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Indigeneity in modernity: The cases of Kgebetli Moele and Niq Mhlongo

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The study of South African English literature written by black people in the post-apartheid period has focused, among others, on the so-called Hillbrow novels of Phaswane Mpe and Niq Mhlongo, and narratives such as Kgebetli Moele's *Book of the Dead* (2009) set in Pretoria. A number of studies show how the fiction of these writers handles black concerns that some critics believe to have replaced a thematic preoccupation with apartheid, as soon as political freedom was attained in 1994. However, adequate analyses are yet to be made of works produced by some of these black writers in their more rounded scrutiny of the first decade of democracy, apart from what one may describe as an indigenous/traditional weaning from preoccupation with the theme of apartheid. This study intends to fill this gap, as well as examine how such a richer social commentary is refracted in its imaginative critique of South African democratic life beyond its first decade of existence. I consider Mhlongo's novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007) together with Moele's narratives reflecting on the same epoch *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead*. For the portrayal of black lives after democracy, I unpack the discursive content of Mhlongo's narratives *Affluenza* (2016) and *Way Back Home* (2013), as well as Moele's *Untitled* (2013) respectively. I probe new ways in which these post-apartheid writers critique the new living conditions of blacks in their novelistic discourses. I argue that their evolving approaches interrogate literary imaginaries, presumed modernities and visions on socio-political freedom of a post-apartheid South Africa, in ways deserving critical attention. I demonstrate how Moele and Mhlongo in their novels progressively assert a self-determining indigeneity in a post-apartheid modernity unfolding in the context of some pertinent discursive views around ideas such as colour-blindness and transnationalism. I show how the discourses of the authors' novels enable a comparison of both their individual handling of the concepts of persisting institutional racism and the hegemonic silencing of white privilege; and distinguishable ways in which each of the two authors grapples with such issues in their fiction depicting black conditions in the first decade of South African democratic rule, differently from the way they do with portrayals of the socio-economic challenges faced by black people beyond the first ten years of South African democracy. **Keywords:** Black South African English literature, postapartheid South Africa, transnational, institutional racism, colour-blindness, indigeneity, modernity.

Introduction

In this paper I compare how, in their individually distinctive ways, the post-apartheid black authors Niq Mhlongo and Kgebetli Moele handle concepts such as persisting institutional racism, hegemonic silencing of black antiracist critiques, and white talk insidiously seeking to perpetuate white privilege in an ostensibly equal democratic South Africa. I do this through a consideration of Mhlongo's

novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007) together with Moele's narratives handling the same epoch *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009). For the portrayal of black lives after ten years of democracy, I unpack the discursive content of Mhlongo's narratives *Affluenza* (2016) and *Way Back Home* (2013), as well as Moele's *Untitled* (2013) respectively. I put more accent on the novels of the first decade of freedom from apartheid. As my analyses of this specific category of narratives will demonstrate, in this period the black writers meet an equally more virulent euphoria with freedom with equally more radical discourses against faked demises of institutional racism, against hypocritical deployment by some commentators of pro-transnational critiques, and against a hegemonically imposed colour-blindness—more than they do in their second decade works when focus understandably shifts from extant apartheid attitudes within white discourse to metonymic introspection pivoted on black societal leaders. Apart from comparing Moele's and Mhlongo's individual mainly novelistic handling of the specified concepts, I also distinguish ways in which each of the two authors grapples differently with such issues in their fiction set within the first decade of South African democratic rule, and in their narratives depicting black conditions beyond the first ten years of South African democracy.

I argue that their evolving approaches interrogate literary imaginaries, presumed modernities and visions on socio-political freedom of a post-apartheid South Africa, in ways deserving critical attention. I demonstrate how Mhlongo and Moele continue to assert a self-determining indigeneity in a post-apartheid modernity, unfolding in the context of some discursive notions such as colour-blindness and transnationalism.

That the key terms I enumerate above are inevitable building blocks for the conceptual framework apt for the post-apartheid novels I consider is revealed by remarks such as this, "While much South African criticism has moved away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy, reading [...] recent novels by black writers through a critical race lens shows that post-apartheid literature continues to provide imaginative windows into racial inequality, racial ideology, and the struggle for freedom" (Milazzo, "Reconciling racial revelations" 142). Institutionalised racism, according to Milazzo ("Rhetorics of racial power" 11), should not be obfuscated through simplifications into "individualized conceptualization" of "racial categories". I look at the six post-apartheid novels of Moele and Mhlongo in order to test whether they affirm what Milazzo ("Rhetorics" 129) laments as "racism viewed merely as individual prejudice" evident in much of post-apartheid criticism that excludes "the true nature of racism having institutional and structural dimensions." In Milazzo's ("Rhetorics" 129) view, this kind of a post-apartheid "shift away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy" that commentators on South African literature employed appropriately in critiquing apartheid-era

literary discourses, leads to inadequate analyses of South African literature on the socio-economic crossroads faced by black people in the post-apartheid period.

De Kock (26) decries the same flaw in the interpretation of post-apartheid literary discourses in his observation that,

At a planning colloquium [of a then forthcoming essay collection entitled *Cambridge History of South African Literature*] at Wits in 2008, the editors urged writers to imagine they were writing for an audience conceived of transnationally, with little prior knowledge of the field. Writers were urged to let go of the “internal” or older national disagreements and controversies in South African criticism.

The so-called “older national disagreements and controversies in South African criticism” the predominantly white setters of agenda (De Kock 26) forbade in this impactful meeting refers literally to discourses on institutional racism and its structural deprivation of the blacks continuing to be oppressed during democratic rule. Such a stance by dominant literary critics in South Africa continues to this day, where epistemic hegemony surreptitiously protects white privilege in the name of a transnational nonracialism. This is why I saw the need to re-interpret the post-apartheid novels of Moele and Mhlongo. My first aim in doing this is to redress what Milazzo (“Racial power and colorblindness” 37) has debunked as “the ways in which the ‘post-apartheid canon’ has been (mis)represented”. Using Moele’s and Mhlongo’s narratives as examples, I demonstrate how the works of black post-apartheid authors disprove, rather than affirm, such views by dominant critics of post-apartheid South African literature assuming that this group of imaginative artists has forsaken apartheid-era censures of white privilege and other related themes.

