creating continuity". From his vantage point "*mourning is not something that can be finished*."[10] More importantly, he bemoans the fact that "*another aspect of the work of mourning, which is to repair the disruption of the inner self-other relationship caused by the actual loss*"[11] has been given short shrift owing to "*the emphasis on the need to detach from the lost object*[12]." If Gaines' mourning theory were to carry the day, it would spell opening the floodgates of a work of mourning that would never draw to a close. Doubtless, it would mean living without forgetting. Yet, renowned eighteenth-century German thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche is of the mind that happiness is kind of pegged to coming to terms with the past, to wit, to forgetting. Much as this philosopher registers his recognition that "*living requires the services of history*"[13], he is at pains to emphasize that "*an excess of history harms the living*

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[6] *Mourning and Melancholia*, op.cit., p.257.

[7] Ibid., p.245.

[8] In Freudian Psychoanalysis, decathexis happens when there is divestment of libido from the 'loved-object'. Salman Akhtar gets into the specifics: "*Decathexis is employed for the withdrawal of psychic energy from an idea or an object. The defense mechanisms of repression and isolation exemplifies this process as does secondary narcissism that results from the investment of libido from frustrating objects back into the self*." In *Comprehensive Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karnac Books, 2009, p.69.

[9] DEUTSCH, Helen, 'Absence of Grief.' In Psychoanalytic Quaterly, Vol. 6, n°1, p.13.

[10] Robert Gaines, "Detachment and Continuity: The Two Tasks of Mourning". In *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, Volume 33, Num.4, 1997,p.589.

[11] Ibid., p.589.

[12] Ibid.,p.589.

[13] Friedrich Nietszche, *Untimely Meditations: On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1874). Virginia, USA: Richer Resources Publications, 2010, p.7.

being." [14] He belabours his point by striking a warning note: "*There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of the historical sense, through which something living comes to harm and is finally perishes, whether it is a person or a people or a culture.*"[15] The past can be put in the service of living, provided that man does not overdo it.

The late Jacques Derrida (a world-class French philosopher who passed away some years ago) captures mourning through the lens of friendship. He is at pains to underscore in *The Work of Mourning* the correlative dimension between mourning and friendship:

To have a friend, to look at him, to follow him with your eyes, to admire him in friendship, is to know in a more intense way, already injured, always insistent, and more and more unforgettable, that one of the two will inevitably see the other die. One of us, each of us, says to himself the day will come when one of us will himself no longer see the other and so will carry the other within him a while longer, his eyes following without seeing, the world suspended by some unique tear, each time unique, through which everything from then on, through which the world itself—and day will come—will come to be reflected quivering, reflecting disappearance itself…[16]

The most important takeaway from the foregoing is how far finitude is pegged to friendship. Mourning is, as it were, encompassed in friendship and death. The moment of loss (be it that of a loved one or a friend) always provides the grim opportunity of displaying and giving vent to the full measure of one's friendship and fidelity to the dead. In point of fact, two strands factor into the public outpouring of grief, sadness and sorrow that play out in mourning: the nature of loss, i.e. death, and the strength of attachment. To be sure, death is a harrowing experience that packs a punch in the sense of making a mockery of the cozy assumptions and certainties that we have about the world. The passing of a loved one brings to light, in Sartre's books, the meaninglessness of life: "*Thus death is never that which gives life its meaning; it, on the contrary, is that which as a matter of principle removes all meaning from life*."[17] Developing an awareness of one's finitude to the point of contemplating the advent of the day when one is longer: that is a bitter pill to swallow: "*One cannot look directly at the sun or death*,"[18] said seventeenth-century French thinker François de la Rochefoucauld. If anything, the passing of a relative or a boon companion is a chilling reminder of our own mortality but, more importantly, it upsets the applecart of one's "assumptive world"[19] to the point of knocking one for six.

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[14] Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, op.cit., p.7.

[15] Ibid., p.9.

[16] DERRIDA, Jacques, *The Work of Mourning*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p.107.

[17] Jean-Paul Sartre quoted by Françoise Dastur in *Death: An Essay on Finitude*. Translated from French by John Llewelyn. London: Athlone Press, 1996, p.62.

