

THE UNDERMINING OF YOUNG MINISTERS OF RELIGION AS ILLUSTRATED IN P. T. MTUZE'S *INDLEL' ECAND' INTLANGO*

Zilibele Mtumane

(Faculty of Humanities/University of Johannesburg/ South Africa/27(0)115592867/zmtumane@uj.ac.za)

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the undermining of young ministers of religion by members of the public and congregants, as it is illustrated in P. T. Mtuze's novel; *Indlel'ecand'intlango* (1985). This investigation is fulfilled by considering how Ntobeko Ndleleni, who is a young pastor and the leading character in the story, is looked down upon both by members of society and his congregation. The undermining by members of the public is discussed as it is presented taking place at a train station in King William's Town, where passengers comment on this character. The denigration by members of the congregation is revealed in a conversation by congregants referring to this cleric. The question this essay is attempting to answer is whether Mtuze exemplifies this tendency convincingly in his novel. Nouns such as *usana* (an infant), *iqhajana* (a young haughty person) and *umfundisana* (a young pastor), and the adverb *ngamakhwenkwe* (by boys), which are used by the characters who denigrate Ntobeko, are discussed. It is also revealed how some of these expressions are used in their diminutive form to emphasise the belittling of this cleric. A definition of the concept of 'undermining' is included as part of the study. Lastly, a concluding section is included where the summary and evaluation, and recommendations are provided.

Keywords: undermining, P. T. Mtuze, *Indlel'ecand'intlango*, minister of religion, Ntobeko Ndleleni

1. INTRODUCTION

Peter Tshobiso Mtuze makes plain some important topics in the novel under study. These subjects include the habit of the undermining of young ministers by members of the public and the church, the attitude of the minister's spouse towards the congregants, the seduction of ministers and their moral weaknesses. Due to limited space, this article tackles only one of these topics, which is the undermining of young ministers. Others will be treated as separate studies at a later stage. So far no research has been made examining this subject of the novel under scrutiny at all. The conducting of this study then serves to introduce this important feature of the narrative. It also closes an existing vacuum in the study of Mtuze's literary works in particular, and isiXhosa literature in general.

Young people who are in positions of responsibility are often undermined by members of society. They are sometimes thought of as unable to perform their duties satisfactorily. Even when they commit mistakes, that is often associated with their young age. Mtuze represents this denigration with regard to Ntobeko Ndleleni, who is a young clergyman and the main character in the novel. All this is discussed in detail later in this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

So far no study has been conducted analysing the undermining of ministers of religion. However, some sources that share light on this subject have been considered and referred to in this study. Mtuze's *Indlel' Ecan' Intlango* (1985), on which this discourse is based, is the text that reveals this challenge of the denigrating of ministers of religion. Sources such as Pearsal (2001), Richard and Schmidt (2002) and Rooney (1999) provide the explanation of the concept of "undermining". Mtumane (2004 and 2007) comments on the cultural impact of the use of some words denoting the undermining of a person among amaXhosa. These sources and others are referred to as a means of strengthening, validating and authenticating the conclusions reached in this research.

3. METHODOLOGY

The interest of this topic is on the analysis of P. T. Mtuze's novel; *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango* (1985), considering the undermining of ministers of religion that is demonstrated in the text. As this assessment involves the handling and creation of ideas about human behaviours, opinions and experiences around this topic, the qualitative research approach is applied in the study. The first step is to read the novel under scrutiny, pointing out areas that reveal this belittling of the men of the cloth. Further, documented sources are consulted that share more light on the topic. These sources include dictionaries that explain the concept of undermining, books that are used to explain some of the words that are used to signify this denigration and those that reflect the cultural position of amaXhosa regarding the use of words that have a lessening tone. Data gathered in this manner will then be applied in the analysis of Mtuze's novel. Each of the sections of this study concentrate on the aspects of the subject of the discourse.