The rationale for post-apartheid scholarly hegemony in South Africa invoking the notion of transnationalism in order to silence what I see as continuing literary engagements with structural racism and white privilege is clear. The significant South African literary critic Leon De Kock (28), using such a rationale, argues that while remaining important or even necessary for a sense of history and drive in making distinct some sort of national imaginary, “the category ‘South African’ as a marker of a literary field [...] has irrevocably entered into the fluid waters of ‘trans’, the transitive cusp of crossing and recrossing, of absorbing the fictional self into (now easier, more fluid) spaces of related elsewhere and of absorbing the otherness of such elsewhere into the fictional self”. Recognising what De Kock and the other critics describe as “a transnational turn” of South African literature starting from the 1990s in post-apartheid South Africa thus, includes their ideological acknowledgement that nationally, apartheid has collapsed while transnationally the world had begun to flatten out laterally, with national boundaries “suddenly [becoming] superfluous in the wake of economic and technological flows uniting people within global networks” (De Kock 22, 28). In South African post-apartheid transnational “literary-

cultural pursuits the desire [is] to step beyond the enclosure of the 'national' [...] 'the struggle' terrain," in order to adapt to a post-apartheid modernism in which the "new horizon" is distinctly transnational (De Kock 22). It is from this vantage point that I describe the historical literary engagement with apartheid as indigenous, as opposed to a South African post-apartheid modernism seen by some as necessarily iconoclastic with regard to what I presently posit as an indigeneity.

Unfortunately for post-apartheid South African literature produced by blacks which I argue continues in interesting ways to pursue the liberation struggle as in the era of apartheid, "the increased salience of cultural hybridity and hybridization" forbidding any mention of institutional racism in the new democracy politics, coupled with "the rise of 'world literature'" (De Kock 23), is an index of "how colonial structures of power are reproduced in our time on a global scale" (Milazzo, "Reconciling" 134). Lund (xv) is lamenting such a hegemonic silencing, in his description of the invocation of a transnational episteme such as one manifest in mainstream South African post-apartheid literary analysis in the form of "transnational discourses of racial hybridity that white elites often invoke to delegitimize claims to reparations made by people of color." As may be argued with cross-racial post-apartheid South African fiction of the post-apartheid period, black writers' nuanced handling of issues carried forward from the apartheid era should not be mistaken for a simplistic disregard of what Titlestad (677) describes as the inevitability of South African cities like Johannesburg and Pretoria "engag[ing] African and global modernity."

Mhlongo's and Moele's post-apartheid novels have been produced in a social context where, according to Milazzo ("Racial power" 36), "literary imaginaries, academic scholarship, and public racial discourse in post-apartheid South Africa" have been shaped into a denialism purporting that "economic power is primarily a consequence of individual merit and personal responsibility; and that racial categories should therefore preferably *not* be invoked." I argue that it is in their response to such a context that the novels assume their distinctive textures.

This betrays the continued existence in the democratic government of institutional racism bolstering unequal white privilege. I thus approach the six novels and one collection of short stories in a manner responding to the invitation articulated by Milazzo ("Reconciling" 129), "to rethink the shift away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy that is evident in much post-apartheid criticism." In this way, I attempt to determine the extent to which the seven post-apartheid South African publications of prose fiction "[speak] to striking continuities between colonial past and postcolonial present" (Milazzo "Reconciling" 139) within an ineficacious scholarship "that silences structural racism and reinscribes color-blindness" (Milazzo, "Reconciling" 36). This situation marks more than twenty years after the dawn of an ostensibly nonracial democratic South Africa.

Mhlongo's and Moele's narratives set in the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa

As far as Mhlongo's oeuvre set in the first decade of South African democracy is concerned, I consider his novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007). Moele's books that I consider, handling the same epoch, are *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009).

Milazzo's ("Racial power" 34) interpretation of the discourse of Moele's *Room 207* as "both challeng[ing] and reinforce[ing] colorblindness discourse and, in mystifying institutional racism, appear[ing] emblematic of the ideological ambiguity and dearth of antiracist militancy that inform much twenty-first century black fiction written in English," incisively identifies the ideological concepts of colour-blindness and its concomitant effacing of institutional racism, to be the concerns of post-apartheid South African fiction by black writers, known during apartheid for their unambiguous antiracist militancy congruous then with the general spirit of fighting for freedom. However, unlike her and the other scholars interpreting a novel like *Room 207* (2006) as discursively ambivalent, I see a consistent combating of apartheid ideologies and a continuity with anti-apartheid narratives of the past in this and the other novels I focus on. I argue that the narrator of *Room 207*'s "seem[ing] terribly split, torn" point of view (Murray 89), is a mere discursive appearance belying the truly constant presence of the counter-colour-blind narrative of the novel.

One of the six friends living in Hillbrow's Room 207, Modishi, has a rural background, and has inherited a farm and his parents' house in the Soweto township of Mapetla (*Room 207* 48–51). The narrator Noko is from a background where his father has told him, a while back, not to expect any financial support from him although he is still in his formative years as an adult (74–5). The characters Zulu-boy and Matome come from rural KwaZulu-Natal and Bolobedu in Limpopo respectively, and like the rest of their roommates have been staying in Hillbrow for eleven years yet continue to regard the urban flat as their 'locker room' away from their real homes in rural South Africa (13). For me, the adult characters and idealised rural landscape forming the psyche of all the inhabitants of the Hillbrow flat symbolise dynamic African ethical dimensions a new democracy in South Africa promised to the formerly marginalised.