[18] Quoted by John Morgan in *An Easeful Death?: Perspectives on Death, Dying and Euthanasia*. Sidney: The Federation Press Pty Ltd, 2009, p.25.

[19] The concept of « assumptive world is the brainchild of C. M . Parkes. He coined it back in 1975 and defined it as "a strongly held set of assumptions about the world and the self which is confidently maintained and used as means of recognizing, planning and acting. . . . Assumptions such as these are learned and confirmed by the experience of many years." PARKES, C.M. Bereavement as a Psychosocial transition: Processes of adaptation to change. In R. Janoff-Bulman (Ed.), *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a Psychology of Trauma*. New York: The Free Press, p.4. Pretty much two decades later Ronnie Janoff-Bulman reworked the concept by elaboration on it. As a result, she came up with a book entitled *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a Psychology of trauma*. There, Janoff-Bulman goes to great lengths to point out that "*at the core of our external world, we hold basic views of ourselves and of our external world that represent our orientation towards the 'total push and pull of our cosmos.'*(p.6) Janoff-Bulman goes on to expound the three fundamental assumptions that act

The theoretical background that we have endeavoured to conduct about the notion of mourning is by no means thoroughgoing due to its intricacies and the hefty body of literature thereon. As regards the notion of resilience, important as it is, its presence as a theme in the novel does not seem to us every bit as strong as that of mourning. Consequently, we've elected to incorporate what little theoretical perspectives we've garnered from different studies into the chapter devoted to Mda's treatment of 'resilience' in *Ways of Dying*. During our analysis of the novel, we'll relentlessly have recourse to theories germane to psychoanalysis and psychology as well as philosophy to buttress our argumentation.

The psycho-social implications of mourning

Unlike Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* which stands as an encapsulation of the travails plaguing postapartheid South Africa, with *Ways of Dying* Zakes Mda portrays the halting steps of South Africa's transition from institutionalized racism to full-blown democracy. One of the trademarks of this "interregnum"[20] is the staggering rampancy of wanton violence and its attendant string of deaths. Actually, the novel opens with this chilling exclamatory statement from the Nurse: "*There are many ways of dying*!" (WD, 1). The fact of people dropping off like flies from crime of any ilk means that, in the world of *Ways of Dying*, the process of mourning is an everyday occurrence. Toloki's credentials as a "professional mourner" are brought to light on the death of Noria's first son. "*Wearing his black costume and his top hat*" (WD, 2) as a token of his weird vocation, Toloki goes from funeral to funeral in order to solace people in their hour of bereavement. For all the dignity and respect that his calling is supposed to command, Toloki is, nonetheless, baffled as to the barbs and snide jibes of which he is the butt from the mourning procession. The narrator echoes Toloki's bewilderment through a spate of speculations, thereby adding to the mystery surrounding this man:

Why do people give way? he wonders. Is it perhaps out of respect for his black costume and top hat, which he wears at every funeral as a hall mark of his profession? But then why do they covering their

as our "*guides for our day-to-day thoughts and behaviors"*: the world is benevolent; the world is meaningful; the self is worthy. The author makes a point of pointing out that although "*not everyone holds these basic assumptions, yet it appears that most people do*.' (p.6) Janoff-Bulman gets into the specifics of the three assumptions and begins with '*benevolence of the world.*' She contends that "*in general, the world is a good place…When we assume other people are benevolent , we believe that they are basically good, kind, helpful, and caring. In assuming that events are benevolent, we believe in the preponderance of the good fortune over negative outcomes and misfortune.* Additionally, psychologist Janoff-Bulman, in an endeavour to ram home her point, admits that "*in my research, people's beliefs in the benevolence of the world or events are very positive and highly correlated.*(p.6) Over and above benevolence and meaningfulness, Janoff-Bulman identifies a third core assumption about our worldview, namely: self-worth. "*This assumption*," The psychologist says, "*involves a global evaluation of the self, in general we perceive ourselves as good, capable and moral individuals*." (p.11)

