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Introduction

In the twentieth century more and more South African writers “found fruitful inspiration in the emerging injustices of white minority rule” (Baxter, par.4). Alongside names as Sol Plaatje, Alan Paton and Nadine Gordimer, the black South African writer Mongane Wally Serote is mentioned as a writer of protest literature in Peter Baxter’s article “South African Literature.” J.M. Coetzee, probably South Africa’s most famous writer, is not categorized as a writer of protest literature. According to Clive Barnett and other critics Coetzee’s books can be valued not only as political statements but first and foremost as works of art. Although his work is usually associated with traditional politically engaged fiction, he escapes “the received conventions of politically committed literature” (Barnett, 1999) by not explicitly discussing politics. In this thesis a comparison will be made between several novels of Mongane Wally Serote and J.M. Coetzee. Although both South African writers have written about apartheid they are not likely to have the same point of view, one writer being black and the other being white.

In his article “J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*: A culmination and a solution to a problem of white identity” G. Scott Bishop raises the colour question. Coetzee’s work offers the reader the white point of view: “Besides his political sympathy for blacks, his work reflects a concern for the whites' precarious position at the top of the social order” (Bishop, par. 3). Serote, on the other hand, is a black South African, who joined the liberation struggle not only as a writer but also as an MK comrade. The MK was the military wing of the ANC.

Both writers wrote a novel before 1994, during apartheid. Serote wrote *To Every Birth its Blood* in 1981 and Coetzee published several novels, one of which is *Age of Iron* in 1990. Interesting questions that arise from these novels are: How do the writers depict South Africa under apartheid? And how do they see the future post-apartheid state?

In 1999, five years after the abolition of apartheid, Coetzee published the novel *Disgrace*. Serote's latest novel on South Africa is *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, published in 2002. How do both writers view post-apartheid South Africa? Did their fears or hopes for the future prove to be true?

To cover all the questions posed above, the following research question was formulated: **How do the novels of J.M. Coetzee and Mongane Wally Serote depict South Africa under apartheid, the transition period and post-apartheid South Africa?**

In order to be able to answer this question the historical background of South Africa will be given in chapter one. Additionally, the novels *Age of Iron*, *To Every Birth its Blood*, *Disgrace* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go* will be analysed in chapters two to five. Finally, chapter 6 contains a concluding analysis of the four novels and thereby answers the research question. But first of all, the two writers concerned will be briefly introduced.

Mongane Wally Serote was born in 1944 in Sophiatown, Johannesburg. When Sophiatown was demolished in the sixties, Serote moved to Alexandra, the township that features in his novels. Before Serote started writing novels he was a celebrated protest poet. He had published several collections of poems like *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) and *Freedom Lament and Song* (1997). During the sixties, Serote joined the Black Consciousness Movement, "which spoke of black identity, resistance and revolt" (UKZN, par.1). In 1969, he was jailed by the apartheid regime for nine months without having been charged. During the mid-seventies, Serote received a Fulbright Scholarship and studied in the US. When he returned to Africa he remained in exile in Botswana. Then Serote moved to London to work for the ANC from 1986 until 1990. In 1990, the ANC was no longer banned. Serote returned to South Africa and became a Member of Parliament in 1994. Nowadays, Serote lives in Pretoria and he is head of the Arts and Culture department and CEO of the Freedom Park that was opened in 2009. His first novel *To Every Birth its Blood* was published in 1981, followed

by *Gods of Our Time* in 1999 and his latest novel is *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, published in 2002. Mongane Wally Serote is praised for his capacity to articulate the feelings of many of his fellow black South Africans:

[...] if hope is a tool, language is its implement, and, again, Serote would effect transformation through language. His war against apartheid has been a way of words, in the most literal sense, and the world has witnessed that such a war can influence hearts and minds. (Jobson, par.14 , quoting Meihuizen)

John Maxwell Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940. Coetzee graduated with honours degrees in English and mathematics in 1960 and 1961. After graduating Coetzee went to England for a few years and then studied and worked in the US from 1965 until 1971 when he returned to South Africa. “From 1972 until 2000 he held a series of positions at the University of Cape Town, the last of them as Distinguished Professor of Literature” (Frängsmyr, par.6). In 2002 he emigrated to Australia. Coetzee started writing in 1969 and his first novel *Dusklands* was published in 1974. Other award winning books written by Coetzee are *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983), *Age of Iron* (1990) and *Disgrace* (1999). J.M. Coetzee’s “[...] narratives, cruel at best, and biting clear in their perception, offer no more than a critique on the general peculiarities and contractions of South African life, with no particular concession made to modesty” (Baxter, par.4).

Chapter 1 Historical background of South Africa

It was 1652 when Jan van Riebeeck arrived in South Africa with the assignment of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company, to start a way-station for its trade route between the Netherlands and the East Indies. This settlement was the start of increasing contact between the indigenous black people and the western white people. From that moment on there was a continuous stream of western Europeans moving into these newly discovered territories.

As a result of the Napoleonic wars, the English overpowered the Dutch colonists in 1806. Living areas of white colonists at the Cape of Good Hope were separated from those of indigenous black people. According to B.J.H. de Graaff, some people mark this as the beginning of apartheid. Others point out the year 1857 as the starting point because then the “Nederduitse” reformed church decided to hold separate services for black and white people. In his book *Apartheid, Een Aanzet tot Begripsbepaling*, De Graaff explains that it is difficult to determine which event or date marks the beginning of apartheid. He himself considers it a 20th century political phenomenon. In 1910, under the leadership of the English colonists, the Union of South Africa was realized and segregation was established in the constitution. It was decided that black people were excluded from national elections in most of the provinces. At that point, the living conditions of most Afrikaners (white South Africans with mainly Dutch, German and French roots) were equally bad as those of black Africans. This did not, however, lead to a feeling of brotherhood, because the Afrikaners felt superior to the poor black people. This feeling of superiority led to the foundation of the Nasionale Party (NP, also known as the ANP).

Far into “the 1930s blacks were seen as part of the African landscape, just as the plants and animals” (Graaff, 17). Both the NP and the Suid Afrikaanse Party (SAP, which was mainly supported by English colonists) were of the opinion that political and/or social

equality for the two races was impossible. Segregation was necessary “to ensure the safety of the white race and of Christian civilization by the honest maintenance of the principles of apartheid and guardianship” (Shepherd, 3, quoting Malan). This is what Dr Malan, member of the NP, stated in 1944 about the system of apartheid. In 1948, the NP won the elections and the system of apartheid was immediately brought into operation. The apartheid regime severely restricted the rights of black people. Examples of this are that no marriages between white and black people were allowed, that black people had to enter public buildings through the back door or had to go to different buildings, they had to take different buses and were not allowed to own land or property.

During the 1950s, resistance to the racist policy was a common phenomenon. The most important organization behind these protests was the ANC (African National Congress). The MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe) was the active military wing of the ANC, which was founded by Nelson Mandela. The first MK guerilla attacks were launched in 1961. From the 1960s onward, Western governments began to change their attitude towards the Afrikaner government. While they first regarded the situation as a matter of “domestic jurisdiction”, they eventually tried to put pressure on the Afrikaner government to stop the repression and apartheid. Since the 1960s (especially in European countries), the belief that a nation should not be based on race, ethnicity or religion, but on equality for all citizens gained importance. Human rights became the basis for a democratic nation. One of the main turning points in the way European countries reacted to the apartheid regime was the Sharpeville Massacre of March 1960, a mass killing of unarmed black South Africans. This was one of the most striking acts of the apartheid regime. In order to maintain grip on the country, the government banned the ANC.

“I believe it is time to question ourselves where these politics lead to”, wrote Cosmas Desmond in 1971 in his book, *The Discarded People*, about South African politics. As a

white priest, he visited several living areas for black people that were introduced in the 1960s, the so called homelands. Black South Africans were sent off to these homelands. In these homelands there were no houses, schools, shops or sanitary facilities. Desmond saw how people were delivered into a deteriorating situation of malnutrition, while the white people in South Africa enjoyed remarkable wealth and rising incomes (Desmond, 1972). Because of its critical stance against the Afrikaner government *The Discarded People* was banned.

It was in the 1970s that one of the most dramatic actions was taken in order to break the black resistance. Heavy protests were held by black students in the South Western Township near Johannesburg. The police actions to stop these riots killed about 700 black people. At that time, the Afrikaner government lost support of some white people (even in the government). They experienced great difficulty in tackling the apartheid system. According to them, gradual reform and time were needed to change the system into a “more equitable social system” (Shepherd, 1977). The NP started to realize they had to change their policy.

It was not until the beginning of the 1990s, that the apartheid system was abolished. Members of anti-apartheid parties were freed and the ANC gained power. In 1994, the first multi-racial election was held in South Africa. The ANC, with Nelson Mandela as their leader, won the elections.

Then “the dilemma of how to deal with politically motivated human rights violations of the apartheid period” (Wilson, 2002) raised its head. Taking into consideration the above mentioned belief about the importance of human rights, a remarkable decision was made. It was decided to grant amnesty to human rights offenders of the apartheid period. This led to the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1995. The thought behind the commission was that national unity in the new South Africa could only be feasible through reconciliation. The South African term that covered this thought is *ubuntu*. The word “is an expression of community, representing a romanticized vision of ‘the rural African

community' based upon reciprocity, respect for human dignity, community cohesion and solidarity" (Wilson, 9). It was introduced by the leader of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Desmond Tutu.

In practice, the implementation of the reconciliation system was not as easy as it was in theory. Wilson says in his book about the commission: "It remains to be seen whether they have altered, over the long term, concrete social practices and discourses of violent conflict, justice and punishment" (Wilson, xxi).

The situation in South Africa remains problematic and "the cost of the years of conflict will be paid for a long time yet, not least in terms of lawlessness, social disruption and lost education"(BBC, par. 4). It is questionable whether the ANC has been able to greatly increase the country's prosperity. First of all, the unemployment rate remains high. Secondly, land distribution is still problematic because most of the land is still owned by white people. "The government aims to transfer 30% of farmland to black South Africans by 2014" (BBC, par. 8). Finally, another problem which complicates the rehabilitation of South Africa is HIV/AIDS. South Africa has the world's highest number of infected people. Solving this problem has proven to be problematic, mainly because for a long time the ANC government refused to face the facts and take proper actions to tackle the problem.

Chapter 2 *Age of Iron*

“How long, how long before the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth?” (50).

In Coetzee’s novel *Age of Iron*, the future of South Africa after the abolition of the Apartheid state appears to be at issue. Through the eyes of a female protagonist dying of cancer, and eager to face up to the full truth about her country in the face of death, Coetzee gives a very disillusioned analysis of South Africa’s present, but also of the future that is likely to grow out of this present, and that is already announcing itself. Could that future be an age of clay or earth?