The "thousand condoms" forming part of the room's scanty yet ambitious furniture reveal right at the opening of the novel *Room 207* points to the invincible hugeness of a culturally alien Hillbrow culture (13). The metropolitan allure of Hillbrow thus includes pleasures that, without inner strength and caution, can easily destroy—in the same way healthy, ethical sex contrasts with HIV-AIDS crawling close to it. The primacy of inner strength is a motif of the novel. The character D'nice, has been to "a rural public school" before coming to study at Wits University (36). Moele's description of D'nice's mind as "different" highlights the presence of his rural cultural strength that he has brought along to the new world of Hillbrow. Liquor, as one of

the symbols of debauchery associated with the urbanization/globalization of well-bred rural people, entices D' nice to abandon the inner strength with which he can survive the challenges of a new kind of life in Hillbrow.

D' nice's inner self is not crushed however, hence his confession that he has to keep his mind "forever in a state of intoxication" in order to control such a restive consciousness chafing against Hillbrow city life (36). The communal values of his rural life, symbolised by his continuing briefly during his stay in Hillbrow to wear a smile in relating with fellow citizens, disappears from his face only to survive in his consciousness. This is revealed when he resolves with his inner self to remain his rural self, with the words, "They have to take me as I am, because I am what I am" (36). Some research has shown that such a feature of associating the urban locale with destructive habits concealed in evidently pleasurable attractions like drinking and smoking permeates oral literature, South African indigenous language literature written during apartheid, and post-apartheid English literature written by people from black cultural groups, such as Moele and Mhlongo (see Rafapa). Comments like the present one on the interaction of Room 207 mates with Hillbrow urban life thus fit within a bigger literary-genealogical matrix.

Significantly for the ideological context of post-apartheid South Africa, the surviving African sensibility of the six friends provides them with ammunition to conquer the divisive effects of tribalism, otherwise threatening much needed black racial consciousness even after the political defeat of apartheid. Such a victory is seen when the six young friends accept each other as they are. As a result, Noko the narrator praises the character Zulu-boy as "a Hillbrowean in true nature" (62). Vicariously for the entire circle of friends, the narrator embraces the typically Zulu Zulu-boy, with his temperament of hating the Pedi ethnic group even more than he dislikes the black foreigners from African states described as *makwerekwere*, and his associating every individual "with their tribe or the land they were from" (65). Although for Zulu-boy "the Zulus were the supreme race and after that everybody was subhuman", the author reveals that none of his friends blame him (65). The reason for their attitude, displaying their subversive stance against post-apartheid undermining of black unity, is that Zulu-boy has "inherited" his tribalist terminology from somewhere "in their apartheid past" (65).

In fact, by being who he is and wanting people to take him as he is, Zulu-boy endears himself to everyone around for adhering to their credo echoed earlier by D' nice, of being allowed to be who one is (36). In addition, Zulu-boy subscribes to black solidarity by perpetuating the rural self-preservation of his black people and heeding the exhortation of the parent of one of his flat mates as he leaves his rural home to come to Hillbrow, to stay "away from the ways of the city" (36). The "ways of the city" or the foreign lifestyles it symbolizes here includes forgetting one's pride in ethnic identity or abusing ethnic identity to break away from fellow blacks.

This Zulu-boy achieves in his attractively Zulu way. Moele thus sees ethnic identity positively as a weapon to be appropriated to forge black unity needed in the post-apartheid combat against continued institutional racism, rather than cause division. Otherwise his manipulating characterization to include the six Hillbrow residents always fondly calling each other by their tribal appellations would be gratuitous.

There should be no doubt that Moele's discourse is that of asserting ethnic identity as a weapon against the structural racism keeping blacks in South Africa poor beyond apartheid rule. Extant structural racism serves to maintain the socio-economic privilege of whites, who continue to be institutionally elevated above the majority blacks. The consistency with which the author paints Zulu-boy in heroic terms should dispelled any such doubts about the six friends appropriating apartheid-induced tribalism into an empowering self-valuing. Towards the end of the novel Zulu-boy's body has metaphorically been destroyed by Hillbrow's silencing ways, resembling post-apartheid colour-blindness discourses that have translated into a similarly annihilating outcome of institutional racism against underprivileged blacks in a democracy. Rather than elicit anti-heroic pity in the reader, Moele portrays sustained Zulu pride in the dying Zulu-boy "having Aids" and left with only one day to live.

Zulu-boy calls Noko to invite him to his funeral, so that he should "be there when they are closing the Zulu out" (210). As the dying Zulu-boy rounds up his friends to bid them goodbye, he addresses Matome over the phone as "Satan of a Pedi boy", remarkably concluding with an unbroken spirit to valorise metaphorical sexual intercourse with women suffering from AIDS, with the loaded words, "hope you are enjoying the sex" (210). HIV/AIDS clearly provides a metaphor for a sick democratic South Africa relating with marginalized black citizens in a way similar to unsafe sex with an infected partner. By a thematic crescendo where Zulu-boy robustly proclaims that at his own funeral "Mfana womPedi" will continue to meet with the former's Zulu-Africanist resilient spirit in the form of the former's mother, meaningfully described as "a big Zulu woman with a big Zulu heart," (211). Concluding the conversation with the affectionate words "Mfana womPedi", after opening it with the deceptively caustic "Satan of a Pedi boy", should nullify any possibility that Zulu-boy's reference to the ethnic identity of his Hillbrow friends is hateful. Differently from extant apartheid racist agenda, Moele does not utilise such ethnic diction to signal tribal friction within the black people. Finally, Zulu-boy makes a similar phone call to D'nice, declaring unfazed that "Mfana woMswana, I'm going to sleep today and you will not see the Zulu tomorrow" (211).

D'nice's words, as the exchange unfurls, enhance Moele's use of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as a metaphor of the destructive immanence of institutional racism continuing to devour blacks during the first decade of South African democracy: "Don't we all have [AIDS] and it's just that we don't know yet? It's fashion. If you don't have it you aren't living yet and when you start living you will have it somehow" (212).

The other, more literal, point Moele is making is that under the constraints black people suffer in the kind of skewed democracy we have, and the structural poverty of blacks spawned by an institutional racism favouring whites socio-economically as a group, it is impossible to stop the racialized scourge of HIV/AIDS among blacks.