[20] Antonio Gramsci is renowned twentieth-century Italian philosopher with a leftist bend. Speaking of the meaning of the "interregnum" he writes: "*If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer 'leading' but only 'dominant', exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; and in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.*" From *Selections from the prison Notebooks*. Vol.2, edited and translated by Joseph Buttigig. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, pp.275-6. We thought fit to bring in that Gramscian theory of the interregnum due to relevancy to the state of political limbo the country in. Although in *Ways of Dying* the freedom fighters are making strides, yet the racist is yet to be ousted from power.

noses and mouths with their hands as they retreat in blind panic, pushing those behind them? Maybe it is the beans he ate for breakfast….Or maybe it is the fact that he has not bathed for a whole week, and the December sun has not been gentle. (WD, 8)

Disbelievingly, the community's go-to guy when it comes to mourning is treated like dirt and looked on in some circles as a social pipsqueak. Worst of all, he is thwarted at every turn in his attempts to make something of himself through mourning at funerals. Nothing daunted, he continues ploughing a lonely furrow in bringing succour and a sense of humanness to the somber atmosphere of funerals. We learn on page 15 that from the outset of his professional career as a mourner he casts his bread upon the waters, charging no fee for his service: "*In his profession, people are paid for an essential service that they render the community. His service is to mourn*." (WD,15). Still, every now and then "*an appreciative family pays him any amount it can*." (WD,17). It is worth underscoring that Toloki is a man to whom death and mourning matter, to say the least. His presence at a funeral service never fails to move mourners to tears thanks to his mien and soothing words:

Throughout the funeral, orator after orator, he sat on the mound and made moaning sounds of agony that were so harrowing that they affected all those who were within earshot, filling their eyes with tears. When the Nurse spoke, he excelled himself by punctuating each painful segment of her speech with an excruciating groan that sent the relatives into a frenzy of wailing. (WD, 17)

The significance of the presence of the "Nurse" at funerals bears scrutinizing. His or her job does not entail any medical dimension. Rather, he is duty-bound to recount in no uncertain terms how the dead has passed away. The Nurse's air time can take place before or after burial (WD, 16). The nature and complexity of his funeral occupation speaks volumes about the power of language in mourning. Death, as Sartre rightly pointed out, flies in the face of meaning as it plays havoc with our cozy certainties and great expectations that we harbour about life. (There is no such thing as a cut-and-dried response to loss of a loved one. The way we handle or respond to loss varies from one person to another, or from one community to another.) One way of endeavouring to fathom out the sense of meaninglessness that death conveys and, lo and behold, getting to the bottom of the experience of traumatic loss, is the recourse to language. True, in times of mourning it has healing properties. Distinguished Kenyan writer and critic, Ngũgi wa Thiong'o feels that "*Memory and consciousness are inseparable. But language is the means of memory*."[21] In the same breath, he goes out of his way to stress that "*Memory resides in language and is clarified by language*."[22] Obviously, the foregoing gives traction to the symbolism attached to oration and eulogy at funeral services. When the bereaved manages to know through language, which South African literary pundit David Attwell equates to "*a primary constitutive element of consciousness and of culture at large*"[23], the truth about how his loved one passed on, then the burden of his grief may be assuaged. By the same token, the weight with regards to the work of mourning may turn less cumbersome. It's no wonder that the Nurse's funeral pulling power is huge and that the crowd in attendance hangs on his every word. When a furore crops up over the mysterious death of a young man and when anger starts to build up as to the unknown cause of his disappearance, some relatives of the deceased ill-advisedly charge the Nurse with dereliction of duty. This is how "the communal voice" that recounts the narrative rebuts the ill-informed accusation and goes on to vindicate the Nurse:

[21] THIONG'O wa, Ngũgi, *Something new and Torn: An African Renaissance*. New York: basic Civitas Books, 2009, p.40.
[22] Something New and Torn: An African Rennaissance, op.cit., p.113.
[23] Ibid., p.113.

