

THE CLASSROOM AS A SITE OF MISSION: POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE IN THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

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Abstract: *In contexts where structural violence is a defining characteristic of the society that literature remains one of the most potent means for humanization to be realized, for the marginalized and dehumanized to become conversational partners with those who represent the powerful forces of a given society. Indeed, South African authors who have been able to chronicle the havoc wrought by apartheid, such as Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda, have also been able to conceive of the process of renewal that could lead to the transformation of society. Through the portrayal of the inner turmoil suffered by a black South African woman while she is coming to terms with the fact that her son has killed a white American student, Magona, in *Mother to Mother*, offered a quite honest representation of the condition of that mother by the novel which was also a social critique that deconstructed the stereotypes of victims and evildoers.*

Keywords: *post Apartheid literature, memory, South Africa*

INTRODUCTION

The fall of apartheid in South Africa was a historical turning point that also ushered in a lengthy cultural, moral, and religious struggle to grapple with the aftereffects of systemic oppression, marginalization, and violence. The issue of education, in particular, and the function of literature, specifically, as a medium of instruction, have played a significant role in a country where the collective memory should be reactivated, empathy be fostered, and the national identity be remoulded. Through their aesthetic nature, literature took on a new duty when they also became instruments of morality, diagnostic tools for historical trauma, and reflectors of the future possibilities and past injustices. Therefore, the local educational scenery was by no means passive rather it actively directed public theology and a musical and ethical critique, because the conversations around fiction were to a large extent intertwined with the building of ethos and civic responsibility.

In contexts where structural violence is a defining characteristic of the society that literature remains one of the most potent means for humanization to be realized, for the marginalized and dehumanized to become conversational partners with those who represent the powerful forces of a given society. Indeed, South African authors who have been able to chronicle the havoc wrought by apartheid, such as Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda, have also been able to conceive of the process of renewal that could lead to the transformation of society. Through the

portrayal of the inner turmoil suffered by a black South African woman while she is coming to terms with the fact that her son has killed a white American student, Magona, in *Mother to Mother*, offered a quite honest representation of the condition of that mother by the novel which was also a social critique that deconstructed the stereotypes of victims and evildoers.

On the same note, in *The Heart of Redness*, Mda puts colonial imprint that has grown into contemporary moral complexities side by side, thereby, inviting the readers to downplay the legendary aspect of history and the resultant effect of moral infractions on society at large. These acts of rewriting the stories are not merely narratives but rather dialogic spaces that empower the reader, and in particular, the student, to grapple with their intricate ethical standpoints, interact with historical memories that have become the flashpoint of rivalry among different groups, and finally explore the practicality of ethical judgment.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this regard, the study aims to find out what the present classroom in South Africa, which has already gone through the apartheid period, can really be in terms of both a pedagogical setting and a space of special mission (of literary engagement to promote societal awareness in the classroom). It is only that the intention of this study is not simply to be a mere discussion of examples of post-apartheid literature, neither to be an analysis of the texts through a theological lens, but there is a desire to dig deeper into the possibility of reading and teaching of these works as the realization of the mission-understood here not as the Church's initiative to convert the world, but as the Church's commitment to justice, reconciliation and human development. This paper builds the very place that intersects with the fields of missiology, pedagogy, and literary studies, suggesting that the classroom when infused with culturally relevant literature can also be the marginal space where moral learning and social conscience can occur.

As we address the issue, we are drawing on a theoretical framework, according to which both education and mission are, in fact, having a transforming effect themselves and particularly in situations that are defined by the violence and fragmentation of society in the past. Here the missiological viewpoint (referring to what the study of mission implies) is based on a perspective of a postcolonial theology that envisions the Church not only as a teaching institution but as the body of the witness deeply involved in the world's struggle and potential. In this light, education, as a theological act, is the process of educating individuals consciously and collectively for the common good, with a sense of pain and suffering, hoping for good end achievable through faith.

As we turn to the ideas presented by David Bosch in *Transforming Mission*, we are told that the author unfolds a mission model that is not triumphalist, but dialogical and kenotic, that listens before it talks and walks alongside the others instead of fighting and defeating. Such aspects provide an excellent ground for possessing the classroom as a palace of ethical imagination while the victims'

narratives are being overwhelmed by the empowerment of the unauthorized, and the displaying of empathy and determination.