Such a theme of not disaggregating poverty and HIV/AIDS from institutional racism is reinforced when the dying Zulu-boy himself highlights the inexorability of the pernicious limitations of institutional racism in the democratic South Africa by opening his statement with the allegorical Afrikaans word thus, "Ja! That I have it doesn't make me inhuman, nor does it make me a fool" (212). The Afrikaans word *Ja* metonymically points to an ironically continued apartheid mentality in the new South Africa often referred to in hollow words such as "rainbow nation". Rather than blame the suffering of black people on their own weaknesses, which Milazzo cautions against in her highlighting of potential thematic contradictions in *Room 207*, by such a technique Moele actually delivers a discursive message similar to that of Milazzo herself when she highlights that "AIDS, xenophobia, dispossession, or identity displacement are deeply racialized realities in South Africa" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 38). To disassociate these concepts from racial domination "reinforces colorblind arguments and prevents us from understanding the socio-political function of race" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 38).

Not only do Moele's characters in *Room 207* upset the apartheid institutional racist plan to set black against black by means of a negative emphasis on ethnic difference. The culturally affirming relationship among Zulu-boy and his friends converges with the notion of an underlying African consciousness binding together the different African tribes (see Mphahlele, "What's New" 252-5). Symbolically in their behaviour, the *Room 207* friends exemplifying the post-apartheid South African populace striving to defeat a white privilege society reveal Moele's message that the black characters derive their self-determining spirit from their common Africanness underlying all African consciousnesses and lifestyles (see Mphahlele, "Notes towards" 136). Recourse to African proverbs, idioms and customs that are repositories of African spirituality transcending African ethnic identities are a universal cultural language all the six friends understand in solidarity, as they recline in *Room 207* killing time.

This is why after Modishi's girlfriend has aborted his child, Zulu-boy exclaims, to the laughter of everyone, "I don't know what your ancestors are going to say about that"; as bereaved Modishi appears to invite pity from his friends, the narrator taunts him by saying that "Hillbrow life is not *komeng*" i.e. an initiation school, so no-one is going to comfort Modishi; as the narrator reminisces around Windybrow Theatre about a hustling life in Hillbrow, he makes reference to the African spiritual notion of life after death being invariably blissful, for the reason that punishment for whatever wrongdoing happens during one's existence on earth (56, 158). According to Mphahlele ("Notes towards" 138, 139), African spirituality differs from foreign modes

of religion such as Christianity in that whoever disturbs the harmony between him/herself and other humans and with the universe suffers punishment during his/her physical life through the intervention of the ancestors, and not after death. By means of such characterisation, Moele addresses Milazzo's justifiable concern with the achievements of black post-apartheid South African literature "being potentially contradictory" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 39).

While I agree with Milazzo's ("Racial power" 39) observations that "the realities of racial dictatorship over-determined apartheid fiction" and that "black novelists are finally experimenting with the self-regulating subject and with narratives of free will", I do not see the outcome of such novel crafting playing a reactionary role. Once we concede that the construction of such non-determinist yet socio-politically constrained fictional characterisation demands more profound skill and a much more nuanced decoding by critics, we should uncover continued resistance among black post-apartheid authors such as Moele and Mhlongo. Consummately with the new, more sophisticated post-apartheid weapon among white supremacists of insidious hegemonic discourse, the crafting of such deceptively inane characters require a more profound skill than was the case with overtly protesting characters in the face of crass racial segregation of the past.

In Moele's *The Book of the Dead* (2009) HIV-AIDS deaths are now so large scale as to hint at the climactic drawbacks of a persisting structural racism combined with what Murray (86) has accurately described as the negative impact of the excesses of the predominantly black ruling class on "many black people's lives under the elitist, self-serving variant of democracy that has come to dominate post-apartheid South Africa". As young migrant workers from the protagonist Khutso's rural village of Masakeng occasionally return from the big cities, they are "home to visit their ancestors; to give thanks, to ask for a better tomorrow" (10). The African spirituality premise shows up again when Khutso has passed his matric exams and his mother "dance[s] a ritual dance, thanking all of her ancestors" (27). The defying of ethnic partitioning introduced by Moele in *Room 207* is once more employed to obfuscate whatever ethnic difference might threaten much need black unity in the fight against worsened neo-liberal freedom conditions. Khutso's girlfriend Pretty, hailing from an extraneous tribal identity, puts Khutso's mother at ease with her readiness to partake of goat meat during festivities (52). Significantly she motivates with the universal African spirituality reason that goat meat "is the gods' preferred meat" (52).

The economic lowliness of a family affording only goat meat during a celebration, and the high-class Pretty's cultural solidarity with Khutso's people, satirically points to the democratic South Africa's creation of a new black middle-class co-opted by the economically advantaged whites. Pretty's character speaks to Moele's discourse on a phenomenon whereby few upwardly mobile blacks joining the whites whose affluence has been structurally and institutionally favoured through racial power

from the days of apartheid, refuse to aid a post-apartheid colourblindness that, according to Milazzo ("Rhetorics" 12), seeks to de-politicise institutional racism by denying collective advantage in its appeal to a 'shared humanity that precludes any critique of white privilege.' Although *The Book of the Dead* (2009) paints on a larger canvas the regrettable co-option of blacks into a self-defeating episteme of colourblindness, Moele does introduce such a social critique in the earlier *Room 207* focusing more on cryptic institutional racism. Before Zulu-boy resurfaces on his deathbed he disappears with a Swazi girl while also collaborating unsuccessfully in a music project with the superstar Brenda. He tells the narrator Noko that he does not "have any complaints because if the song had been a hit he could not walk Hillbrow as a free man" (210–1). The freedom of mingling with his fellow economically struggling people on the streets of Hillbrow signifies a resistance to be co-opted as a token of false nonracialism into the white middle-class in post-apartheid South Africa.

It should be Moele's progressive intensity from *Room 207* published in 2006 to *The Book of the Dead* published in 2009 in censuring post-apartheid silencing of white privilege, that has led Murray (89) to repeat her stylistic observation of a conflicted narrator in *Room 207*, this time echoing the same sentiment in the word, "Readers of *The Book of the Dead* have had problems with the unevenness of the work." Observations of such a "splitness" of the narrator of Moele's debut fiction, and "unevenness" of his second novel, stopped short of the kind of unpacking I undertake in this paper.