The Nurse explained that no one really knew how this brother died. What qualified her to be the Nurse was not that she was the last person to see him alive; she was the only person who went out of her way to seek the truth about his death, and to hunt his corpse down when everyone else had given up.(WD, 17)

In a world eerily conspicuous by the unwarranted wantonness of tit for tat violence – between government forces and ANC freedom fighters - and its offshoot of senseless deaths, Toloki epitomizes the human face of mourning. The distress of bereaved families and the baseless accusations levelled against the Nurse bring out the best in him. Admittedly, he is a diminutive figure, yet he is possessed of the X factor that any man of his position is supposed to have: "*He is quite short. But what he lacks in height he makes up for in breadth*." (WD,11). On several occasions in the narrative he remarkably bails bereaved families out of distressing quagmires: witness the astonishing move he undertakes in order to avoid "*the scandal of a fight in the graveyard*." (WD, 22). As a matter of fact, it all began when a family man left home "*and said he was visiting his beloved sister*." (WD,18). Much to his loved ones' dismay he never made it back home, sound and safe (WD,18). In a bid to find out about the missing man's whereabouts his relatives led by his sister go to "*the big government mortuary*" after unavailingly searching "*all the hospitals in the area, and all the police stations and prisons*." (WD,18). It's a worthwhile point to make that the relatives of the missing person are in a catch-22 situation: they can't start the process of mourning unless they find his corpse but, regrettably, the hospital workers who are supposed to attend to them are not playing ball. Instead, they get at their hands an offhand and disdainful treatment (WD, 19). Thankfully, they see the light at the end of the tunnel thanks to a kind-hearted white-coated official who

led her [the missing person's sister] *to another room with corpses in tray almost like oversized filing cabinets. It was a very cold room. The official said, 'Most of these are the bodies of unidentified persons. I can only open two trays at a time'…And so he opened two trays, and she looked the bodies, and they rushed out to stand in the sun…. 'You can identify your brother by the clothes he was wearing,' he said.* (WD,20)

Clueless as to what her brother had on, she was so wise as to give a bell to his wife "*who describes them* [the clothes] *to her*." (WD,20). Thereupon, the sister doubles back to "*the pile of bodies*." By her admission, relief is writ large on her face "*not because "her brother was dead but because the search was over*." (WD,20). Against all expectations, her feeling of alleviation is short-lived: "*They went back to the cold room, and the official pulled out the tray. But the body was not there. The tray was empty*."(WD,21-22). Understandably, the missing person's sister teeters on the brink of snapping. All the same, she gets cold comfort from the following:

The white-coated official was concerned. On investigating the matter, he found that the body that had been in that tray had been released that morning, obviously by mistake, to a family which lived to another town. It had been given to their undertaker. (WD,21)

Driven by the intent to leave no stone unturned until she takes possession of her brother's corpse, the next morning she sets out for the town "*where her brother's body had been dispatched, accompanied by a few male relatives*."(WD,21). Upon arrival at the cemetery, they discover, to their horror, that "*the body was already in the graveyard, and a funeral service was in progress*."(WD,21). Unfazed by this latest body blow, she demands that the body be released. What with the point blank refusal of the undertaker to comply and the missing person's sister's unyielding stance created a potential for a dust-up with unintended consequences. ("*The strange-looking*" mentioned in the scene refers to Toloki no less.) Thanks

to his collected character and common touch, he steps in with an Olive Branch as tempers begin to fray. Eventually, he manages to talk "the indignant crowd" out of "*desecrating this place where the dead have their eternal sleep by fighting here*." In the same breath, he urges them to open the casket to make sure that "*this is the right body*." (WD,21). After a short spell of pushback from the mourning crowd, they wrap up toeing Toloki's line: "*The coffin was opened, and indeed this our* (sic) *brother was in it*."(WD,22). Toloki is justified in championing the sacredness of the graveyard. Doubtless, a cemetery represents shades of our past in terms of familial connections, friendship and love. Through the graveyard we sort of stay connected with the memory of our loved ones who are no longer. Norbert Elias writes about the symbolic purport of the graveyard that:

What is written on the unperishing tombstone is a mute message of the dead to whoever is alive—a symbol of a perhaps still articulated feeling that the only way in which a dead person lives on is the memory.[24]

In Elias's line of reasoning, Man ought to stop short of defiling burial sites in order not to break "the chain of remembrance". Norbert Elias goes to great lengths to hammer home this point:
…when the continuity of a particular society or of a human society itself is ended, then the meaning of everything that its people have done throughout millennia and of that has ever seemed significant to them, is also extinguished.[25]

The gravistas of mourning, the meaning of death and the sense of kinship run deep in Toloki. Mda's portrayal of Toloki is in sync with that troubleshooter who is a great one for pouring oil on troubled waters.