LITERATURE AND THE LEGACY OF APARTHEID

One of the most important things here is the concept of a social conscience- it is not just a matter of basic civic duty but a change of ethical attitudes incorporated with the help of historical memory and prophecy. Thus, moral training is a process of moulds that constitute perceptions, identify the ethical nature of social life, and involve being prepared to act with sympathy and bravery. In this way, literature is a key to such kind of training since it invites people to the world of stories in which they must not only understand but also resolve the moral issue, assert human dignity against inhuman conditions, and in which the other person has a face no more. In that case, post-apartheid South African literature functions as a moral laboratory where the truth-telling and reconciliation processes are being verified.

The combination of pedagogy and theology with postcolonial literary studies presents a direct view of text's influence on individuals' minds and its potential to challenge previously accepted paradigms. We can see the transformation brought about by the female characters in the absence of the male hero through their suffering, silence, waiting, and submissiveness in the Njabulo Ndebele writings *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. Through this narrative technique, the gender-oriented lacunae can be seen in the apartheid and nationalist discourse, presenting the scholars with an opportunity to participate in discussions about power, sacrifice, and historical remembrance's ethicality. Postcolonial pedagogy, in this regard, has become another way used by people that reject them, not just a performance of teaching.

Indeed, the influence of the post-apartheid era of South African literature is not only a research topic but also the painful memory and evidence of such traumas that are ongoing and hence it needs interpretation, and further attention. Writers of that epoch, who tell their stories full of suffering, provide hope in their attempts to heal the broken and share their testimonies of the survived, this is just but part of the literature that was there those days with the students offering them information about their kind of history and the role that they are to play. The practice of just analysing without getting involved is far gone and is the challenge they need to face and emerge victorious. This lit the way for both, students, and educators to engage not only in discussions but also in the actual process of uplifting the country. Thus, the classroom has evolved to be a platform of experiencing the mission of reconciliation, justice, the harnessing of individual characters at a time.

THE CLASSROOM AS A MISSIONAL SPACE

South African society has been more than just reformed at the institutional level, politically restructured, and morally reoriented after the collapse of apartheid. It has been a slow and delicate process and required the social fabric to be rewoven through the engagement where not just knowledge was passed but

ethical responsibility was also awakened. Therefore, in the big project, the educational duties of the Church, particularly through its network of faith-based schools, have become paramount in the cultivation of a liberated moral imagination (Higgs & van Wyk, 2007: 338). By implication, the classroom is not a teaching place only, but where theology, ethics, and pedagogy cross each other in game-changing ways. Education in a missional outlook of justice, peace, and reconciliation, serves as not only a shaping but also a healing function (The word of Farley, 1983: 198). This process opens us the way to the story of the Christian mission which cannot be completed without a nod to Africa. However, this mission has often been seen as a part of the colonial regime, and yet, at the same time, it has provided us with a witness, whom we, our children, and our children's children can count on for the love, the tender care, and the new social order that instructional schools based on religious faith can revive as their present role in society (Walls, 2002: 230).

The context of such educational spaces, where the study of literature happens, resonates the very much alike sentiment of what is going on in the lives of the African people and becomes the front line in combating the informational opium of the colonizers. The representative texts, which are mute witnesses to the awful events in the past and are shouting the worth of human dignity, for example, *Disgrace* by J. M. Coetzee and *July's People* by Nadine Gordimer, encourage their readers to approach their violent roots and puzzle out their stand in the systems of the centre or the periphery (Attwell, 1993: 36). We also understand that a parallel narrative exists in the novel, *No Time Like the Present*, where Zakes Mda sheds light on the disillusionment of life of people after freedom and somehow, enlivens the semblance of hope, the possibility of making a compromise, and ethical fatigue in the light of arising inequality.