It is the "indigeneity" Moele's characters bring along to the "modernity" of Hillbrow and post-apartheid South Africa, that strengthens them against a persisting structural disadvantage bolstered by white privilege. White privilege or racial power is still guaranteed by institutional racism—ironically in an equal, democratic South Africa the black characters are in today. Niq Mhlongo's 2004 and 2007 novels (*Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* respectively) do also confront such a blemish on the face of the new democratic South Africa. In my discussion of the two novels I demonstrate that "a place of belonging" that Mhlongo attempts to define is a post-apartheid South Africa straddling suburban and township black lives, where what Murray (78) describes as the depiction of "a younger generation's battle with unemployment, poverty, AIDS and disillusionment" involves the same issues of reinscribed institutional racism as well as a faked nonracial creation of class.

The protagonist of *Dog Eat Dog* Dingz confronts a white dean at the University of the Witwatersrand where he is studying, so that he can be granted an aegrotat exam under false pretences of having been to a family funeral. In a manner supporting the discourse that "You must lie to the whites in order to survive in this country," he has no scruples about lying to the dean (168, 210). When the dean sees through Dingz's lies and disbelieves his fabricated reason for missing the exam, the latter confronts the former with a metonymic accusation of racism. Dingz's dishonest accusation of the dean with racist supremacy using the words "Meaning that blacks always lie

about their situation,” symbolises post-apartheid black arrogance (210). When the dean invokes the idea of Wits rules having to be respected by students irrespective of their racial identity, the cheating black student Dingz retorts, “Those rules, I think, must also take cognizance of the cultural diversity in this country” (211). After ironically threatening to take his quarrel with the dean to the SRC for justice, Dingz gets away with murder and is “granted a deferred examination” unjustly (211).

Earlier on when this stratagem is hatched, Dunga provides a false justification for Dingz’s truant lying as the fact that in early post-apartheid South Africa “the whites themselves already live in the web of a big lie” (168). Such a justification does contain some truth in as far as persistent white privilege exists in post-apartheid ‘nonracial’ South Africa, where blacks continue structurally to be disadvantaged by institutional racism. However, the author’s technique results in the reader’s sympathy going to the whites. The pathetic position of the white section of post-apartheid South Africa is highlighted when the two white friends Dingz eavesdrops upon in the toilet, amplify it metonymically: “Can you say anything nowadays? They will just dance that toyi-toyi dance of theirs and call you a racist [...] Us white people no longer have a hope in this country [...] They’ve got the power now and there’s nothing we can do.” (169)

In a manner differentiating emphases in Mhlongo’s discourses from those in Moele’s, the two white friends’ ascription of white group insecurity to power abuse by blacks as a group does echo even the sentiments of some blacks in post-apartheid South Africa, as when Dunga encourages his friend Dingz to act irregularly with the words, “Nearly everything in life is a gamble, including your own existence at Wits. If you look for certainties, you have far to reach and little to find in this world; our very existence is uncertainty itself.” (167) The deceptively literal isolation of white blame evident in Dunga’s claim that “the only language that whites understand in this country is lies”, figuratively dissolves confinement of castigation to the whites (167) in post-apartheid democracy. A close scrutiny of this dialogue yields a paradoxical fusing of races in post-apartheid capitalist South Africa where middle-class blacks and whites connive in their economic monopoly to exploit the majority blacks who on the whole remain alone in the lowest economic strata.

Due to existence of the employment equity pursuing affirmative action in post-1994 South Africa, the dean could as well have been a black person with the required qualifications. Mhlongo opts to leave some white characters such as the dean in some management positions in order to negate views by some extremist whites that “Unless you apply some black shoe polish to your face and shave your beard [...] then [...] demand affirmative action” you will not be empowered in the democratic South Africa (170). Mhlongo’s two white characters working next to Dunga complain that “This affirmative action is killing us white people, it’s just racism in reverse” only to bring out the antithetical message that affirmative action does not benefit working-class

black people as it is purported to be due to institutional racist limitations regulating it (170). One of Mhlongo's discourses through such a characterisation is democratic government's need to explode the myth that personal effort for blacks and whites amounts effectively to equal opportunities since the defeat of crass apartheid, and therefore there is no need within structures of government to accelerate economic opportunities for blacks through employment equity policies like affirmative action.

The sardonic tone of the two white men Dingz hears complaining about what they see as 'racism in reverse' in the implementation of affirmative action turns facetious with the image of a white face painted black with shoe polish (170). The idea that such a black veneer will wash off and fail any genuineness or permanency test is Mhlongo's way of satirising the black democratic government's cosmetic nonracialism that attempts to camouflage the economic advantage of whites who should not be painted with the same brush as the blacks. Such opposition to colour-blindness resonates with censure of white privilege a post-apartheid literary critic such as Milazzo ("Racial power" 39) subverts, in a remark like this one that "in [...] various twenty-first century fictions of the black self-regulating subject including *Dog Eat Dog*, *After Tears* and *Room 207*—there is tension between the role played by personal responsibility and the societal constraints that limit the characters' possibilities for survival, self-fulfillment, mobility, or ascent to the middle-class."

We should remember that in black township parlance the word white or *ngamla/mlungu* refers to more affluent members of society, irrespective of their skin colour, who are even capable of offering employment to the less fortunate. From such a perspective, the baseless protest against blacks purportedly benefitting from affirmative signals a paradoxical transcendence of race in some colour-blind solidarity between historically advantaged whites and the neo-colonial black bourgeoisies together counteracting a widening of economic mobility for working-class blacks. The blacks now enjoying economic middle-class status live as much a lie about an egalitarian society, as the whites do regarding an equal post-apartheid South Africa while continuing to be favoured by institutional racism in *Dog Eat Dog*. Mhlongo reinforces this discourse of an untenably neoliberal middle-class consisting of blacks and whites, in his characterisation of the black Zulu woman externalizing the suffering of black masses while waiting in an inefficient Home Affairs office. In words that could as well be lambasting a white apartheid government, the elderly woman reveals that, clients are treated with disdain under a black government that no longer cares about blacks, lacks respect for them and treats them as "useless [...] like dogs", "now that the elections are over" and the black politicians have won (203).