The novel, published in 1990, features protagonist and narrator Elizabeth Curren, a middle-aged white South African woman with English roots. The novel is a letter to her daughter. When the protagonist hears she has been diagnosed with terminal cancer she starts writing a letter to her daughter, who lives in America. The writing itself is more important than whether her daughter reads it. “Private papers. These papers, these words that either you read now or else will never read. Will they reach you? Have they reached you?” (32). As Dominic Head says in his book *J.M. Coetzee*: “The letter is a confession for the self” (Head, 139). By writing everything down, in the face of death, Mrs Curren tells the truth about South Africa. Although “Coetzee steadfastly refuses to provide authoritative interpretations of his novels or to reduce them to political statements” (Barnett, 1999), it is most likely that Coetzee wrote the novel for the same reason. “I [Mrs Curren and Coetzee] tell you this story not so that you will feel for me but so that you will learn how things are” (103). Coetzee alludes to the age Mrs Curren lives in as the Age of Iron.

The Afrikaner government's attitude and actions are like iron, they seem unbreakable and unbendable. According to the novel, South Africa, and especially its government, is living in a state of denial, and refuses to acknowledge its problems, as seen from the description of the functioning of the media. The protagonist is staging a silent protest against the regime of the Afrikaner government, which uses the media for propaganda:

I was watching television. One of the tribe of *Ministers* and *Onderministers* was making an announcement to the nation. I was standing, as I always do when they speak, as a way of keeping what I can of my self-respect (who would choose to face a firing squad sitting down?). *Ons buig nie voor dreigemente nie*, he was saying: we do not bow to threats: one of those speeches. (9)

Mrs Curren keeps standing as a way of protesting against the government. She compares them with a firing squad who eliminate people who are in their way. By standing up she is saying that if they take her down she will go proudly.

Mrs Curren comments on the misuse of the media by the Afrikaner government: "Governmental control of media was another essential part of the ideological struggle, registered clearly in Mrs Curren's reactions to television and newspaper coverage of politics" (Head, 132). Near the end of the novel, Mr Verceuil, a vagrant living in Mrs Curren's garage, is helping Mrs Curren who through her illness is no longer able to take care of herself. Mr Verceuil suggests bringing the television up to Mrs Curren's bedroom. She refuses, because she says it will make her feel sick. Mr Verceuil answers: "Television can't make you sick. It's just pictures" (180), to which Mrs Curren replies: "There is no such thing as just pictures. There are men behind the pictures. They send out their pictures to make people sick" (180). This underlines how the narrator detests the way in which the government influences people through television.

The media are also employed to keep people ignorant of the struggle going on, as appears on page 39. Florence, Mrs Curren's black housekeeper, tells Mrs Curren that in certain areas in South Africa, black teenagers have burned down their schools out of protest against the apartheid regime. Mrs Curren realizes she would not know about these riots if Florence had not told her: "Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television says nothing, the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks" (39). This passage explains how the apartheid government tried to keep their citizens ignorant of the entire situation of a smoldering civil war by providing them with incorrect information. The media are used by the government as a means to hold a tight grip on the people in order to remain in charge.

Through the narrator Coetzee seems to show his disapproval of the current situation in South Africa. The determination of the government to rule South Africa with an iron hand creates a hell on earth. However, it is only when the protagonist realizes the end of her life is near that she starts to see South Africa's worst realities.

At the beginning of the story, Mrs Curren's doctor tells her she is going to die of cancer. The day after she receives the bad news, she notices Mr Vercueil in her garage. She starts to wonder whether he was sent by God to guide her through her last months. "I wondered whether you were not, if you will excuse the word, an angel come to show me the way. Of course you were not, are not, cannot be – I see that. But that is only half the story isn't it? We half-perceive but we also half-create" (168). Vercueil's name seems to be a reference to Virgil, from Dante's *La Divina Commedia*. Similar to Virgil giving a guided tour through hell, Vercueil receives the task to guide Mrs Curren through the living hell, namely South Africa. "The idea that Vercueil may represent an angel of death to Mrs Curren introduces an allegorical dimension to the novel" (Head, 129). Vercueil is the angel of death

who drives the car when he and Mrs Curren go to the township where the riots have been and where they find Florence's son, Bheki dead.

Towards the end of the novel, an implicit but very strong remark is made about the Afrikaner government. After Bheki gets killed Mrs Curren thinks about life, death and hell. She considers hell as the domain of ideas. "Why can hell not be at the foot of Africa, and why can the creatures of hell not walk among the living?" (110). This is a strong accusation towards the Afrikaner leaders. According to Mrs Curren (and Coetzee?), the men who invented the idea of apartheid must be creatures from hell who are apparently still alive and living in South Africa.

Mrs Curren feels ashamed of the white people of South Africa. Several incidents in the novel increase this feeling of shame. Bheki and his friend are deliberately hit by a police car. Bheki's friend ends up in hospital. Mrs Curren witnesses the crash and goes to the police to tell what she saw. They are uninterested and ask why Mrs Curren came to them because she was not affected. Mrs Curren replies: "But I am affected, very directly affected. Do you understand what I'm saying?" (86). This incident affects her because she is white like the racist policemen. She is ashamed of the white people in South Africa, of the race she belongs to: "Perhaps I should simply accept that that is how one must live from now on: in a state of shame" (86).

Mrs Curren's daughter "had simply had enough" (75) of the situation in South Africa and moved to America. At some point, Mr Vercueil suggests Mrs Curren phone her daughter to ask her to come back to South Africa to take care of her. Mrs Curren says her daughter made the vow that she is not coming back before things have changed. She says: "She is like iron. I am not going to ask her to come back on her vows" (75). Then Mr Vercueil replies that Mrs Curren is like iron herself too. Mrs Curren is hurt by this remark and answers: "If I were made of iron, surely I would not break so easily" (75). And Mrs Curren does break.

Her personal, and especially her emotional state of mind is affected more and more during the novel. Towards the end of the book the police come to search Mrs Curren's house to find Bheki's friend (who left the hospital). Mrs Curren is not willing to cooperate and uses her illness to prevent herself from being moved out of the house. A woman is called in for assistance. "Where is the pain? asked the woman, frowning. In my heart, I said. [...] I have cancer of the heart. [...] I caught it by drinking from the cup of bitterness [...] you will probably catch it too one day. It is hard to escape" (155). Only the reader, not the woman understands the irony in Mrs Curren's remark. With the cup of bitterness Mrs Curren is referring to her experiences with the malpractices of the Afrikaner government. The pain in her heart might even be worse than the pain of cancer.

Another comparison shows that Mrs Curren becomes more emotionally involved with the situation. In the beginning of the novel Mrs Curren's attitude seems relatively indifferent. She is aware of the situation in the country: "There were not so many of these homeless people in your time. But now they are part of life here. Do they frighten me? On the whole, no" (7). When she has bars installed on her windows she does feel like a caged bird. A bird that has to watch out for the wild predators outside. "Now you are safe. The words of a zookeeper as he locks the door for the night on some wingless, ineffectual bird" (28). In short, initially Mrs Curren tries to keep reality out of her perception of the environment. It is only when she sees Bheki's dead body that her attitude changes radically: "And I thought: Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again" (103).

All these realizations make Mrs Curren "want to rage against the men who have created these times" (117). She realizes it is childish to blame others for the situation, but she is convinced that power is the mechanism that creates such disgrace and shameful times. Power is the mechanism and the government is the machine. Mrs Curren wants to rage against the machine, rage against its steely operators.

Coetzee uses many metaphors in his book to express his worries about the direction the country seems to be going. Mrs Curren herself is used as an allegory for the nation. She “stands for the nation as a whole, the cancer within mirroring the metaphorical cancer outside” (Head, 132). Her body is ill, and so is the country. Just as there is no cure for the cancer, there seems to be no cure to turn the tide for South Africa. The actions of the apartheid regime are like growing cancer cells that cause irreversible damage.

“This emphasis on embracing the damaging truth establishes a principle of facing up to difficult self-knowledge” (Head, 137). When the doctor tells Mrs Curren that she is suffering from terminal cancer, she says the devastating news is “for me, mine only, not to be refused. It was for me to take in my arms and fold to my chest and take home, without headshaking, without tears” (4).

Mrs Curren's pessimism about South Africa's future is underlined by the following quotation: “life in this country is so much like life aboard a sinking ship” (22). She is fully aware things are headed in the wrong direction, but she feels unable to prevent the ship from sinking, unable to stop the malpractices of the Afrikaner government which are destroying South African society. This powerlessness discourages Mrs Curren from putting some effort into improving South African society: “the spirit of charity has perished in this country” (22). In Mrs Curren’s opinion, the people who need charity despise it and the people who give charity are desperate.

About her house Mrs Curren says: “A house built solidly but without love [...]. Whose walls the sun, even the African sun, has never succeeded in warming” (16). Her house resembles the country, which is also built without love. The house is slowly falling apart and the question arises to whom it will belong when Mrs Curren dies. The same question rises for South Africa. Who will own South Africa after apartheid?

A land in process of being repossessed, its heirs quietly announcing themselves. A land taken by force, used, despoiled, spoiled, abandoned in its barren late years. Loved too, perhaps, by its ravishers, but loved only in the bloomtime of its youth, and therefore, in the verdict of history, not loved enough. (25)

South Africa is exploited by its colonizers and they do not love it enough to keep it from devastation. A softer age should set in, an age of clay or earth to bring back warmth and love for South Africa. The time has come for a new generation to take over and start over. The heirs who will inherit the country are the young black South Africans. But will they introduce a softer age?

The repression practiced by the apartheid state is creating a new generation of black youngsters whose radicalism bodes a long period of extreme violence. The protagonist is longing for better times for South Africa. The children raised in this age are hard as iron. “How long, how long before the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth?” (50). Society is hardened and it is difficult to turn the tide. By society she does not only mean white people. It is also the young black radicals who drive the community apart by their violent escalations. Mrs Curren hungers for love: “Hunger, I thought: it is the hunger of the eyes that I feel [...] I am hungry with love of this world” (18).

But it is difficult for Mrs Curren to break through the walls of prejudices. While Mrs Curren tries to make a distinction between black South Africans, Bheki has the tendency to generalize about white people. When his friend John comes along to Mrs Curren’s house, Mrs Curren asks why they let a stranger into her house. “He is not a stranger, he is visiting, said Florence. Must we have a pass to come in here? said Bheki. He and John exchanged glances. Must we have a pass?”(47). This incident indicates that while Mrs Curren has the right to ask about the people who enter her house, Bheki and John immediately consider her a racist. During the apartheid system black people needed a pass to get access to certain areas of the

country. By asking her whether they need a pass to enter the house they depict her as a person who feels superior to black people.