4. THE CONCEPT OF UNDERMINING

'Undermining' is an expression that is derived from the verb undermine. It is used in different contexts, where it gives different meanings. In the context of physical work it means to "erode the base or foundation (a rock formation)" or "to dig or excavate beneath (a building or fortification) so as to make it collapse" (Pearsal, 2001, p. 1521). It may also mean to "damage or weaken, especially gradually or insidiously" (Ibid.). With regard to human beings, Rooney (1999, p. 2030) views undermining as "... to demoralize somebody or something by covert or malicious action". As this study is about the denigration of human beings, Rooney's definition is more applicable to the discussion of the topic. To demoralise implies to "dishearten, discourage, dispirit, or deject" someone (Waite, 2008, p. 198). The *Cambridge Dictionary* (undated) views to undermine as "to make someone less confident, less powerful, or less likely to succeed ...". In Mtuze's *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango*, demoralising is done with malicious words where some characters express utterances that denote their denigration of Ntobeko Ndleleni. Were Ntobeko to hear the negative comments of people about him, he would probably get discouraged indeed. He would indeed feel "less confident, less powerful or less likely to

succeed and weaker”. These comments form part of the discussion in the ensuing section of this essay.

5. DISCUSSION

In the novel under scrutiny Ntobeko comes to the village of Ndevana as a young cleric of the Anglican Church. His being undermined becomes evident on his arrival at the station in King William’s Town, having the ministerial collar on, where members of the public reduce him with their remarks. This is apparent in the words:

Abo sebekhwele kuloliwe bamana besiyana ngamehlo besebeza besithi omnye komnye, ‘Sana lwakwabani?’ Ukho yena ode walikhupha bhutyu elithi, ‘Obu bufundisi sebaba yinto elula engenwa nangamakhwenkwe ngoku,’ kunjalonje esitsho ngamandla engakhathali nokuba uvile lowo kuthethwa ngaye.

(Those who had already boarded the train looked at each other saying one to another, ‘What an infant?’ There is one who spoke blasphemously saying, ‘This ministry has become so easy that even boys take it up now,’ speaking loudly, not concerned whether the one he refers to has heard.)

(Mtuzze, 1985, p. 1)

Of note are the noun *Sana* (Infant) and the adverb *nangamakhwenkwe* (even by boys). *Sana* is a noun whose prefix *U-* has been deleted. *Usana* (an infant) is a small baby of a few days old. It cannot perform any duty as it depends on other people even for its own needs. For the train passengers to consider Ntobeko as *usana* (an infant) then demonstrates how they undermine him. Their reference to him in this manner reflects the use of a hyperbole in their denigration. Hyperbole is a figure of speech that is an exaggeration of fact and may be used for serious or ironic or comic effect (Abrams, 2009, p. 149). Although Ntobeko is young, he is far older than

an infant. In fact, for him to be accepted into the ministry is an indication that he is old enough to perform ministerial duties. Therefore, the reference to him as *usana* (an infant) is “an exaggeration” of the fact of his young age.

The adverb *nangamakhwenkwe* (even by boys) is derived from the noun *amakhwenkwe* (boys) which is the plural of *inkwenkwe* (a boy). The use of this plural form reflects how the speaker assumes that any boy can now then take up the ministry, as Ntobeko is seen to be one of them. A boy is generally a minor male person who, under normal circumstances, cannot be given any public leadership position, except among his peers where he is being trained. Among amaXhosa, for a grown up person to be described as a boy has a negative connotation. According to Mtumane (2007, p. 79), who comments on Nelson Mandela’s having been treated as a boy during his detention on Robben Island:

It tends to put one in an inferior position, as a “boy” is always regarded to be an inferior person and never regarded as a grown up ... He is always treated with contempt as he is regarded to be an inferior human being.

The train traveller’s seeing Ntobeko as a boy then illustrates how he views him as a minor and therefore regard him with contempt. In this manner he and other passengers downgrade him as they do not expect him to be a clergyman at his age. It is for this reason that the speaker regards the ministry as having ‘become so easy’ as to be taken up by Ntobeko who seems so young according to him. Had the speaker not been looking down upon this character, he would still recognise the enormous state of the calling.

The noun *inkwenkwe* (a boy) may even be used sarcastically to refer to a grown up male person who has not undergone initiation (circumcision) among amaXhosa. Such a person is also not taken seriously among this community. This is emphasised by Mtumane (2004, p. 15) who shares that about a boy among amaXhosa:

*Eli xesha ingekaluki ibingathathwa njengomntu opheleleyo ...
Bekungakhathalisekile nokuba sele indala kangakanani na, ingekaluki nje
ibingahlonitshwa ingahlonelwa bani.*

(While he has not undergone initiation he was not regarded as a complete person ... It would not matter how old he was, before initiation he would not be respected by anybody.)