The communal colouring associated with mourning also bears testimony. Chanting, dancing, testimony about the dead person, washing of hands after burial, eulogy: all this goes with the territory of casting in one's lot with the bereaved, and, accordingly, of the work of mourning. In Elias's estimation, "*Ideas of death and the attendant rituals themselves become an aspect of socialization. Common ideas and rites unite people; divergent ones separate groups*."[26] Interestingly, mourning can help tell the better-off from worse-off. As it happens, in the *World of Ways of Dying*, only moneyed classes can afford profligate funerals whilst folks at the bottom of the social pecking order are reduced to somewhat scraping the bottom of the barrel:

At some funerals, especially in the townships where there better-off people, the system of dispensing food is different. The most important people — usually the relatives and close friends of the family, and those who are pillars of the community — are served food inside the house at the table. The food that is served there will include not only the usual funeral fare of samp and beef, but rice, and some salads, and jelly and custard. The second stratum is made up of those people who are fairly important, but not well-known enough to sit inside at the table….The final stratum is that of the rabble. They are fed samp and beef in communal basins…(WD, 161)

When death befalls someone, their friends and neighbours alike are in something of a double bind: on the one hand, they are so overwhelmed with grief that they don't find it in themselves to speak, on the other, remaining tightlipped may be an unbefitting way of wearing one's heart

[24] ELIAS, Norbert, *The Loneliness of the Dying*. (First English Edition,1985). Translated by Edmund Jephcoll. New York: Continnum, 2001, p.40.
[25] *The Loneliness of the Dying*, op.cit., p.40.
[26] Ibid., p.12.

on one's sleeve in terms of giving vent to one's sadness. From Derrida's point of view, in the event of the passing of, say, a friend, neither speaking nor silence is possible: "*Speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one's sadness*.[27] Not until Roland Barthes passed away did Jacques Derrida bite the bullet of publicly taking the floor at a moment of mourning[28]. The rationale for that Derridian perception lies in the evidence that such a traumatic moment as mourning knocks us sideways, so much so that our mind kind of goes blank. In "All-Out Friendship", a speech he made on the occasion of Jean-François Lyotard's demise Derrida writes:

I feel at such a loss, unable to find public words for what is happening to us, for what has left speechless all those who had the good fortune to come near this great thinker—whose absence will remain for me, I am certain, forever unthinkable…[29]

Harking back to the work of mourning in *Ways of Dying*, Noria has had more than her fair share of it. We learn at some point in the novel that "*all the catastrophes that have happened in her life have affected her*…" (WD,151). Not only did her mom (who was her pride and joy) pass away through illness, but she suffered the heartbreak of losing two sons, in grisly circumstances (WD,148-9). Such stories, if harrowing and traumatic, did not tell on Noria to the point of impinging on her will power and, above all, her ability to come to terms with her lot. Rather, it soon dawned on her that the process of mourning is not a never-ending business. She can't seem to allow grief to be a thorn in her side for good. Consequently, she settles for what Freud calls "*decathexis*" as opposed to what Robert Gaines labels "*creating continuity*". She wastes no time, indeed, in withdrawing from the "lost object" and reinvests her energy in a new object, in new relationships. Once she's drawn a line under her mourning period, she devotes her expenditure of time and exertion to charitable work, tending to the needy and downtrodden. Her favourite haunt, so to speak, is an unregistered day nursery, snidely and tellingly referred to as "dumping ground". The picture of the inmates of the "dumping ground" is painted in unflattering terms; and is, to be sure, an indictment of the state of South African society in transition:

Some of the children are victims of the war that is raging in the land. Their parents died in massacres and in train slaughters. In a recent massacre in the settlement, which was carried out by some of the tribal chief's followers from the hostels assisted by Battalion 77 of the armed forces of the government, as many as fifty-two people died, including children. Some children were orphaned overnight. They are now here at the dumping ground. (WD, 168)

The "dumping ground" mentioned above is a poor man's day nursery where "*women who have unwanted babies dump them in front of her* [Madimbhaza] *at night. She feeds and clothes the children out of her measly monthly pension*." (WD,166). Madimbhaza is "an old woman" who runs the "dumping ground". Noria has, doubtless, elected to "*keep down hatred and contempt*"[30] despite the fact that "*the cruelty of the world not only killed her uplifting laughter*

[27] "In Memoriam : Of the Soul" In *The Politics of Mourning*, op.cit, p.69.