Mrs Curren might feel a distance between herself and black South Africans, but that does not mean she does not feel equal. The famous Shakespeare passage from *The Merchant of Venice* fits the context of discrimination perfectly: “Do I not eat, sleep, breathe like you? cries Shylock the Jew: Do I not bleed like you?” (40). When after the crash Bheki’s friend is lying on the ground wounded, Mrs Curren tries to stop the bleeding. She dislikes the friend, because of his aggressive and unintelligent attitude, but at that moment she only sees him as a person in need. She realizes “blood is precious, more precious than gold and diamonds” (63).

It is through Florence, that Mrs Curren witnesses the cruelty of the apartheid regime. Of course, this cruelty provokes a response from black South Africans. Especially black youngsters start to fight back. Although Mrs Curren herself never experienced any violent incidents she fears the young black rioters: “It is the roaming gangs I fear, the sullen-mouthed boys, rapacious as sharks, on whom the first shade of the prison house is already beginning to close” (7). The aggressive attitude of black youngsters makes Mrs Curren worried about Bheki, who has dropped out of school.

She asks Florence why she does not intervene and send him back to school. Florence argues that Bheki can decide for himself about what to do with his life. Bheki’s argument for quitting school is that school is there to make black people fit into the apartheid system. “‘Liberation before education’ was a keynote phrase [...] one which characterizes Bheki’s attitude in the novel” (Head, 131). School boycotts by black youngsters commenced in 1983 and became more widespread during 1984 and 1985.

Florence respects her son’s decisions and admires his generation for being brave enough to stand up against the government. “These are good children, they are like iron, we are proud of them” (50). Mrs Curren is of the opinion that education is most important to fight

injustice. This uneducated aggressive group of rioters is dangerous: “You told me you admire your son’s generation because they are afraid of nothing [...] What you admire in them is not necessarily what is best” (48). According to Mrs Curren bravery can be good but in this case it has created cruelty. Florence replies: “But who made them so cruel? It is the whites who made them so cruel!” (49). To Mrs Curren this is not a valid argument for a parent to let go of the responsibility for one’s child’s actions: “Their hearts are turning to stone before our eyes, and what do you say? You say, This is not my child, this is the white man’s child, this is the monster made by the white man” (50).

The radicalism of the young black South Africans does not seem to herald a softer age. But is it possible to change the current situation without using violence? At first the liberal protagonist disagrees with the young radicals, and pleads for a more gradual transfer of power; but more and more, under the pressure of her experiences, she comes to see the need for radical revolutionary change.

Mrs Curren realizes the people of South Africa themselves should stand up against the wrongdoings of their leaders. Although she is convinced that apartheid will come to an end, she knows it will take time: “Apartheid is not going to die tomorrow or the next day” (67). A similar example is found on page 70: “South Africa: a bad-tempered old hound snoozing in the doorway, taking its time to die. And what an uninspired name for a country! Let us hope they change it when they make their fresh start”. The Afrikaner government is compared to an old dog. Like an old dog the apartheid system is only slowly willing and able to let go of its existence. It is coming to its end like a dog that gets grumpy and mean towards the end as well.

In short, the seventies and eighties of 20th century South Africa are described as an age of iron. Apartheid holds the country in a tight grip. The media are controlled by the Afrikaner government to keep the people ignorant. The narrator refers to South Africa as a

hell on earth, through which she gets a guided tour by Mr Verceuil. Mrs Curren wants to rage against the machine, against the iron age. But like there is no medicine against the cancer in Mrs Curren's body, it is impossible to cure the country.

Mrs Curren is dying and wondering who will inherit her house, just like the Afrikaner government is slowly dying and wondering who will take over South Africa. The protagonist longs for a softer age. But will that be introduced by the young black South Africans, who are gradually taking over the country?

Although Mrs Curren rejects the violence used by the black rioters, she understands that this government needs to be fought against. Still, to the protagonist (and to the writer?) this need for violence and intolerance to bring about the regime change remains a matter of great worry. What, after all, will black radicalism mean for well-meaning whites like herself? Or for drop-outs like Mr Verceuil? The only hope for people like them is that the new generation of black South Africans will introduce an age of clay or earth.

How are these young black South Africans depicted by the black writer Serote? How do these youngsters see South Africa's future? In the following chapter, in which Serote's first novel *To Every Birth its Blood* is analysed, Serote shows the reader his point of view.

Chapter 3 *To Every Birth its Blood*

“It is a world of burdened, complex people struggling to give life to something new under the African sun” (Finnegan, par. 9).

To Every Birth its Blood is the first novel written by Mongane Wally Serote in 1981. The novel tells the story of Tsi Molope, a journalist and actor living in one of Johannesburg’s townships, Alexandra. The second part of the novel features several other young black South Africans from Alexandra. Most of them become active members of the Movement, an anti-apartheid organisation operating underground. The novel gives a realistic impression of the freedom struggle black South Africans started in the seventies and “Serote paints vividly the sights, sounds, smells and energy of life in the townships in revolutionary times” (Weston, par. 2). In his article “A Distant Rumbling in the Township”, William Finnegan comments that Serote’s novel, as that of any black South African writer, cannot be a remembrance in tranquility. He adds: “Neither is this a novel necessarily directed at the elite international readership addressed by South African writers such as J. M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer”(Finnegan, par. 8). Serote has written many poems about South Africa, apartheid and the liberation struggle and, according to Essop Patel, Serote can be called revolutionary: “Within the context of liberation and literature, Mongane Wally Serote is indeed a revolutionary poet, rooting his poetry in a higher priority: that of the national liberation struggle” (Patel, 193). The questions concerning Serote’s first novel raised in this chapter are the following: How do black South Africans in the novel experience South Africa under apartheid? How do the characters see the future of their country? And how do they think that future can be attained? And most importantly, how do the opinions of the characters differ on these matters?

The answer to the first question, “how do black South Africans in the novel experience South Africa under apartheid?” is evident. Frustration, disbelief, sorrow are words that typify the feelings of black South Africans featuring in the novel. However, hope and strength and commitment are important terms as well.

Part one of the novel merely shows Tsi’s frustration about the situation. Frustrations about the living conditions black South Africans have to cope with: “The devil’s kitchen. Township. Alex. What is this mess? Our home. Our country. Our world” (36). Alexandra is the Johannesburg township where the story takes place. All characters are born and raised in this turbulent area. The township stands for hope and courage on the one hand and on the other hand the situation in Alexandra creates frustration and sorrow: “[...] an ambivalent symbol of both mothering and oppression” (Attwell, 292). Patel quotes Serote on living in Alexandra: “My background of Alex made me feel extremely disenchanting, like everybody else. I wanted to use writing as a medium to express this disenchantment. Alexandra was for me a definition of the way blacks lived in our country as a whole” (Patel, 188, quoting Serote). This feeling of disenchantment can indeed also be found in the novel. The township is labelled by the Afrikaner government as a breeding ground of evil. People in Alexandra are well aware of this. Tsi comments: “I grew up in Alexandra. I am a curious and dangerous combination, if we are to take Verwoerd’s dream of South Africa seriously” (22). All the rules and restrictions even in the townships fill people with despair. It is hard to find a proper job and part of the money earned has to be spent on a permit to live in Alexandra: “A shit piece of paper, which was supposed to allow me to live in Alexandra. Permit. I had lived all my life in Alexandra” (35). Like many others Tsi has difficulty coping with the situation: “Molope [...] is alienated, humane, inept and chronically depressed; he seeks his solace in booze and jazz” (Finnegan, par. 3).

The ill-treatment of black South Africans by the Afrikaner government is frequently raised in the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Tsi and a colleague are commanded out of their car by policemen and assaulted for no reason. In the second part, Oupa is assaulted and eventually killed by the police. These episodes show how the apartheid system is enforced by the police. After the assault Tsi runs into an old acquaintance, Zola, who comments on the violations: “when you defeat someone and while he is lying on the ground, you continue to beat him, it just shows you are not a man. Men don’t fight like that. That is fear”(16). Zola wonders why these men do not have conscientious objections to fighting that way. In a battle, fighters should be equal in order to make it a fair battle. Zola refers to Hitler: “You must have read about Hitler. [...] Hitler put people in an oven [...] How can a man fight like that?” (16). These episodes of the display of power by white men show that black South Africans did not even get a fair chance to defend themselves from being humiliated. It also underlines the pessimistic state of mind Tsi finds himself in.

In the second part of the book the feeling of hopelessness is replaced by a feeling of commitment and determination. While in the first part the focus was on Tsi, in the second part we are introduced to several other young black South Africans from Alexandra. According to Dorian Barbour, the story shifts “from an individual to a collective focus, and from alienation to commitment” (Attwell, 294). The shift in the novel from one character to many characters and from depression to commitment alludes to the shift of mentality after the Soweto uprisings of 1976. The Soweto uprisings brought about this feeling of community and hope. That is what the characters in part two represent. Oupa, Oni, Yao, Dikeledi, and John all become active members of the Movement. A clear example of how the characters motivate each other to fight for freedom is the following. John is one of the many people in Alexandra who lost a loved one through a riot with the police. His attitude is marked by the loss of his girlfriend. According to Dikeledi and Oni, John is “drowning in self-pity” (104). His attitude

changes slowly when Oni tells him he should learn a lesson from Nolizwe's death, a lesson to defend himself. John comes to understand what Oni means: "I am hurt that Nolizwe died. I am horrified that she died the way she died, but I realise something else has to happen" (105).

John realizes what a beautiful country South Africa is, despite the miserable situation:

The people of this country are locked in a tight embrace which is going to destroy them. The white people. The black people. The gold. The diamonds. The guns. The bombs. South Africa, such a beautiful country. The bright sun, the warm days and nights, the rainy days, the mountains, trees, rivers, such a unique country. (107)

Another example of commitment in part two which underlines Barboure's opinion, is when Oupa asks Oni why she thinks South Africa is a beautiful country. Oni answers: "[...] the people who run this country are selfish, dogs in the manger, making everyone miserable to satisfy their avarice and greed. Only the landscape is beautiful" (162). Oni's love for her country makes that she is willing to fight to free her people from the oppressor.

The story is set in the seventies when the end of apartheid is not yet in sight. How do the characters in the novel see their future? Again, there is a difference between the vision on the future in the first and second part of the novel. Tsi is pessimistic about the future. When his parents ask him whether they will have grandchildren, Tsi answers: "You ask me if you will have grandchildren. What for? Where is the future they will take in their hands?" (39). When Tsi is with friends, he asks a girl whether she would consider being his wife and she answers: "No, you are the educated type, I don't like those, they end up on Robben Island" (26). In the novel, several people, like Tsi's brother and Dikeledi's father, have been sent to prison on Robben Island. While Tsi is pessimistic about the future, Dikeledi becomes combative and takes over her father's role by joining the Movement. She does not know what should be done after apartheid and focuses on the revolution: "She [Dikeledi] wondered how this system could be destroyed, what system would replace it" (132). That the characters in

part two are more concerned about how to change the current situation than about what will happen afterwards is underlined by the following passage. Oni and John are having a discussion and John asks: “Oni tell me, what do you think is going to happen to this country eventually?” (104). Oni answers: “I think the right question would be, if you don’t mind correcting you, what can we do to change what is going on?” (104).