Mhlongo continues his concerns with the co-option of black parvenus into a predominantly white middle-class, in his later novel also set in the first decade of South African democracy *After Tears*. Consonantly with his discourse in *Dog Eat Dog*, Mhlongo manipulates his protagonist University of Cape Town dropout Bafana Kuz-

way to yield to ephemeral pleasures distracting him from a self-defining project to qualify for the benefits of a modern post-apartheid South Africa. Although Mhlongo accentuates lack of personal effort and individual depravity as a cause of Bafana's failure to heave himself out of apartheid era structural deprivation, Mhlongo discursively makes community protests against post-apartheid institutional racism and a token colour-blind deracialisation of the new capitalist middle-class coincide with Bafana's antiheroic establishment of a fake law practice (154–67). The profundity of such a juxtaposition of climaxes of individual failure on the part of Bafana and a vicariously national fiasco in black post-apartheid leadership, is an index of the novel's function as more than what Titlestad (682) perceives as a "picaresque [...] [mode] in which black urbanity is represented." The criminality of Bafana's attempts at facing the new post-apartheid city's challenges is of epic black-national levels.

Bafana's friend Zero expresses joy with the fact that there is a "revolution" in which the black Soweto residents will teach the democratic government the same lesson as "the apartheid government before them" in their fight against the post-apartheid 'monster of capitalism' manifested when residents "have this expensive prepaid with a black ANC government? Why are we, the poor people, discriminated against by our own government?" (156, 157–8). Mhlongo's continued discourses from *Dog Eat Dog* include Zero's observation that ever since the formerly oppressed blacks 'voted for them they don't give a fuck about [them] any more (156). Significantly, the symbolic protest of black people against the ruling party includes one of the new black elite's distractions as being "only interested in exchanging the riches of this country with white people (157). In a manner revealing Mhlongo's intensified focus on failures of the new black rulers rather than merely the silencing of white privilege, Zero echoes the black residents communal voice thus: "We used to pay cheaper flat rates for water and electricity during apartheid" (156).

Mhlongo strengthens blame on the black post-apartheid government for creating a neo-liberal, capitalist dog eat dog culture in South Africa's democracy in *After Tears*, after he has charted its unfortunate existence in his earlier novel *Dog Eat Dog*. In *Dog Eat Dog*, the words written on a taxi whose occupants have just abused and robbed Dingz and his friend Themba in Soweto, "THOUGH I DRIVE IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH I FEAR NO HIJACKERS, BUT ANOTHER FUEL INCREASE", enhance the image of a partition between black workers and the black middle-class, with a ripple effect where the mantra is survival of the fittest (92). A black led new nonracial middle-class exploits working-class blacks symbolised here by the taxi-drivers, who in turn exploit weaker members of society such as Dingz and Themba who have some multiple protection fee extorted from them before they can feel relatively safe to walk the streets (92). Mhlongo's juxtaposed depictions of the oppressed classes across race psychically remove racial labels from lower classes. The effect is such that the plight of the forgotten black lower classes merges with

highlights of a similar situation for whites of the same lower working-classes, as when the two white friends in the toilet with Dingz regret that “Everything in this country is about the dance nowadays: you want promotion at work, you just dance in the street. You want reduction of electricity or telephone bills, you go to the street and dance. You want a house, you just dance. You think your boss is a racist, you just dance.” (168)

In words that should be seen as a nuanced imaginary of the future nonracial society of South Africa, the two white male youths provide what they see as a solution of their social challenges: “Then we must also start learning to dance or the gravy train will pass us by.” (168) In the modern South Africa where indigenous racism will be history, both black and white working-class people will have to dance before a new, aloof black-and-white elite opens the economic empowerment door for them. Characterisation in Mhlongo’s *Dog Eat Dog* thus hints at a transition from polarised South African societies of the apartheid period. Precursors to a future, racially fused mass of deprived working-class people are Mhlongo’s portrayal of white uncertainty through the example of the two white friends about a democratic South Africa, and that of uncertain blacks symbolised in Dingz’s image of a train moving between white Johannesburg and black townships where, “crammed like sardines [...] Some people [are] even sitting precariously where the two carriages [join] (171). It should be this unnerving uncertainty about the nature of nonracial society in store for a democratic South Africa Murray (78) is hinting at, by remarking that in *After Tears* “the township is rendered increasingly uncomfortable.”

Similarly, to Moele in his early post-apartheid novels *Room 207* and *The Book of the Dead*, Mhlongo’s novels of the former phase of democracy *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* do handle the drawbacks of the lingering effects of institutional racism in this epoch. This is why Dingz and his friends in *Dog Eat Dog* protest against institutions like Wits remaining “ivory towers to black South Africans” while blacks lucky enough to enter such exclusive institutions suffer from ‘a subtle form of racism practiced by some white lecturers’ in cahoots with the black democratic government (142). This is seen when, inter alia, silencing of institutional racism by black democratic rule has victimised structurally disadvantaged black youths such as the acutely parodied Stomachache into “[dropping] out of Wits” (142).

For me, such socio-economic disillusionment with the modern post-apartheid South Africa where empowering African cultural indigeneity has taken the back seat conflicts with a view like Murray’s (79) that, “Mhlongo’s novels affirm a perhaps idealizing *msawawa*, endorsing homeliness over alienation.” As Titlestad (685) accurately observes, there is indeed a difference in tone between Mhlongo’s and the other post-apartheid black novelists’ discourse on the modern city anxieties faced by people with a black cultural indigeneity. However, the existence to a certain extent of an indigenous cultural anchor to the characters’ actions warrant a re-look at Murray’s

observation, as well as Titlestad's (685) stretching of Mhlongo's mediated tone to seeing the author's style as "playfully [indulging] the local colour of [...] township/location culture, generally eschewing gravity in favour of narrative momentum." Of course such an analysis by Titlestad is consistent with his rather reductive view of a novel like *After Tears* as normatively picaresque.