It is the contention of the paper that if the students encounter such works in a way that is not merely descriptive or the deconstruction of the thematic stipulations in the content or linguistic structural analysis, but as provoking questions into the moral complexity of the historical people, then it is literature that is being utilized here as the tool of conscience-formation and the platform for spiritual discernment (Viljoen, 2013: 102). Thus, reading is gradually stripped of its epistemological function and becomes an existential exercise that is an uninterrupted alternation of one's experience with that of others.

To utilize the classroom as a missional space, an individual needs to design some approaches of which the main characteristic is reaching out only to the surface of ideas and issues, and through that allow literature not only to create consciousness but also to instil the virtues. It is the teaching practices that make space for silence, for listening, for critical dialogue that goes beyond the students' role as mere text-interpreters to learners who recognize in the moral issues a text raises, their own identity (Freire, 1996: 87). The method is one that is against the exploiting of literature for the interests of a certain ideology and instead it attests to the fact that the literature has the ability to bring the opposite of the very spaces

that it closes; the new spaces of ambiguity and tension where ethical formation can occur (Nussbaum, 1997: 89).

Among the actions are the ones where a guided discussion uses students' own experiences to compare with the stories from people that are outside the social margins; reflections of writing that make connections between the fiction story and socio-related realities; and projects on which the student and the community through literary knowledge take real acts of service or commitment to humanity (Jansen, 2009: 45). Such practices, if performed with theological intentionality, start to transform the classroom into the meaning of the mission through the Holy Spirit, not in narrow ecclesiastical terms, but as a vessel of human transformation powered by the Spirit of justice and reconciliation (Bosch, 1991: 432).

As an addition to the above, the use of religious vocabulary and Christian anthropology within the pedagogical framework of teaching can be a helpful factor in these conversations if they are not reduced to dogmatic teaching. The humility- and openness-contextual insights from theology, for instance, can pose some more profound questions on themes like forgiveness, alienation, and redemption typically found in these stories of literature. (Volf, 2006: 212). For instance, one will be struck by the idea that in *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* by Elsa Joubert, the bravery of the mother is reflected in the way she becomes the center of strength and moral certainty in a violent world that is shattered, echoing the theological manifestation of kenosis and resistance (Devarenne, 2006: 74). Keeping all these aspects in mind, we can see that employing a missional perspective in the interpretation of the readings would lead to the holistic development of the students' intellectual, ethical, and spiritual growth, where faith is not reduced to an abstract idea but it is a commitment to the truth and justice (Palmer, 1998: 19).

Here, literature is read as an ethical act; thus, the Church's educational vocation is implicitly congruent with the reading of literature. The classroom is where the Gospel is not preached as a set of propositions but actually is lived out through such practices as hospitality, solidarity, and the development of a deep feeling of compassion concerning suffering (Kelsey, 2009: 312). It is that setting in which pedagogy and mission, story, and sacrament come together that faith-based schools, not through presenting ready-made solutions but by forming students who can bear the weight of complex histories and who can imagine the future based on compassion, memory, and justice, can take a stand in the rebuilding of South Africa (Moloney, 2004: 61).

ANALYSIS OF POST-APARTHEID TEXTS

The classroom becomes an ethical melting pot when literature is used not only to teach stylistic elements or cultural diversity but to reveal the deeper issues of fairness, identification, and healing in societies that have been affected by historical violence. In the context of the post-apartheid era in South Africa, books like Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, and Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* provide the type of literary

assistance that would engage students in the kind of work that would require them to delve into the psychological and social roots of the problem while they remain imaginative in the search for social solutions. *Ways of Dying* by Mda is a perfect example. Toloki, a self-proclaimed professional mourner, is the character who walks through a society in transition that is still traumatized by history. He is not only the healer of the community, but also not the prophet, thus students are compelled to figure out the role of crying in societies that have been destabilized by political violence (Mda, 1995:47).

When *Mother to Mother* by Magona enters the conversation in the classroom, the most common reaction is a physical one, as the story is that effective in altering the narrative of the only one who suffers. The narration of the novel gives a new moral dimension that forces students to distil the underlying systemic conditions-multi-generational dispossession, racialized poverty, and psychological fragmentation-that lead to the incident of violence (Magona, 1998:89).

Texts falling under the study of literary and cultural studies such as the one mentioned above by Meg Samuelson, cause the disruption of national stories of calm through the presentation of mourning and ambivalent female identities and their refusal to accept easy reconciliations (Samuelson, 2007:113).