All that the characters know is that they will fight for change and they are convinced their future will be better. Oni is talking to her old neighbour when she realizes a lot has changed since that lady was born and more is about to change: “Oni also knew that if she was going to live to the age of this old, tired, but forever fighting lady, she would live in a different country” (160).

Oupa is probably the most optimistic and fanatical character in the novel. He is convinced the Movement will tear down the Afrikaner government: “[...] the African people are going to win this war, about that there is no question” (141). And although they do not speculate about a new South Africa, in the anticipation of freedom they picture their future:

For over four centuries we have fought, man after man, woman after woman, fought with everything we had, for what seemed to us a very simple and easily understood reality: this is our land, it must bear our will. South Africa is going to be a socialist country, this is going to come about through the will, knowledge and determination of the people. (185)

An interesting question to add at this point is: Is this how Serote himself saw South Africa’s future? We see parts of Serote’s life reflected in the novel. Like Tsi, Serote worked as a journalist. Like Yao, Serote travelled to America. And just like Serote, Yao preferred to come back to South Africa. According to David Attwell: “some of the anguish of what was surely Serote’s own sense of isolation comes through in the portrayal of Yao” (Attwell, 293). A striking difference, however, is that in the novel South Africa is pictured as a socialist

country, while Serote was a member of the Black Consciousness movement. This movement's aim was to create a black South Africa.

What emerges in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, however, is an uneven process in which the struggle is seen to be most usefully advanced by a secular ideology – rather than the racial or cultural characteristic of Black Consciousness – and a form of collectivization that is most obviously represented by the ANC. (Attwell, 295)

This socialist ideology is best explained by Dikeledi's father, Ramono, "whose political wisdom carries most weight in the novel" (Attwell, 295). He says: "I want you to understand that colour here must not be the issue. [...] I am afraid that you have put too much emphasis on the colour question" (142). Not the system of segregation, but rather the system of oppression and exploitation should be destroyed. In this novel, Serote's opinion remains ambiguous on this matter.

What the novel is most concerned with is the fight for freedom, the revolution. The question of how to attain this freedom is answered throughout the novel. Most characters are in some way active members of an anti-apartheid organisation. Boykie, Tsi's colleague, states in the beginning of the novel: "I am with the BSO [Black Students' Organization] right now, but I realise that is only a stage, just a stage in our battle to reclaim a home for ourselves" (49).

Tsi's father is sceptical about the anti-apartheid actions his sons support. His eldest son has been captured and Tsi might be the next to disappear. According to him, the young radical people are not capable of standing up against the regime. "He [Tsi's father] had to believe that one day, his heroes, his supermen, were going to fly into South Africa and seize it out of the terrible grip that now held it" (63). Those supermen were men of his generation, who knew and respected the law and who would free the country by reason instead of violence.

The young people in the novel are convinced waiting is not an option. After Dikeledi's father is sent to Robben Island she is determined:

There was only one way left – people had to fight. She understood now that there was no such thing as people being born free. She understood that there was no such thing as freedom being asked for, that freedom must be fetched, must be won, must be fought for. (132)

An important factor for black South Africans in their fight for freedom is education. The Afrikaner government was well aware of that and made sure the educational system enforced segregation. Tsi comments on the educational system of South Africa:

Education is a socialising agency: in South Africa, black children are subjected to an education which is instrumental in imparting the dominant ideology of apartheid or separate development, a system which the black people in general abhor [...]. History is taught, in both white and black schools, to distort the reality of South Africa; enforced segregation in schools entrenches the segregation system as a whole. (92)

It was through the implementation of the policy that all black children should be taught Afrikaans instead of English that in 1976 the Soweto uprisings started. Many students protested against the implementation. The students were violently suppressed by the police. The conviction that education is an important means of defence is underlined in the novel. Tsi and Tuki are in the elevator at their office when the white lift man comments that it is dangerous to educate people like them. Tuki says laughing: "Oh, is that what's going through your head? There will be thousands of us educated soon, and you won't be here, Mr Koek" (76). After Tsi quits his job as a journalist, he starts working at McLean's College. Working at McLean's gives him the feeling of doing something constructive:

Visiting these centres we saw young boys and girls who otherwise would have been in the streets, exposed to Afro-American literature, Afro-Caribbean literature, African

writers. We were watching what we believed to be the crumbling of the walls of ignorance. (86)

The novel's title underlines the revolutionary spirit of the story. *To Every Birth Its Blood* refers to the fact that a new South Africa can only come about through the sacrifices of black South Africans. On the last page Tsi comments: "The strongest will win this game. It is costly. But the strongest will win it. Who is the strongest?" (206). This question is not answered directly, but the narrator continues with the description of a birth: "Her vagina, open like the lip of the earth, the lip of the sky when the sun pours out, was red with blood" (206). This brings together the sorrow of the ones lost through the battle on the one hand and the strength to continue the fight on the other hand. Blood is shed in order to attain freedom. Finnegan comments: "It is a world of burdened, complex people struggling to give life to something new under the African sun" (Finnegan, par. 9).

To Every Birth its Blood is a revolutionary novel which shows the combative spirit of many young black South Africans in the 1970s. It visualizes "the waste and suffering that are encountered in the midst of ordinary, daily experience under apartheid" (Attwell, 292).

The division of the novel emphasizes the different ways of thinking about and coping with the situation. Tsi Molohe represents a depressed people who see no way out of their misery. The characters in part two represent the young belligerent black South Africans, who are convinced that, through determination, cooperation and violence, South Africa can be freed from its oppressor.

"The strongest will win" Serote says in *To Every Birth its Blood*. But after that he raises the question "who is the strongest?". Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* is set in post-apartheid South Africa and the main characters witness the power shift that takes place. The strongest make their powers felt.

Chapter 4 *Disgrace*

“I am not any more the dog-man” (129).

Disgrace tells the story of David Lurie, a divorced professor teaching Romantic poetry at Cape Town University, who has an affair with a student. The affair sours and David is summoned before a committee of inquiry. David is willing to admit his guilt and resigns. To leave it all behind, David travels to his lesbian daughter Lucy, who lives in the countryside. All is going well until one occurrence radically disrupts their lives. They become fully aware of the power shift in South Africa. Three black African men appear on their doorstep. They attack father and daughter and Lucy is gang raped by the three. This incident drives a wedge between David and Lucy and their opinion on South Africa’s future.

Disgrace was published in 1999, five years after the abolition of apartheid. In his earlier novels, Coetzee always speculated about the future of South Africa. He raised questions like: What will happen to the country after apartheid? How will black and white South Africans respond to the shifting power relations? In this novel, set in post-apartheid South Africa, the answers to the above formulated questions are conceptualized. Of course, only five years after the abolition of apartheid the new setting is still under construction. Therefore, one question still remains unanswered: what will be the future of South Africa?

Unlike many of Coetzee’s other novels, *Disgrace* is not an allegory. Examples of allegories in his earlier novels are Magda’s father in *In the Heart of the Country*, who represents the Afrikaner government during apartheid and Mrs Curren’s body dying from cancer in *Age of Iron*, representing the illness that is destroying South Africa. *Disgrace* is viewed as a realistic novel: “Although there is little trace in Coetzee’s novel of ‘smelly

underwear' or 'people picking their noses', it is safe to say that *Disgrace* has every appearance of being a realist text" (Cornwell, 313).

Although *Disgrace* is not an allegorical novel, there are several connotations in it. David Lurie's character resembles many features of the older white generation of South Africans who (consciously or unconsciously) allowed apartheid to exist. However, David Lurie does not represent the Afrikaner government. One argument to support this is that the name Lurie implies his ancestors were English and not Afrikaners. Another argument is that the text seems to suggest David was not a supporter of the apartheid regime. His preference for dark, exotic women supports this claim. In the beginning of the story David weekly visits an escort girl, called Soraya. David remarks: "she was on their books under 'Exotic'" (7). Melanie is the student David has an affair with. She has black hair and her eyes are large and dark. David changes the meaning of her name by altering the intonation. From Mélani: meaning melody, her name becomes "Meláni: the dark one" (18).

The traditionally dominant white attitude is visible in his attitude towards women. Especially his affair with Melanie exemplifies this. David likes the feeling of superiority to these women. Melanie is overruled by David's advances. David is aware of this: "She will not know how to deal with him; he ought to let her go. But he is in the grip of something" (18). David ignores Melanie's hesitations and forces himself on to her. A few days later, during one of his lectures, he explains the expression 'to usurp upon': "usurp upon means to intrude or encroach upon" (21). This is exactly what he does to Melanie. In her article "The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" Sue Kossew describes David "as a repulsive/attractive 'serpent' corrupting innocence while excusing his actions via confession" (Kossew, 157). Even though David is fully aware of his actions he does not restrain himself. He realizes that what he does is wrong: "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (25). David weakens the impact of his actions by calling them

undesired instead of rape. He refers to Blake when he says: “sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires?” (69). David justifies his actions by arguing that men have certain needs they cannot (and seemingly should not) withstand. Impulse is an important term in the novel. It seems to be the word that justifies the actions. An impulse comes from one’s instinct, a natural drive to act a certain way. In one of his lectures David refers to Lucifer: “Good or bad, he [Lucifer] just does it. He doesn’t act on principle but on impulse, and the source of his impulses is dark to him” (33). Indirectly, David refers to himself with this citation. So, although David is against apartheid and repression, he is unaware he acts upon these principles. In the first part of the novel, David seems convinced he is doing nothing wrong: “it is not abuse of a young woman he [David] is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist” (53). He compares these impulses with those of a dog. He refers to the story of a dog that gets punished because it chases female dogs. According to David a dog can be punished for chewing a slipper, but not for having desires: “No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts” (90).

David is forced to end his ‘abuse’ of Melanie and has to appear before a committee that is set up especially for this trial: “The body here gathered [...] has no powers. All it can do is make recommendations” (47). This is likely to be an allusion to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Kossew, 159). This commission was set up in South Africa after the end of apartheid to come to an amnesty agreement with human rights offenders. Like David is being questioned for his abuse of Melanie, many people were questioned for the abuse of black Africans. David’s treatment of Melanie appears to allude to the treatment of black South African women by white colonizers: “no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part” (53). According to Cornwell, in his article “Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”, David and Melanie’s encounter “is contextualized within the several centuries of colonial history in which white men

debauched black women with impunity” (Cornwell, 315). Elaine Winter is one of the committee members in the novel and she strongly disapproves of David’s actions: “She regards him as a hangover from the past; the sooner cleared away the better” (40). This hangover could not only refer to David and his actions, but also to the white male dominance that should be cleared away as soon as possible.