In a manner, I see as differing from Mhlongo's artistic moral, Moele's discourse foregrounds resilient black cultural identity in black characters' heroic self-definition as subjects forging their own existence in a post-apartheid state. Such an interpretation should temper more pessimistic critiques of Moele's discourse in *Room 207*, such as Milazzo's comment that, 'From the first page, *Room 207* paints a bleak and uncompromising picture of post-apartheid South Africa that leaves no room for celebration' ("Racial power" 41). Mhlongo's approach is that of exposing institutional racism in ways valorising more the solidarity of working-class citizens across race, in a well-defined fight against a disempowering class hierarchy drawing perpetrators from both races. Derivation of a self-describing agency from an African cultural consciousness in the case of Mhlongo is presumed, rather than characterised in the way Moele handles his novelistic discourse.

This is why in *Dog Eat Dog*, the character Dworkin's laudatory allusions to black citizens who cling radically to historical dates in a manner opposed to a superficial nonracialism in the post-apartheid Johannesburg milieu are relegated to a merely psychic level, not patently enacted in the drama of the novel. Mhlongo achieves this kind of laid back psychological concession of a resilient African cultural identity through the character Dworkin's cryptic reminder to his circle of friends that conforming to post-apartheid colour-blind discourse is "liberal lightweight politics" (213). He calls for pride in "our [black] history" where black heroes like Dingane of the Zulu are not historically marginalised into feebly acknowledged "kaffir king[s]" (213, 214). Such serious talk among Dingz and his friends happens only in the background, while the main action of the novel unfolds within a Reconciliation Day carousel in a bar, where the black youths studying at Wits socialize and celebrate raucously in the most hip of ways—congruously with a modern post-apartheid South Africa in which there is freedom of movement and association even in formerly white residential areas (214–6).

Despite their discursive variations, Mhlongo's and Moele's novels reveal the complex texture of post-apartheid South African society in ways that assert a need for a more introspective and profound political leadership. Milazzo's ("Racial power" 39) concession that "These novels continue to direct our attention towards the multifarious legacies of apartheid and invite us to witness the enduring differential value of black and non-black lives," thus makes a significant point about the invaluable contributions of Mhlongo's and Moele' works.

Mhlongo's and Moele's narratives set beyond the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa

In *Way Back Home* (2013), Mhlongo continues his greater focus on the neo-colonial flaws of black rulers in post-apartheid South Africa by painting more their ironic intensification of black disadvantage. This is seen when former exile Kimathi disrupts the exclusively white middle-class life of Willem and Jacoba by buying Mr Redelinguys's next door mansion (130). Clinging to evanescent class structure inherited from apartheid segregated economic opportunities, the white couple initially mistake Kimathi for the white neighbour's servant, and only discover days later that the former exile Kimathi is the new owner of the mansion when they see him "drive out in his BMW, wearing a very expensive suit" (131).

The reader tends to empathise with the white neighbours for their failure to adjust to change, as when their inability to afford the luxury life of a former exile now turned a corrupt tenderpreneur comes to the fore. The white couple, unable to afford "a bottle of Glenfiddich single malt whisky" of which there were "only three in the whole country" which Kimathi boasted to a fellow struggle exile turned tender swindler Sechaba to have bought for twenty-eight thousand rands, steal from the whisky after the tormented Kimathi has passed out near the swimming pool (131).

Fortunes of the now flimsy white middle-class have changed so much that it is now they who rummage through leftovers from vulgar rich blacks. In a sense, the reader cannot but pity Willem as he confesses, "Well, after we tried to resuscitate him, I did help myself to half a glass of that stuff [...] The kitchen door was open, so I got myself a glass" (131–2). Kimathi's white neighbours are as pathetic as the only white man in a planned project team George. Although George's construction company has in the past "benefited from government tenders of more than one billion rand" he remains an exploited token engineer to push through tender application documents, hence his wearing "a cheap blue shirt [and] a beltless pair of old blue jeans" (38–9).

This is not to say that Mhlongo's discourse on post-apartheid life beyond the first decade of democracy silences colour-blindness. Mhlongo uses the voice of the veteran struggle figure Yoli, whose father was "caught in 1972 and hanged" after going back to Middelburg and killing a white man named Viljoen following the latter's acquisition of the former's farm in the wake of the forced removals of blacks by the apartheid Boer government, epically denounces cosmetic nonracialism informed by democratic rulers' colour-blindness in her loaded remark, "Now they want to reconcile? Reconciliation se voet", i.e. to hell with Reconciliation (29). Rather, in *Way Back Home* Mhlongo blames colour-blindness more on the corrupt black rulers than the whites whose continued benefits from apartheid period institutional racism are obfuscated more by black rulers. Mhlongo identifies priority on corrupt self-gain as responsible for continued impoverishment of blacks and a heartless consolidation of an unconcerned new black middle-class. Yoli's family, like many more families

whose members sacrificed painfully for the attainment of democracy, continues to live from hand to mouth in a humble township house (29).

On the other hand, former struggle comrades such as Ganyani Novela who has been in exile with the likes of Kimathi, Sechaba and Ludwe lead a lavish life gained from rapaciously using political connections to gain irregular tenders, like Ganyani's "thirty million rand" when the ruling party "promised to build one million new homes for the poor during its first term of office" (38, my emphasis). To shine a spotlight on the corruption preoccupying the symbols of a self-enriching black ruling class, characters such as Kimathi are described spending almost all of their life in expensive hotel negotiating corrupt business deals with government, where Kimathi, for example displays his self-important arrogance when he puts "all three of his cellphones on the table, including the one he had just taken from his cream Dunhill jacket" (38). Ganyani turns down an offer of "seven per cent [...] of nine hundred million" rands, for the reason that he "cannot betray the spirit of [black South Africans'] noble revolution by taking such a small percentage," in his ignoble justification that he "didn't join the struggle and go into exile to be a poor man when liberation came" (39). Mhlongo's dialogue satirises these representatives of the new democratic government for parodying the noble goals of the liberation struggle, of uplifting the quality of life of the entire nation as opposed to corrupt self-aggrandizement.