The Cry of Winnie Mandela by Ndebele introduces another element by portraying the lives of four women in search of their identity, who are passed through quite a number of stations which include a fictional episode from the figure of Penelope as she is recast in the South African scenario. The novel facilitates learning because it urges the students to deal with or discuss the distance between historical mythologizing and lived experience. The novel accounts for the structure thereof-a personal testimony, a fictional intervention, a historical commentary-confirms the inability of either reader to conclude Winnie Mandela as an icon or a criminal, but rather it raises the readers' attention to an ethical one (Barnard, 2007:163).

Informing the subject matter via the use of these texts in an educational setting, especially in a faith-based school or an institution where a social justice curriculum is employed, has been observed to be the best way to achieve the necessary objective of creating a new generation of people-to-people. Employing these materials in the classroom for various purposes, such as reflective journaling, structured debates, or comparative essays that bring out the relationship between text analysis and current social problems like xenophobia, economic exclusion, and gender violence is a method that has been tested and found working. Students, once they were directed to the ethical and intertextual connections, were found to often be able to exhibit an increased level of critical empathy as well as moral discernment.

From an educational viewpoint, the gains are not just in the area of cognition and understanding, but extend to the emotional and spiritual aspects of the person. For example, on many occasions, students communicated that their way of understanding social responsibility was changed; it was not abstract or institutional anymore but deep and personal and had a lot to do with their historical

setting. Such reactions imply that literature, when considered through a missional perspective, not only becomes a repository of stories but also a tool that shapes readers by engaging them in the narrative, struggle, and redemptive imagination.

CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that literature has the power to change the way of thinking, the use of literature as an instrument of justice and reconciliation in educational institutions often comes across as colliding with the inflexibility of curricular designs and the political sensitivities that dominantly influence cultural fields. Especially in state-controlled systems of education, the curriculum tends to focus on language proficiency, the classic works of literature, and examination-based tasks rather than on the main idea of engagement with historical injustices or social trauma.

The situation is getting worse as the teachers' knowledge of the ability to work with the students is questioned. This is particularly true when it comes to young people who are faced with a number of conflicting situations in the story. Many teachers do not know how to work in a way that is trauma- or interdisciplinary education-informed and this is the one major factor leading to even the most carefully chosen texts not having much impact.

As well, the institutions often do not think of arranging regular seminars to support educators from integrating literature to social and political themes, thus, surely, the teachers who would like to work along the aforementioned lines are isolated. In the absence of strong back up system-combine both administrative management and within the people themselves-literature studies are at the risk of being deprived of any process of intellectual inquiry and eventually turning into a sort of self-righteous moral sermon or a tacitly neutralized aesthetic exercise rather than becoming a vivid platform where ethical issues are discussed.

However, these issues may also provide the impetus for multidisciplinary collaboration, in particular, amongst the faculties of theology, literature, education, and culture. If the institution's governing body is open to new ideas, joint projects can arise which redefine the classroom as a democratic space in which hermeneutical, ethical, and spiritual interpretations merge. This is also what we get from John de Gruchy, in his work *Theology and the Modern World*, who advocates for such partnerships by underscoring the role of literature for representing a link between the prophetic critique and the public conscience (de Gruchy, 2007: 133).

Thus, when literature classes are co-taught or are embedded in a dialogue with theocentric and sociological perspectives, their potential for not only imparting knowledge but also promoting imagination is fully realized, a virtue that has been missing from those societies adversely affected by the forces of disunity and inequality.

From a missional vantage point, the classroom is not only the space of cognitive instruction but also the field of action where people can encounter each other, exercise their discernment, and instil optimism. Literary works that have as their theme the plight of oppressed and downtrodden offer students a language to speak the truth of their condition without losing sight of the possibility of grace.

If literature is to be more than poetry devotional to the Church in education over the mothering of the masses, it is necessary to have it taught not only as a depository of values but as a form of discernment as well. It should be a way of being attentive to the other and of engaging in a dialogue of lament and of perpetuating the moral faculty required for healing the wounds of division.

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