In order to leave it all behind and to get on with his life, David immediately pleads guilty to the charges. He comments: “pass sentence, and let us get on with our lives” (48). Further on in the novel, David calls himself old fashioned because he would rather be put against a wall and be shot than having to plead guilty and apologize publicly. When he is asked whether he would consider counselling he says: “I am beyond the reach of counselling” (49). This citation refers to the attitude of the older white generation after apartheid and their difficulty to adjust to the new setting. Coetzee formulates it as follows: “His [David’s] temperament is not going to change; he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set. The skull, followed by the temperament: the two hardest parts of the body” (2). It seems that this feeling represents the feeling of many of the older generation of white South Africans. They find it difficult to accept the shift of power that throws them down from their pedestal, difficult to adapt to the new way of life in South Africa. David does not care for his country anymore. He feels defeated. “Lucy’s future, his future, the future of the land as a whole – it is all a matter of indifference, he wants to say; let it all go to the dogs, I do not care” (107).

Near the end of the novel, David visits Mr Isaacs, Melanie’s father. About David’s resignation from the university Mr Isaacs says: “how are the mighty fallen!” (167). David is surprised, because he does not consider himself a mighty person. However, as an older, white university professor, he did belong to the generation that used to be mighty, those who ruled the country. Now that the times have changed, ‘mighty’ people cannot do whatever they want and get away with it. Mr Isaacs argues that David might be sorry about his actions, but sorry

is not enough: “The question is not, are we sorry? The question is, what lesson have we learned? The question is, what are we going to do now that we are sorry?” (172). The novel shows how hard it is for David to change his attitude towards South Africa’s new power structures. Not because he supported the old racist system, but because he unconsciously got used to it. In the end, he comes to the conclusion that that is why it was possible for him to follow his impulses: in the old system he would not be prosecuted for such actions.

It is only when Lucy gets raped that David realizes what would happen when every man follows his impulses. Within this new power structure those three rapists get away with their crime, like he did in the old days. It is only then that he understands the consequences of his own actions. “It is this sense of self-disgust, uselessness, and superfluity - a loss of authority - that links David’s sense of being ‘out of place’ with the unwanted animals of Bev Shaw’s animal refuge” (Kossev, 157). On the last page, David is helping at the clinic putting street dogs down. There is one dog in particular that David has become fond of. However, since the dog is destined to be put down some day, David decides to wait no longer. Bev is surprised by his action: “Are you giving him up?” (220), she asks. “Yes, I am giving him up” (220). This last line of the novel has been discussed by many scholars. Does it mean David gives up the dog in himself, the doggish characteristic that allowed him to follow his impulses? Is Coetzee suggesting this is the only solution in order to create good prospects for South Africa? Or does he suggest that since men are like dogs it is unlikely South Africa will have a future? Is he giving up on South Africa? It remains unclear and for the reader to decide.

What is Lucy’s attitude towards the future of South Africa and how does this differ from David’s attitude? Lucy is defined by David as “a solid countrywoman, a boervrou” (60). She is part of the new white generation of South Africa. David wonders where she got this country woman attitude:

Dogs and a gun; bread in the oven and a crop in the earth. Curious that he and her mother, cityfolk, intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share. (60)

This last line alludes to the fact that Lucy belongs to the new white generation of South Africans that averted from the apartheid system even before the abolition. This might explain her way of living and her attitude. When David arrives Lucy is living alone. Before that she lived with a woman with whom she had a relationship. Whether she is really a lesbian or whether she dislikes men remains unclear. David thinks the latter: “The dogs, the gardening, the astrology books, the asexual clothes: in each he recognizes a statement of independence, considered, purposeful. The turn away from men too. Making her own life” (89). One might say that this wish for independence and making her own life is what many young white South Africans wanted even during apartheid. Unlike the older generation, they can adapt to the new setting. Lucy is, for example, willing to help Petrus to establish his lands. David might call it naïve, but Lucy has faith in Petrus and the new South Africa.

This faith in and hope for a new South Africa might be why Lucy refuses to report the rape to the police: “what happened to me is purely a private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not” (112). David cannot believe that she does not report the crime to the police. According to David, Lucy does not stand up for herself: “If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again. You may as well pack your bags and leave” (133). David has the feeling that Lucy thinks the new generation has to pay for what the old generation has done: “Do you hope you can expiate the crimes of the past by suffering in the present?” (112). It looks as if she does. The worst aspect of the rape, according to Lucy, was the personal hatred she experienced from the rapists. She does not understand how people who did not

know her could feel so much hate towards her. David assures her it was no personal hatred: “It may have seemed personal, but it wasn’t. It came down from the ancestors” (156). Lucy is of the opinion that suffering crime is “the price for staying on” (158) and accepts it as her fate.

By focusing on the [...] response of a victim rather than on the attack itself, Coetzee appears to be dramatizing just how radical a transformation white South Africans may be required to undergo, as individuals and as a society, to recover a measure of the ‘grace’ so conspicuously absent in their land. (Cornwell, 314)

Lucy is willing to make concessions in order to maintain her house and life in the country. She is very pragmatic in her decision-making. She accepts Petrus’s offer to become his third wife in exchange for protection. This, however, entails that Lucy signs over her land to Petrus. David considers this blackmail, but Lucy considers it her only choice. “By accepting a marriage of convenience with him, as his third wife, she is acknowledging the power of African rather than Western tradition and law” (Kossew, 161). That is not of Lucy’s concern: “Lucy’s response is that she has no interest in principles: she is simply making a pragmatic arrangement to secure the future well-being of herself and her child” (Cornwell, 316). Lucy’s determined attitude might on the one hand be seen as a sign of hope, on the other hand it symbolizes the difficulties the new white generation will have to face if they want to remain living in South Africa. “The image of a pregnant Lucy awaiting the birth of a child conceived during a violent rape, a child who will be of ‘mixed race’, the symbol of a change in ‘tenancy’ of the land, is at the very least an ambivalent message of hope and defeat” (Kossew, 160).

The answer to the question of how the black South Africans will respond to a power shift is given through the character of Petrus. Lucy introduces Petrus: “Petrus is my new assistant. In fact, since March, co-proprietor” (62). The first encounter David has with Petrus is when he just arrives at Lucy’s. David asks him about his work on the farm. To David Petrus is the man who looks after Lucy’s dogs, the dog-man. It is clear that David, more than Lucy,

has difficulty accepting the new power structures. Petrus is no longer the assistant. He is the one in charge. When Lucy suggests David could give Petrus a hand in establishing his own lands, David cynically says “[...] I like the historical piquancy” (76). He refers to the fact that not only during apartheid, but throughout the history of South Africa white people gradually displaced black South Africans to claim their lands to, for example, start a farm. Often in the same way as Petrus establishes his lands in *Disgrace*. For centuries black people had to assist white people. Now the roles are reversing. Petrus frequently asks David to help him when work has to be done on the farm. “Petrus needs him [...] to be his *handlanger*” (136). David says he does not mind being a *handlanger* but he dislikes Petrus’ attitude. He becomes “a dominating personality” (137). Again, this is a passage that emphasizes the reversing of the roles. It used to be black people who had to be *handlangers* and white people who were the experts. Now David is not even asked whether he has any knowledge about farming. It is Petrus who is the expert and David becomes his assistant.

Petrus’s absence during the attack immediately suggests he knows more about the incident. Of the absent Petrus, Ettinger, Lucy’s old white neighbour, remarks darkly: “Not one of them you can trust” (109). David does not trust Petrus either and wonders why those three men came after Lucy and not, for example, after Ettinger. He contemplates on how it is possible those three men arrived the moment Petrus was not there, and how the strangers had come to know Lucy was living there on her own. When Petrus returns and ignores the matter, David is furious. He questions Petrus about the situation, but Petrus keeps aloof from it. It is at this point David comes to understand times have actually changed: “It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it” (117). Petrus is the one pulling the strings. A citation supporting this argument can be found near the end when Petrus throws a party to celebrate the establishment of his new house and lands. The first remark Petrus makes when David and Lucy arrive at the party is: “I

am not any more the dog-man” (129). Looking at this from a more general perspective Petrus’s character might allude to black South Africans who, after the abolition of apartheid, started behaving like the white dominators did during apartheid: taking power and abusing it for your own personal good.

When one of the rapists turns out to be Petrus’s acquaintance, David’s presumptions are confirmed: “Petrus is not an innocent party, Petrus is *with* them” (133). Petrus knew about the attack and made sure he was not around at that moment. He might not have been one of the attackers, but he did turn a blind eye or even worse: “Petrus [...] has possibly engineered the incident to demonstrate her [Lucy’s] vulnerability and the importance of his patronage” (Cornwell, 316). Petrus is trying to chase Lucy away in order to expand his territory. “Petrus has a vision of the future in which people like Lucy have no place” (118). This view on black South Africans is illustrative of the novel. Now that the power is in their hands they will treat white people like white people treated them. It remains a matter of black versus white, no matter the efforts of white people like Lucy. This is clarified on page 201. David asks Petrus how he knows the young rapist. “He is a child. He is my family, my people”, Petrus answers. “So that is it. No more lies. *My people*”, David thinks. Petrus will protect the young black boy because he is black, and black people are his people. “Against this new Petrus what chance does Lucy stand?” (151). Coetzee shows his concern about the relationship between black and white in post-apartheid South Africa.

The first conclusion to be drawn is that the “novel fails to provide easy answers to ‘the ethical minefield of modern South Africa’” (Kossew, 161, quoting Sorensen). In 1994 South Africa’s new future officially began. It was then that the power was handed over to black South Africans, who started treating white people the way white people treated them. After all, black South Africans were no longer the dog men.

It is only when Lucy is raped by three black men that David realizes what he did to Melanie. As Graham puts it in her article “Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*”: “the two rapes that take place in the novel reveal the power dynamics in each setting” (Graham, 437). While David initially thinks those men behaved like dogs, he comes to the conclusion he behaved like a dog too by raping Melanie. Who is David to tell Petrus he should not behave the way he (David) behaved in the past? If the conclusion is that men with power behave like dogs, the novel seems to convey a pessimistic message for the future of South Africa.

Lucy, as her name already suggests, stands for hope. Although it takes a long time before she mentally recovers from the rape, her persistence and faith makes that she survives. Whether she will be happy again in the new South Africa remains a question.

The question Coetzee seems to raise is: Is there a future for black and white people together in South Africa? Even Lucy, who made a lot of effort to be a good neighbour to Petrus, feels afraid in her own house. And Coetzee himself? He moved to Australia.

What does Serote think of post-apartheid South Africa? Is he of the opinion that black and white people can live together in peace? These questions will be answered in the next chapter, which examines Serote’s latest novel *Scatter the Ashes and Go*.