In what appears to be the common approach of Mhlongo's and Moele's novels commenting on post-apartheid South African life beyond the first decade, emphasis on blacks' personal responsibility grows in inverse proportion with diminishing a chastisement of white privilege inherited from a past unequal society. This is why the entire unfurling of the return of Senami's spirit home takes place within the matrix of her and other freedom fighters' sexual abuse and criminal brutalization by movement leaders at the Amilcar Cabral camp in Angola. Kimathi, then known as Comrade Pilate conspires with other movement leaders such as Comrade Idi (real name Ludwe), among others to torture, assault, rape and eventually murder Lady Comrade Mkabayi (real name Senami) for trumped up charges meant to cover the movement leaders' immorality and criminality. Before torment overpowers Kimathi, who commits suicide (208), it is Senami's ghost tormenting his conscience in spite of his apparent peace of mind brought by corrupt plunders in the name of now achieved freedom.

Unlike with Moele's earlier use of heroic African cultural values to defeat colour-blindness, in Mhlongo's *Way Back Home*, corrupt government officials and their former struggle combatants, livestock is "slaughtered to thank the ancestors" for dubious reasons having nothing to do with caring for the other human being. This is why Kimathi slaughters a sheep to "thank the ancestors" after "winning the tender to fix the potholes in Bassonia" (131). With such a narrative manipulation Mhlongo

seems to indicate that beyond the first year of democracy a salvaging African cultural consciousness has not only been eclipsed, but has been so distorted by rampant corruption that it has completely lost meaning. Indeed, African cultural values in Mhlongo's novels are as distorted for corrupt financial gain as in his 2016 collection of short stories *Affluenza*. After the protagonist of Pedi cultural identity has died in a car accident in the Eastern Cape, culture is invoked to exploit the Xhosa family she was visiting when she met her death (63). In the pretext of honouring Pedi customs, the Maja family make the emissaries of the Xhosa traditional family pay a bride price of thirty-five thousand rands in cash and two expensive suits "bought at Markham in Phalaborwa"; ten thousand rands for a surviving three month old girl before she can stay with her late mother's "in-laws"; and ten thousand rands towards her funeral—over and above the costs for transporting the corpse from Eastern Cape to Limpopo and footing the mortuary bill (77–8).

In what may be described as a call for a return to indigenous African cultural morality at the hands of Moele in his novel *Untitled* (2013), abuse of women traced back to exile days in Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* assumes a central place. In *Untitled*, the teenager protagonist Mokgethi drops out of a private school located in a ritzy suburb due to the general post-apartheid economic strife of blacks and enters, and finds herself in a public school that does not "have a school bus, established sports facilities or modern sports equipment, a library or a laboratory" (183). For Moele at this phase of his writing career looking at post-apartheid life beyond its nascent euphoria, the national impact of a still-racialised economy is relegated as a backdrop against which the excesses and overall depravity of black leaders themselves.

Genuine nation builders such as Mokgethi's lady teacher Miss Kgopa do exist, yet they are overwhelmed within black self-rule by the immoral and corrupt majority (87). Mokgethi's new school principal Shatale rapes and continues for a long time to abuse one of Mokgethi's friends Lebo, and the other girls (74, 88). School dropouts and upwardly mobile black males see less powerful males and women as objects of their sadism and libido. Moele employs the voice of the narrator Mokgethi to challenge the black communities themselves to take the lead in moral regeration: "Cry, little girls of my beloved country, the Bonolos, the Pheladis, the Lebos and the Dineos that have to live, are living, in communities full of men who prey on us every day." (208)

If in *Room 207*, as Milazzo ("Racial power" 49) has observed, Moele "avoids falling back onto a deterministic victimization of blacks and represents a post-apartheid South Africa in which racial pride, knowledge, and personal choice can contribute to escaping destitution," such a theme is enhanced and covers a wider scope in *The Book of the Dead* (2009). The metaphor of HIV/AIDS as extant institutional racism requiring black people to counteract with their survival kit of adaptive African cultural indigeneity introduced in *Room 207*, explodes to all consuming proportions in *The Book of the Dead* where the scapegoat of apartheid has receded further into oblivion.

Moele's discourse to rally black people to fight self-destructive social tendencies as a nation transcends a mere magnification in *The Book of the Dead*, to acquire pandemic dimensions menacing to self-destruct a democracy that should otherwise regenerate in exuberance through a versatile indigenous morality relayed from the older to the younger generations—in order for a properly constituted post-apartheid modernity to be forged.

Conclusion

Close analyses of Mhlongo's and Moele's novels set in the first decade of South African democracy reveal differing ways in which each of them interrogates views such as Milazzo's ("Rhetorics" 8) that, "Twenty years after the official end of apartheid, racial inequality remains rampant in South Africa." I have demonstrated also how in *Room 207* Moele's discourse problematises a statement like Milazzo's ("Racial power" 46), about 'emphasis on ethnic differences' not providing 'a useful antiracist strategy.'

My discussion above has differentiated Mhlongo's prioritisation of the evil of institutional racism and colour-blindness above the primacy of black rulers' moral introspection. At the time Moele castigates the black leaders and their followers in *Untitled* in his more pronounced call for a return to their liminal indigenous cultural values, Mhlongo through the imaginaries posed by the discourse of *Way Back Home* demystifies the origins of corruption not to be inherited from a scapegoat apartheid, but as inherent among a power abusing black leadership since its days of exile. This is an important negation of the stock tendency in post-apartheid South Africa to practise a denialism whereby everything is blamed on the legacy of apartheid.

There are more ways in which a reading of the novels I adopt in this study refines and enhances how critics so far have charted their contribution to South African post-apartheid literary discourse. One example is how both Mhlongo and Moele progressively confirm in their novels that 'the incisive anti-establishment critique that characterized most apartheid literature by black writers can no longer be taken for granted,' as Milazzo ("Reconciling" 132) has observed in her earlier discussions. Only, the two novelists champion such a stance in ways stretching Milazzo's original ("Reconciling" 132) notion of "anti-establishment"—to imply speaking truth also to a modern, post-apartheid order led by a regrettably flawed black elite.

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