[28] Ibid., p.6.

[29] *The Politics of Mourning*, op.cit., p.214.

[30] From a Schopenhauerian vantage point, when it comes to appreciating a human being the notion of dignity, dear to Kant, is not the foremost factor. It is, indeed, Schopenhauer's contention that "*the idea of dignity can be applied only in an ironical sense to a being whose will is so sinful, whose intellect is so limited, whose body is so weak and perishable as man*." Rather, he is of the mind that, when it comes to an objective appreciation of man, the bottom line is to "*fix your attention only upon his sufferings, his needs, his anxieties, his pains."* As a

but all desires of the human flesh." (WD,149). Sympathy is for her a safety valve for the distressful spells of mourning that she's gone through, "*in a city where death is plentiful*."(WD,123).

Resilience as a bulwark for survival in a hostile world

It stands to reason that mourning and resilience are not two sides of the same coin. Yet resilience can, to be sure, go a long way towards allaying the pain and anxiety attendant upon the process of mourning. In the same way as mourning, resilience is part of human life. Little wonder psychoanalysts, psychologists, sociologists, you name it, have racked their brains in order to tease out the depth and scope of its importance to the living. In *Resilience in Context*, Jennifer R. Riley and Ann Masten describe the term as "*patterns of positive adaptation in the context of past or present adversity, which is one class of adaptive phenomena observed in human lives*."[31] As if expanding upon this definition, Sam Goldstein and Robert Brooks emphasizes the elastic nature of resilience: "*Within the materials sciences, Resilience is defined as the ability of a material to resume its original shape or position after being spent, stretched, or compressed*."[32] Importantly, both definitions have a commonality in that they tend to adaptation.

Resilience, as mentioned above, is another standout theme in *Ways of Dying*. Even though Noria has shown throughout the story line an outstanding capacity for gamely overcoming her emotional and physical travails, there's no getting away from the fact that the protagonist who embodies 'resilience' the most in the novel is Toloki. We might just as well contend that 'resilience' is his middle name. He has, indeed, run the gamut of human ordeals from parental rejection to the humiliations and despair of a social outcast, without being unduly knocked for six. At an early age, he starts to be reeling from the deprivation of fatherly affection. Surprisingly enough, his father's animus against him turns out to be an auspicious game changer in his future life. The harshness of the fate meted out to him by Jwara stems from his attending church services flouting the fact that "*His was not a family of church-goers*" and that "*his father never cared for the church*." (WD,103). For that misdemeanor he faced the patriarchal music:

Toloki stutteringly tried to explain that he had merely testified as others were doing. But even before he completed a sentence Jwara kicked him in the stomach. He fell down, vomiting blood. Jwara kicked him again and again. Toloki's mother came running, and threw herself between the two men in her life. (WD,103)

Strangely, the mother and her son do not put the same spin on Jwara's dismal conduct. Xesibe charges her husband with carrying out a defense mechanism known as *displacement*[33] while

result, *"you will always feel your kinship with him, you will sympathize with him; and instead of hatred or contempt, you will experience the commiseration that alone is the peace to which the Gospel calls you.*" Arthur Schopenhauer concluded by saying that "*The way to keep down hatred and contempt is certainly not to look for a man's 'dignity', but, on the contrary, to regard him as an object of pity.*" On Human Nature, op.cit., p.5.

[31] RILEY R., Jennifer and Masten, Ann, *Resilience in Context.* New York: Plenum Publishers, p.13.

[32] GOLDSTEIN, Sam and Robert Brooks, *Handbook of Resilience in Children.* New York: Springer, 2013 (second edition), p.8.