Chapter 5 *Scatter the Ashes and Go*

“There is a battle and war fought in bedrooms by men and women in love” (92).

Scatter the Ashes and Go was first published in 2002 and is Mongane Wally Serote’s third novel. The novel describes the final years of the liberation struggle, even though Serote wrote his third novel almost ten years after the change to post-apartheid South Africa. The story is based on two main themes, love and war. Or as Luc Renders points out aptly in his article “Paradise Regained and Lost Again: South African Literature in the Post-Apartheid Era”: *Scatter the Ashes and Go* concerns the question “[...] how to bring about a just South Africa. The striving for justice in society is interwoven with the individual's search for love and happiness” (Renders, par. 22). The novel consists of several opposing principles concerning the themes just mentioned. What is a just society and how can this be obtained? How do individuals deal with being at war? How are women positioned in the novel? And is there room for love in times of war?

Much of the novel is concerned with justifying the war on apartheid. The story starts in Angola, where comrades of the MK are preparing themselves for battles and guerrilla attacks in their home country, South Africa. MK is the abbreviation of the English translation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, which was the active military wing of the ANC. Nelson Mandela is one of the founders of the MK. Moss is the main character and narrator of the story. (Moss bears a great resemblance to Serote and therefore Moss is considered Serote’s mouthpiece in this novel.) Moss explains the movement’s aim: “The priority of the movement is to abolish the apartheid system, and to create a base for democracy in our country” (124).

The MK was not afraid to use violence to reach its goal. In *Scatter the Ashes and Go* the guerrilla strategies used by the MK are discussed. One of the comrades, Nthabiseng,

argues that the know-how of creating bombs is the advantage of living in the 20th century. To reach one's goal one is allowed to use these innovative techniques: "Science is an organised way to gather and compile new knowledge, and technology is an organised manner to apply and be creative and innovative with that new knowledge to create a better world" (292). In other words, the end justifies the means. When the abolition of apartheid is not reached through talking, using violence is the only option left. Consequently, the Afrikaner government classified the MK as a terrorist organisation, while the ANC supported the freedom fighters.

Can the MK be classified as a terrorist organization? In her article "Nelson Mandela, the terrorist" Gwynne Dyer explains that freedom fighters are not necessarily terrorists: "Terrorism is a tool, not an ideology" (Dyer, par. 8). Vusi, Moss's friend and comrade, explains how he distances the acts of the MK from terrorism. According to him, there is a difference between nationalism and terrorism. A war driven by nationalism has been declared on the apartheid system and "You cannot become a nation by being terrorists" (11). The argument that violence is only a tool is supported by the MK manifesto:

We of Umkhonto we Sizwe have always sought -as the liberation movement has sought - to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We do so still. We hope - even at this late hour - that our first actions will awaken every one to a realisation of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. (ANC, p.7)

The MK still hope that their first violent attack will wake up the Afrikaner government, so that no more violent actions are needed to attain the abolition of apartheid.

Serote states that this new South African nation should be based on the principle of equality and so it should consist of all people living in South Africa. Although there are

dilemmas concerning the creation of a just society, which will be discussed further on in this chapter, Serote has a clear opinion about the basic conditions needed to create a better nation.

First, we have to make it clear to everyone, that every single person alive is born with rights. We have to say because of this, it is also our collective right to protect this individual's rights. [...] If we can do this, we will have taken the major steps towards making a democracy and justice possible in our life. (72)

In short, everyone in South Africa is equal and has equal rights, no matter what skin colour one has. Therefore, Serote underlines that: "The first thing we must work out is how to make white South Africans, South Africans" (88). Leaders of a new South Africa should "[...] be committed to fight sexism and tribalism equally, we must cultivate a human rights culture through programmes, processes and institutions" (339).

Serote emphasises the different opinions on the use of violence. The following is written down in the manifesto of the MK:

The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come to South Africa. We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom. (ANC, par.4)

During a demonstration of young black South Africans, Moss argues exactly the same as the MK manifesto: for the young there are only two options left, fighting or dying. "The old, with anxiety, could do nothing [...] We, their children, were once again in the bloodletting they knew would happen but wished away" (279). Logically, the young black South Africans are the ones who join the MK.

Many of them, in those days, when they were students, demanded from their country that they be educated properly; they sang, they danced, they chanted slogans and

raised their fists in the air. They did all this, fired by their youth and by collective thought of crowds, both of which had an animalness about them. (52)

Those boys and girls were driven by anger. Many of them had been in detention. They had been humiliated, thrashed and assaulted. Their environment was characterised by disease, poverty and killings. When they joined the MK “you had to search and search and search to find the person in them” (53). At the camps in, amongst others, Angola the young freedom fighters regained their hope for a better future. “It is here where you also find the young men and women of South Africa, almost unsheathed from oppression, grow, bloom into new human beings” (54).

However, despite the positive image about joining the MK, the novel also emphasises the inward conflict of being in exile: “I would like to contribute as a fighter to the freedom of my people, the nation I belong to and my country; I am happy to be here, I am honoured to be here. But the right place to be, is at home” (133). Just like Serote, Moss has been an exile for almost twenty years. He argues that “exile is an assault on one. It destroys one’s link with the present and focuses one to live in the past, and the future” (86). When your thoughts are with your home country you either have to live on memories from the past or on dreams for the future. However, being away for almost two decades makes you feel a stranger in your own country. When Moss returns to South Africa he says: “I want to find out how it feels to be a South African” (231). The novel underlines the difficulty of re-entering a society after many years of exile. On the one hand he feels distanced from his comrades of the MK and on the other hand he does not feel at home in South Africa: “I feel somewhat detached, something has distanced me from the body of the ANC. But also, I am not really part of the community” (251).

Besides the emotional struggle of being in exile there is the emotional conflict of dealing with loss. Throughout a war one loses comrades, one loses friends. During the story

Vusi dies of malaria. Moss remembers Vusi's opinion on how to deal with the loss of a comrade:

Vusi told me that our war for freedom is not only justified, but that we must remember that it is for real. It is bloody and we will lose those we love, including our own lives. But that because it is so justified, it is like a brazier in winter, which keeps families and friends together, and which, in the early hours of the morning, when the red hot coals have burnt, we also have to scatter the ashes, it is a duty we have, which we must do, to prepare also, for the new brazier. (168)

This is one of the passages the title *Scatter the Ashes and Go* refers to. Vusi says that one should not mourn for the loss of a comrade because he died for a good cause. It is one's duty to scatter the ashes and keep moving towards the goal. There is no room for mourning. Moss has difficulty holding on to this thought. When Sizakele, a female comrade who was very dear to Moss, dies in a car crash Moss says: "I thought about Vusi and his nonsense about scatter the ashes and go; I wanted to cry but could not" (198).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, another question raised in the novel is how to bring about a just society, a democracy. First of all, an important step towards achieving this is to recognize and acknowledge the flaws of the existing society. Moss is aware of the problems South Africans have to cope with.

[...] having been closely in touch with all kinds of developments about my country and my people, through my involvement in the underground structures of my movement, I was not surprised to see the low quality of life in the townships, the extremely low quality of life in rural areas, where poverty, disease, illiteracy, were tangible, could be smelt, and in the eyes and manner of people. (28)

Serote not only discusses the South African situation. He is well aware of the political and social situations in other African countries. He uses his novel to make an appeal to the African

leaders. About the civil war in Luanda, Angola, he writes: “Why can’t African leaders read this script: enough is enough! How can they call themselves leaders if they have to lead limbless people? Why can’t we come to terms with the fact that no matter how much we fight we have to, in the end, talk?” (170). He wonders what went wrong in the African countries: “Why are these towns, these cities so cruel to the citizens? Where are the leaders of these countries? What has slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, apartheid and the globalisation of the world done to these millions of people?” (201). This quote seems to suggest that Serote blames other countries (the West) for imposing these threats on South Africa. However, the next line “Where are the leaders of this continent?” (201) implies that Serote blames the leaders of African countries for acting irresponsibly. He argues that it should be possible to improve the living conditions in African countries, since several countries in Asia were in the same position and these countries have been able to overcome imperialism and profit from globalisation.

According to Serote, opportunism and ambition are in the way of creating democracies in Africa. Oil and diamonds are mentioned in the novel as causes of this opportunism. “Because there is no democracy in most African countries, repression is rampant. It is a few opportunists, milking the country, while the majority of the people eat dust” (87). Serote has his doubts about the possibility of creating a democracy in a country where the majority of the people are poor and illiterate and where the army and the private sector are most influential. However, again he concludes that, looking at several countries in Asia, it is not impossible for a country to create a democracy under those circumstances.

One of the dilemmas concerning the creation of a just society the novel touches upon is how to deal with traitors. Moss’s comrades Ndaba, Jackie and Junior are discussing this issue. Since the MK has no jails available, Ndaba argues that all people who have admitted to being betrayers of the MK have to be executed. Jackie, a medical officer of the MK, is of the

opinion that execution contradicts the MK's ideas of a just society: "it is only just, if we ourselves practise justness" (125). Jackie's comrade and lover, Junior, agrees with Ndaba and argues: "I am saying perhaps we should accept that the obstacles we have before us, prevent us from upholding justice" (126). This example underlines the difficulty of upholding justice when your country is in a state of war.

A central conflict in the novel is how to combine life as a comrade with life as a lover. Ralph and Lydia, who are married and have a family, illustrate this conflict. Their marriage is on the verge of divorce, because Ralph is an MK comrade. "Lydia was torn between supporting Ralph with his ANC work, while on the other hand she felt, it was an excuse for him not to be a father, as this took much of his time" (89). In the beginning of the novel, Moss and Vusi are discussing whether it is possible to have a family and be an MK comrade. Moss is of the opinion that "you can't run a revolution and run a family, that's all there is to it" (18). Vusi disagrees and argues: "Rubbish, a family is a base for a revolution" (18). Morongwa, an older comrade, underlines the meaning of love between a man and a woman and seems to agree with Moss:

[...] when a man and a woman say they love each other as a man and a woman, they mean, they want to contribute to building a community, a society, a nation. Do you realise that that is precisely what the apartheid system has violated among us as a people? It has broken down families in a systematic manner? (31)

Morongwa, furthermore, argues that despite the liberation of women, men and women have different roles to play in society. Now that the MK is changing society, Lydia and Ralph exemplify the struggle many families go through.