The employment of an adverb derived from the noun *inkwenkwe* (a boy) to describe Ntobeko, who is a grown up already, may also serve a sarcastic purpose by this train passenger. He may be implying that, because of his young appearance, Ntobeko may not have even undergone initiation yet, and therefore, is not expected to be a minister of religion. Among amaXhosa boys undergo initiation at around twenty years of age (Mtumane, 2004, p. 15).

Not only strangers like the train passengers belittle Ntobeko. Even members of his congregation do so as well. In a conversation, characters by the names of Malibenje and Ndudumo, who are on their way from visiting Ntobeko, criticise the latter for not telling them his clan name. Malibenje says: “*Xa ingamakhwenkwe antoni la ebufundisini?*” (What do these boys want in the ministry?) (Mtuze, 1985, p. 5). For Malibenje to refer to Ntobeko, who is his pastor, as a boy points to how he also downgrades him, as do the rail travellers earlier in the story. This is surprising as congregants are generally expected to respect and protect their spiritual leader. Instead of considering Ntobeko as a lad, this character would be expected to respect and give him moral support.

In the same conversation, Malibenje views Ntantiso as *iqhajana lomfundisana* (a haughty young minister) as he says: “*Ngathi siza kuthi shu nokantsi leli qhajana lomfundisana, ndiyakuxelela*” (It seems we are going to have it hard under this haughty young minister, I am

telling you). The noun *iqhajana* is the diminutive form of *iqhaji* (a haughty person). The possessive *lomfundisana* is derived from the diminutive *umfundisana* (a young minister), which in turn emanates from *umfundisi* (the minister). Of note is the suffix *-ana* in both nouns. This morpheme is generally used as a diminutive formative, to denote the smallness of something (Richard and Schmidt, 2002: p. 158). Its use in two successive words that refer to Ntobeko emphasises the deliberate and emphatic reduction of this character by Malibenje. *Iqhaji* (a haughty person) is generally one who behaves hastily, eloquently, bravely or arrogantly (Kropf and Godfrey, 1915, p. 245). Malibenje's employment of this diminutive with regard to Ntobeko then reflects how the latter's arrogance (according to him) is like that of a child, as the employment of the diminutive *umfundisana* also denotes that he is a young and even immature minister. The idea of Ntobeko's arrogance is also implied by the use of the proverb *siza kuthi shu* (we are going to have it hard). The ideophone *shu* is often an emotional utterance by someone who experiences sudden pain. The employment of the assertion then serves as a warning that Ntobeko might treat the congregation in an unpleasant manner. The opinion of immaturity is supported by Malibenje's later comparing Ntobeko with older and more experienced clerics who were his predecessors. He says: "*OoNtlemeza babezizikhwakhwa, uNdukwana wayeyintsimbi edl' ezinye* (The likes of Ntlemeza were matured, Ndukwana was more experienced) (Mtuze, 1985, p. 5). This comparison suggests that Ntobeko does not have the maturity and experience his predecessors possessed.

6. CONCLUSION

This essay has examined P. T. Mtuze's exemplifying of the undermining of young ministers of religion by members of the public and congregants in the novel; *Indlel'ecand'intlango* (1985). The downgrading of Ntobeko Ndleleni, who is a young pastor and the leading character in the story, both by members of society and his congregation, has served as the case in this study. This denigration is reflected mostly by the use of words such as *usana* (an infant), *ngamakhwenkwe* (by boys), *iqhajana* (a haughty person) and *umfundisana* (a young pastor), some in their diminutive form, by the characters who belittle Ntobeko. These utterances, which represent nouns, adverbs, sarcasms and diminutives, make Mtuze's presentation of the topic of the undermining of young ministers convincing and successful. The narrator's employment of a proverb and an ideophone also strengthens his expressing the situation.

The undermining of Ntobeko as a young pastor should be a lesson to young ministers in general. They should be aware that, due to their young age, members of society might denigrate them. These clerics should then determine to perform their duties with the utmost commitment so that even those who lessen them should not have their attitude confirmed by their failure in their job. Presenting Ntobeko as having a spouse who is arrogant towards congregants and him indulging in heavy drinking of liquor in the novel, unfortunately, affirms his being reduced by members of society and congregants. With these circumstances, he gives in to the negative attitude of these people towards him. These situations tend to confirm the words of those who look down upon him in the story.

On the basis of the above discussion, it is then recommended that authors of literary works produce more stories with themes of a similar nature for members of the public and those represented in the narratives to learn important life lessons. Scholars of literature also have a responsibility to scrutinise such works and reveal these lessons to the public.

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