[33] The concept of defense mechanism was first floated by Sigmund Freud before being expanded upon by her daughter Anna. "*Defense mechanism (or coping styles) are automatic psychological processes that protect the individual against anxiety and from the awareness of*

Toloki sees in his father's unfeeling action a lack of fatherly love (WD,104). Either way, faced with the glaring realization that he can't live with his father under the same roof, Toloki takes it upon himself to leave "*his home, and his village, in search of what he later expressed to those he met on the road as love and fortune."* (WD,104). His resilience finds expression in his feisty pluck and determination to not let the hardships and disappointments of life get him down. Witness the remarkable self-possession that he displays subsequent to his illegal firing at the milling company. Accused of stealing bags of maize that he is reported to be selling "*to one farmer whom we know very well*", Toloki is taken away "*to the interrogation chambers at the police station*." (WD,62). The cops, in their drive to make him take the fall for the maize robbery, stop at nothing. No sooner had he refused to own up to the theft than "*they tied a chair and attached wires to his fingers and neck. They connected these to the electricity outlet on the wall, and the man screamed in agony and lost control of his bowels*." (WD,62). Astonishingly, he politely spurns his friends' advice to go to the law, on the plea that "*it was the law that rendered him manless*."(WD,63).

The goal of the use of torture is to break the prisoner's will to resist making confessions; it is used by authoritarian states to gain, under duress, bogus confessions from prisoners. Torture practitioners live in a world of their own, shorn of any sense of humanity. J.M.Coetzee in *Doubling the Point* rightly says that the torture room is a place where "*one human being is free to exercise his imagination to the limits in the performance of vileness upon the body of another*."[34] That is, in his theory, what makes it "*a site of extreme human experience, accessible to no one save the participants*."[35] To the likes of Toloki, the resort to torture is a non-starter as their motivation to soldier on through the vicissitudes of life is fuelled by adversity, as it were. Resilience is an elixir for those who are so strong mentally and psychologically as to have it in them to always rise above the blows of fate, nothing daunted. The litmus test of a resilient individual is measured against his ability to turn his failures and dashed hopes as well as deprivation into a wellspring of stamina that is conducive to success. Come to think of it, Toloki is a perfect illustration of that.

Another jaw-dropping trait of character of his that is liable to blow away the reader is his steadfastness in earning his keep: "*The only aberration in his character was that he eschewed charity."* (WD,61). Throughout his strenuous journey to the city he plumbed the depths of hunger and scorn. Notwithstanding, he always stands on his dignity. During a stop-over in a

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internal or external factors. Defense mechanisms mediate the individual's reaction to emotional conflicts and internal and external stressors." That definition from the American Psychiatric Association is resurrected in *Defense Mechanisms: Theoretical, Research and Clinical Perspectives* authored by Uwe Hentschel, Gudmund Smith, Juris G. Draguns, Wolfang Ehier. Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V, 2004, p.15. As regards displacement, Dr. C. Boere describes it "Personality Theories" as "*the redirection of an impulse onto a substitute target. I f the impulse, the desire, is okay with you, but the person you direct that desire towards is too threatening, you can displace to someone or something that can serve as a symbolic substitute." Http://webspace.ship.edu/cbboer/freud.html (accessed 2nd March, 2014).* What makes the concept of displacement defense mechanism relevant to this work is that Jwara vented his spleen on his son, Toloki out of pent-up anger that his muse -Noria- stood her up. Siding with her son, Xesibe lashed out at Jawara: "*It's that stuck-up bitch Noria again, is it not? She didn't come, and you want to take it out on my child*." (WD, 104).

[34] COETZEE, J.M.C. "Into the Dark Chamber: The Writer and the South African State." In Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews. (Ed. David Attwell). Massachussets: Harvard University Press, 1986, p.363.