The liberation of women that Morongwa mentions is another issue that is touched upon in the novel. In line with the idea of everyone being born equal, Moss states that: "The liberation of women lies in the fibre of society, which must view people as being equal, of

different ability, and born with rights” (95). In the MK camps this principle seems hard to uphold. “Comrade Mary, she is a very beautiful woman, a great fighter, came to say she was pregnant” (61). Mary is sent away to give birth to her child, while she had rather remained at the camp to fight alongside her comrades. After a while, several female comrades come up to Moss and say they want Duncan, the father of Mary’s child, to go and support Mary. Comrade Tim disagrees and says: “But why then must men also pay for that mistake done by a woman?” (164). From an emancipated point of view both Mary and Duncan are equally responsible for the child and Moss says: “No, Tim, we are asking Duncan to take responsibility for his child” (164). This example underlines that on the one hand, Moss seems to support the liberation of women. On the other hand, the depiction of women in the novel is less emancipated. It seems that Serote is unintentionally sexist. Serote’s view of women seems to be a combination of reason and instinct. Of all women mentioned in the novel their physical appearance is described. About Liz, a white woman, Moss says: “She is a beautiful woman, a white, beautiful woman. She is tall. She is strong. And aware of both these, including that she has a large bosom” (294).

The message that seems to be conveyed by the novel is that love (and love-making) is inevitable, it is following your instinct. When Moss has been taken to the beach by Sizakele, he instinctively desires her. He realizes his mind is taken over by lust: “Men are dogs, someone once said! What that is supposed to mean is that men eat everything indiscriminately. [...] I did not know what that meant, my wanting her, but certainly it did not mean that I am a dog!” (182). But when Sizakele treats him with food she prepared Moss admits: “[...] maybe, I am a bloody dog, after all” (183).

This need for love can, on the other hand, be explained by the situation the characters are in. They are all away from home, away from their loved ones. Jackie, who has a relationship with Junior, works together with Lungi, who has a relationship with Zinto. Both

Junior and Zinto are away. Jackie and Lungi love their partners, but they are also fond of each other. They have difficulty staying faithful to their partners because: “[...] the sorrow to both, their loneliness, was immense, was so great that it seemed there was nothing else to hold onto” (110). Still, they manage to keep themselves from starting an affair. When Moss has returned to South Africa he is leading the revolution in Alexandra together with Martin. One evening Martin and his girlfriend are dancing in the living room and Moss thinks: “He [Martin] had, maybe, for a while, forgotten about Alexandra and its bloody streets and guns. He was a lover. She was a lover” (302). This underlines the fact that everyone in every situation needs affection. Love makes life worth while.

The instinctive need for sex has a more tragic unforeseen consequence in the novel. AIDS, the leading cause of death in South Africa at the moment, was first reported in 1981 in the US. Only gradually researchers found out more about the disease. The story is set during the 80’s, when AIDS was relatively unknown. The lack of women in the camps led to homosexual intercourse. Comrade Tim says to Moss: “It is now difficult to know whether it is malaria or AIDS which is now devastating our comrades” (166).

In order to be able to make some concluding remarks about this novel, one has to keep in mind that this novel was written almost ten years after the abolition of apartheid, in the 21st century. Despite this, it solely focuses on South Africa during the second half of the 20th century.

Scatter the Ashes and Go clarifies the reason for many young blacks to join the fight for freedom, to become part of the MK. Furthermore, it emphasises the difficulty for these young adults to be away from home and their loved ones for years. Not only does this create the dilemma of how to deal with love and relationships during war, it also creates an alienated feeling when one finally returns to one’s home country.

Additionally, *Scatter the Ashes and Go* justifies the MK's use of violence in order to reach its goal. However, the novel also underlines the disagreement within the black community on how to create a just society. Serote has a clear opinion on how to create a democracy. A democratic South Africa should be based on equality for all races and genders. The contradictions within the novel illustrate the difficulty of living up to these principles. For example, while Serote encourages the emancipation of women, he does not realise his descriptions of women are sexist.

The difficulty of living up to one's principles is underlined by the fact that the future Serote has in mind for South Africa was not attained at the time of writing. In 2002, after almost ten years of ANC leadership, the living standards of South Africans remained low. The only allusion to the future is at the end of the novel: "And then, she told me that Xaba, her husband, was very ill, he will die anytime now from AIDS, and then she said she, herself, was HIV positive ..." (364). The subject of AIDS is only mentioned twice in the whole novel, probably because it was not of importance yet in the eighties. However, since it is the last sentence of the novel, it seems to allude to what is still to come.

In short, *Scatter the Ashes and Go* is about the war against apartheid and the fight for equality and the effect of this war on love and relationships. In 2002 the outlines of a new war become visible, which will also have its effects on love and relationships. This time South Africans have other issues to fight, one of which is AIDS.

Chapter 6 Concluding analysis

J.M. Coetzee and Mongane Wally Serote are so-called politically committed writers. Besides his poetry, Serote wrote one novel during apartheid. This novel, *To Every Birth its Blood*, is part of South Africa's protest literature. Coetzee wrote six novels between 1974 and 1994. These six works of fiction are not covered by the protest literature genre because they do not explicitly condemn the apartheid system. However, of these six novels *Age of Iron* is most evidently disapproving of apartheid. At the time that *To Every Birth its Blood* was written (in 1981) the abolition of apartheid was not in sight yet. Even in 1990, when *Age of Iron* was published, the country was still four years away from a new South Africa. The two fellow South Africans write about South African society under apartheid, the rebellious new black generation and the future they hope for. What similarities and what differences are found between Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*?

Apartheid was finally abolished in 1994 and the ANC (African National Congress) took over from the Afrikaner government. In 1999 Coetzee published his answer to post-apartheid South Africa with his novel *Disgrace*. In the same year Serote finished his second novel *Gods of Our Time*, which continues the story of the liberation struggle. Only in 2002 did Serote publish a third novel, *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, in which he recaptures the fight for freedom and contemplates the ideal South African society. Do Serote's and Coetzee's novels hold an opinion on the new South Africa? If so, is it the future the writers feared or hoped for?

Below an analysis is given of the books *Age of Iron*, *To Every Birth its Blood*, *Disgrace* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go* in which the research question "How do the novels of J.M. Coetzee and Mongane Wally Serote depict South Africa under apartheid, the transition period and post-apartheid South Africa?" will be answered. The analysis is divided in three parts: apartheid, transition period and post-apartheid.

Apartheid

In the 1940s, the Afrikaner government of South Africa introduced the apartheid system. Total segregation between black and white people was enforced. Many rights that applied to white people did not hold for black people. Black people were not allowed into white areas, including city centres, without a permit, they could be rejected for jobs at all occasions, they could only take the bus especially for black people, etcetera. White people were the oppressors and black people the oppressed. Of course not all white people agreed with this system.

Coetzee protested, for the first time explicitly, against apartheid through his novel *Age of Iron*. His sixth novel was published during apartheid in 1990. In *Age of Iron* the protagonist faces the truth about apartheid in South Africa. She is completely taken aback by the situation in her country and wonders what the future will be like, whether the age to come will be a softer age than the Age of Iron she is living in now. She detests her fellow white South Africans for their cruelty, but feels powerless.

“[...] the speaker whose language is the language of oppression is as shackled to the system of oppression as is the oppressed” (Bishop, 9). This quote comes from the article “J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*: A Culmination and a Solution to a Problem of White Identity” written by G. Scott Bishop. ‘The speaker’ in the quote is Magda, the protagonist from the novel *In the Heart of the Country*, written by Coetzee in 1977. Like Magda, Mrs Curren feels shackled to the apartheid system. She feels unable to change the course of affairs in her country and is ashamed of the white South Africans who support apartheid: “Perhaps I should simply accept that that is how one must live from now on: in a state of shame” (*Age of Iron*, 86). Besides this, Mrs Curren, and the rest of the world, is kept ignorant by the government, which creates a feeling of powerlessness. “Of trouble in the schools the radio says nothing, the television

says nothing, the newspapers say nothing. In the world they project all the children of the land are sitting happily at their desks” (*Age of Iron*, 39). However, the important difference between Magda and Mrs Curren is that Mrs Curren gradually breaks the shackles that chain her to the apartheid system. On the verge of death Mrs Curren offers more and more (mental) resistance to the regime.

Through the voice of his protagonists Coetzee tries to break the wall of ignorance. He tries to show how quite a few white people feel oppressed by the Afrikaner government as well and how it makes them feel ashamed of their fellow white South Africans.

Also in Serote’s *To Every Birth its Blood* an example is found of a white person who disagrees with the government. The white David Horwitz is described as “[...] clever, confident and very polite, almost shy” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 113). David tries to be friendly and helpful to Dikeledi, a black girl from the township Alexandra, but he cannot escape the feeling of guilt for being white: “Maybe it would be best to move to England. [...] They would leave behind them all the bloody problems. [...] Guilt of being white” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 114).

Just like David Mrs Curren’s daughter had had enough of the situation in South Africa and moved to America. Although Mrs Curren herself did not move she understands her daughter’s decision and does not ask her to return: “She is like iron. I am not going to ask her to come back on her vows” (*Age of Iron*, 75). Several white people in both Coetzee’s and Serote’s novels are not positive about South Africa’s future. Serote’s black protagonist in *To Every Birth its Blood*, Tsi, is pessimistic about the future as well. In the beginning of the novel Tsi’s father asks him whether he will have children, to which Tsi answers: “You ask me if you will have grandchildren. What for? Where is the future they will take in their hands?” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 39).

Mrs Curren speculates a lot about the future of her country. She longs for a softer age.

She refers to this softer age as an age of clay or earth (*Age of Iron*, 50). Like Coetzee speculates about the future of South Africa in his novel *Age of Iron*, Serote does as well in his novel *To Every Birth its Blood*. In fact, one of the passages of *To Every Birth its Blood* has a lot in common with Coetzee's remarks about an age of clay. John, one of the characters of part two of *To Every Birth its Blood*, says the following about South Africa:

The people of this country are locked in a tight embrace which is going to destroy them. The white people. The black people. The gold. The diamonds. The guns. The bombs. South Africa, such a beautiful country. The bright sun, the warm days and nights, the rainy days, the mountains, trees, rivers, such a unique country. (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 107)

This passage can be divided in two. The first part "The people of this country are locked in a tight embrace which is going to destroy them. The white people. The black people. The gold. The diamonds. The guns. The bombs" (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 107) includes the elements that create the so called age of iron. The last part of the passage "South Africa, such a beautiful country. The bright sun, the warm days and nights, the rainy days, the mountains, trees, rivers, such a unique country" (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 107) are positive characteristics of South Africa. These represent the elements that need to be emphasized in order to create a softer age. In *Scatter the Ashes and Go* the protagonist, Moss, remarks: "[...] this is a very beautiful country, but its people are not" (*Scatter the Ashes and Go*, 255). Both Serote and Coetzee are aware of the beauty of the country and the elements needed to bring about a change. However, this is only a depiction of the future they hope for. Whereas Serote, regarding his first novel, is concerned with attaining freedom and the future he hopes for, Coetzee is convinced that freedom for black South Africans will be attained. He is more concerned about the period after the transition. The pessimism present in Serote's first novel has disappeared in *Scatter the Ashes and Go*. The black South Africans are convinced of their

victory. They are discussing democracy and how to create a just society when apartheid is abolished: “[...] what is democracy? How do we engage and engrave it in our society and make it flourish as a culture of our people?” (*Scatter the Ashes and Go*, 73). Whether it will turn out to be a future of clay and earth remains a question in *Age of Iron*, *To Every Birth its Blood* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go*.

Transition period

The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid is alluded to with the symbol of birth by both Coetzee and Serote. However, they do not use the symbol of birth in the same way. The title *To Every Birth its Blood* obviously refers to a birth. The title is explained most clearly on the last page of the novel: “Her vagina, open like the lip of the earth, the lip of the sky when the sun pours out, was red with blood” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 206). This line alludes to the birth of a new South African society. Both this passage and the novel’s title specifically stress that no birth is without bloodshed, with which Serote implies that no society can be changed without people giving their lives for it.

Coetzee’s allusion to birth is found in *Disgrace*: “The image of a pregnant Lucy awaiting the birth of a child conceived during a violent rape, a child who will be of ‘mixed race’” (Kossew, 2003, p.160). David’s daughter Lucy appears to be pregnant of the black men who raped her. She is determined to keep the baby, even though she did not ask for it. This birth has several negative connotations. First of all, it is born of rape. Besides this, the baby might be carrying the genes of dim-witted Pollux. And finally, the child might be HIV-positive. There is, however, one aspect of hope to Lucy’s pregnancy. The birth of this baby will bring into the world a child of mixed race, like the birth of a new South African society should bring into the world a mixed society. This allusion links up with Serote’s words about a mixed society: “Yet, while we are not trying to deny the difference, we also want to look at

the common elements of these cultures. We are doing all this to help a nation emerge out of these things” (McCord, 184).

The realization of this new nation was attended by a violent struggle. *Age of Iron*, *To Every Birth its Blood* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go* go into this struggle.

Whereas Coetzee in *Age of Iron* only touches upon the subject of the black rioters, Serote’s *To Every Birth its Blood* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go* focus completely on the struggle. Part two of *To Every Birth its Blood* emphasizes the determination of the young black South Africans. They are convinced that using violence is the only way to freedom. Serote’s first novel also provides the reader with a detailed description of the horrors of the apartheid regime and the fate of black freedom fighters, from humiliations and imprisonment to severe torture and murder. An example of such a detailed description is found near the end of the novel when Tsi talks about Oupa’s death: “You think I don’t know that when he [Oupa] got into the hands of those people he had everything a person has, and that when he was put into his box he was toothless, he had no nails, there were parts of him missing?” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 200). Consciously or unconsciously, for the reader Serote’s insertion of these passages justify the violent actions against the regime. In *Scatter the Ashes and Go* the violent actions of the MK are justified by the argument that the MK comrades act out of nationalism. Therefore they should be considered freedom fighters not terrorists.

In *Age of Iron* the protagonist faces the horror of black people’s struggle when she drives Florence to the place where a riot has raged in order to find her son Bheki. They find Bheki dead. It is only when Mrs Curren sees Bheki’s dead body that she realizes the horror of it all: “And I thought: Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again” (*Age of Iron*, 103). Although initially Mrs Curren rejects the violence used by the black rioters, later on she understands the need for action.

As a white man Coetzee never pretended to completely understand the feelings of black people during apartheid. He describes part of the struggle of black people when he has Mrs Curren witness the dead body of Bheki, but when Mrs Curren is asked to comment on the situation she says: “These are terrible sights [...] They are to be condemned. But I cannot denounce them in other people’s words. I must find my own words, from myself. Otherwise it is not the truth” (*Age of Iron*, 99). That is of course the most important difference between Coetzee and Serote, their racial difference creates their literary differences. Where Serote describes the full horror of the struggle, Coetzee’s characters only witness it from the sideline.

However, in an interview with Andrew McCord Serote argues that white people are not affected by the violence and deaths:

If you look at the South African situation, we are absolutely amazed bewildered by the violence that is raging in our country. But the fact is that this violence is not affecting any of the white areas even in an indirect manner. It is claiming hundreds of lives the length and breadth of the country among blacks. (McCord, 187)

Coetzee’s novel *Age of Iron* includes a line that argues the contrary. When Bheki and John are deliberately hit by a police car Mrs Curren goes to the police to tell what she saw. According to the police Mrs Curren was not affected, so they do not understand her problem. Mrs Curren replies: “But I am affected, very directly affected. Do you understand what I’m saying?” (*Age of Iron*, 86). Although Coetzee might not exactly feel the black man’s burden, he is affected by the situation and the acts of ‘his people’. His protest literature supports this argument.

Both *Age of Iron* and *To Every Birth its Blood* convey the message of the need for change. Both novels support the black freedom fighters. Although Serote’s protagonists are more devoted to the violent struggle than Coetzee’s protagonist, even in *To Every Birth its Blood* the voice that questions the use of violence is present. Tsi’s father criticizes the young generation and thinks the country should be freed by reason instead of violence. In *Scatter the*

Ashes and Go a similar situation occurs. Again the older generation is unable to stand up against the repressor, while for the young people fighting back is the only option: “The old, with anxiety, could do nothing [...] We, their children, were once again in the bloodletting they knew would happen but wished away” (*Scatter the Ashes and Go*, 279). As mentioned before, Mrs Curren questions the use of violence, just like the older generation in Serote’s novels. Still, in the end Serote justifies the use of violence and argues that blood has to be shed to regain freedom. Coetzee is less convinced about the righteousness of the coming about of the new South Africa. He questions whether this violent generation can lead South Africa towards a peaceful nation after the transition.

Post-apartheid

How do a white and a black South African writer view and describe post-apartheid South Africa? The doubts about the future voiced in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* are confirmed in his post-apartheid novel *Disgrace*. The first four years of post-apartheid endorsed the fear Coetzee had before the abolition. The new South Africa did not start as an age of clay or earth. In Coetzee’s opinion the roles have reversed, the oppressed has become the oppressor. The black generation that used violence to attain freedom has tasted power and it tasted good. He does also admit that for white men becoming powerless after decades of being in power is a difficult thing to cope with.

In Serote’s *To Every Birth its Blood* Oni compares the Afrikaner government to dogs: “the people who run this country are selfish, dogs in the manger, making everyone miserable to satisfy their avarice and greed” (*To Every Birth its Blood*, 162). Coincidentally, in *Disgrace* Coetzee refers to men as dogs. He implicitly refers to the same men Oni refers to, but he puts his allusion in a more general perspective. Men who follow their impulses without questioning the consequences are like dogs that instinctively follow their impulses. No dog

can be punished for following its instinct. David in *Disgrace* compares himself to a dog, but in the end he symbolically kills the dog in him. He will try to think of the other before he acts.

In the same way Moss, in *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, compares himself to a dog. He has been taken to the beach by Sizakele and he instinctively desires her. He realizes his mind is taken over by lust: “Men are dogs, someone once said! What that is supposed to mean is that men eat everything indiscriminately. [...] I did not know what that meant, my wanting her, but certainly it did not mean that I am a dog!” (*Scatter the Ashes and Go*, 182). But when Sizakele treats him with some food she prepared Moss admits: “[...] maybe, I am a bloody dog, after all” (*Scatter the Ashes and Go*, 183). This remark seems to contradict Moss’s idea on the emancipation of women. In his ideal civilised society men and women are equal. In that case men cannot follow their instincts, as Coetzee points out. This underlines the difficulty of acting upon one’s principles. Would this difficulty be the reason why post-apartheid South Africa did not turn out to be the just society Serote hoped for?

Another remark about dogs in *Disgrace* is made by Petrus, who in the end says “I am not any more the dog-man” (*Disgrace*, 129). Meaning he is not the white men’s assistant any longer. On the one hand, Petrus is no longer the dog man, on the other hand Coetzee contradicts this by suggesting that Petrus’s behaviour has changed for the bad. He starts behaving like the white oppressor did, like a dog.

In his novel *Disgrace* Coetzee clearly voices his ideas on the new South Africa. He is pessimistic and raises doubts about the well-being of white South Africans in South Africa, and about the well-being of the country on the whole. While he, as a white man, finally kills the dog in himself, the black Petrus starts behaving like one. The social roles have reversed and the oppressed have become the oppressors.

It is impossible to articulate Serote’s thoughts on post-apartheid South Africa. He has written two books after 1994, but both are set before 1994. The question remains whether

Serote wrote *Scatter the Ashes and Go* just after the time it is set in, which means he wrote it in the beginning of the nineties. Or did he write the novel after he published his second novel in 1999 and thus at the beginning of the 21st century? The latter seems more likely, although the only allusion to the present is the final line of the novel which refers to AIDS. But why would Serote, at the beginning of a new century, write about the past and not about the present? Imaginably, being in exile and fighting against apartheid was so traumatic that it must take years to deal with such experiences. Writing about all that has happened might be a therapeutic way of coping with it. Besides, Serote might purposely write about the past in order to provide readers (and the leaders of South Africa) with the ideals of the ANC and the MK in order to remind them of what they had in mind for post-apartheid South Africa. Serote's ideas for a new South Africa correspond with the ideals written down in the manifesto of the MK, which amongst others states:

[...] we are working in the best interests of all the people of this country - black, brown and white - whose future happiness and well-being cannot be attained without the overthrow of the Nationalist government, the abolition of white supremacy and the winning of liberty, democracy and full national rights and equality for all the people of this country. (ANC, par.8)

However, in 2002, when Serote publishes *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, little of these ideals have been realized in South Africa: "In this unstable present, the country is tottering under the compound threats of searing poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender violence, xenophobia, ecological crisis, corruption [...]" (Jobson, par.15).

Another conclusion might also be drawn. Serote wrote the novel at the beginning of a new century and is one of the South African writers who cannot escape from protest literature. Zakes Mda comments: "the landscape of South Africa is strewn with the corpses of authors who were not able to survive liberation" (Bulcaen, par. 3). If this is the case, then it might be

that Serote is still in the fuddle of victory and has buried his head in the sand for the social abuses in post-apartheid South Africa. This is not likely, however, since in his novel Serote mentions the risk for South Africa to end up like other African countries, like Angola and Zimbabwe. He is well aware of the possible dangers for South Africa.

To conclude, in *Disgrace* Coetzee witnesses a reversal of the roles of the oppressors and the oppressed. Post-apartheid South Africa turned out as the future Coetzee had feared but expected. It did not appear to be the future he had hoped for in *Age of Iron*. It would be interesting to know Serote's opinion on post-apartheid South Africa. Perhaps Serote agrees with Coetzee, since Serote's ideals for a new South Africa, which he clearly articulated in both *To Every Birth its Blood* and *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, have been far from realised.

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