[35] Ibid., p.363.

town, he looks in tatters and his eyes bloodshot from sleep deprivation. One man in overalls is so curious as to ask Toloki "*where he came from, and what he was doing in that town*." (WD,60). By way of an answer, the "Professional Mourner" '*told him that he was on his way to the city to search for love and fortune*.' (WD,60). This no-brainer draws the questioner's laughter, thereby causing Toloki to decidedly register his bewilderment: '*I do not understand why you laugh at me, father. But I am willing to do piece jobs to survive on the road*.' (WD,60). At bottom, under the veneer of feeling for him, of assuaging his hunger, the locals want to make a laughing stock of him, which Toloki, understandably, cannot put up with:

A man in overalls stopped and looked at him ruthfully. Then he searched his pockets, found a coin, and gave it to him.
'Thank you father, but I do not accept alms.'
'You do not?'
'It is true I am hungry, and if I don't eat I will die. But I do not accept charity.'
'So you'd rather die? What a stupidly proud boy boy!'
'I desperately need this money, father. But I insist on doing some job for you in return.' (WD,60)

This passage bespeaks the mindset of someone hell-bent on pulling himself up by his own bootstraps, despite the odds being heavily stacked against him. Toloki's stiff upper lip together with his happy-go-lucky attitude to life gives him a welcome fillip to fight shy of sinking the Slough of Despond. His strong bend for bouncebackability enables him all through the narrative to keep discouragement at bay. It is worth underlining, however, that in the world of *Ways of Dying* the grass roots share a commonality, i.e. their sense of resiliency. When powers that be, in utter disregard for shanty town residents' lives and possessions, made the call to send bulldozers to the slums in order to "*flatten the shacks, and then triumphantly drive away*," the squalid inmates, baffled though they were, took it in stride. Indeed, in a move meant to display their resiliency, they "*would immediately rebuild, and in no time the shanty town would hum with life again. Like worker bees, the dwellers would go about their business of living.*" (WD,146). By the same token, Toloki, albeit unnerved, stopped short of sinking into despondency:

That night, Toloki suddenly felt hot in his sleep. When he woke up, his shack was on fire. He was only able to save his venerable costume. He stood at a distance, and watched as raging flames consumed all his dreams….Then he walked in a dazed state. He did not know where he was going….He was going to establish his home in one of the quayside waiting rooms, and eschew forever the company of men. And women. (WD,149)

On sober reflection he, nonetheless, relinquishes the idea of "*living the life of a hermit for the rest of his days*." (WD,147-8). If anything, Noria has become a tower of strength to him. What makes the likes of Toloki tick is what eighteenth-century sophisticated German thinker, Friedrich Nietzsche, describes as the "plastic force". He defines it as the

force of growing in a different way out of oneself, of reshaping and incorporating the past and the foreign, of healing wounds, compensating for what has been lost, rebuilding shattered forms out of one's self.[36]

This passage clearly shows that so long as one's life is not cut short one can, through courage and patience, hope for the best despite dire circumstances: "*What doesn't kill me makes me*

[36] NIETZSCHE, Friedrich, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Translated by Ian Johnston. Virginia, USA: Rich Ressources Publications, 2010 (reissued), p.9.

stronger,"[37] said Nietzsche. In the latter's theory human beings can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there are those who do not feel up to withstanding the trials and tribulations of life, and whom the experience of setbacks, no matter how small, can cause to literally fall apart at the seams:

there are people who possess so little of this force that they bleed to death incurably from a single experience, a single pain, often even from a single tender injustice, as from a really bloody scratch."[38]

Conversely, Nietzsche is relieved that

there are people whom the wildest and most horrific accidents in life and even actions of their own wickedness injure so little that right in the middle of these experiences or shortly after they bring the issue to a reasonable state of well-being and a sort of quiet conscience.[39]

Doubtless, Toloki falls into the second category. Either way, Zakes Mda puts his felicitous turn of phrase and keen observation of democratic era South Africa to broach themes which can't leave any of his fellow countrymen uninterested. South Africa has the unflattering record of registering the highest number of crimes daily. Surely, that is liable to prick the conscience of so good a novelist as Zakes Mda. South Africa broke the shackles of racial oppression twenty or so years ago. To live under the yoke of decades institutionalized racism leaves without fail deep scars. Proneness to iron out conflicts through violence (due to the weighty legacy of thee past) and poverty-related murder are, indeed, a trademark of the rainbow nation. Against a backdrop of the rising tide of crime, and survival hassles, mourning and resilience bear scrutiny.

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