

Competing over Ministers of Religion as Illustrated in P. T. Mtuze's *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango*

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Abstract- This essay explores how Mtuze illustrates the competition of girls over young and single ministers of religion in the novel *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango* (1985). It achieves that by considering the competition that is entered into over Ntobeko, who is a young and unmarried minister of religion, by two girls who are members of his congregation. Nomasomi and Nondima are the girls who contest to win Ntobeko's heart so that he marries one of them and their parents support them in this battle. The question this article wishes to answer is whether Mtuze presents this contestation convincingly in the narrative. An attempt to define the concept of competing is made before the actual analysis of this situation. Lastly, a concluding remark is included, where the summary, evaluation and recommendations are provided.

Key concepts: Competition, *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango*, ministers of religion, P. T. Mtuze.

I. INTRODUCTION

Peter Tshobiso Mtuze presents some societal concerns in the novel; *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango*. These concerns include the undermining of young ministers of religion by members of the public, the competition of girls over unmarried ministers, the attitude of the spouses of the clerics, and the moral weaknesses of young pastors. However, due to limited space, this article discusses only one of these concerns which is the competition of girls over unmarried ministers. The rest will be dealt with in other studies at a later stage. Mtuze achieves the representation of this concern by having Ntobeko Ndelele as a young and single clergyman of the Anglican Church at Ndevana, where girls in his congregation compete to have him wed them. Notable among these young ladies are Nomasomi and Nondima. This is discussed in more details in the analysis section of this discourse.

While Mtuze articulates the concern of the competing of girls over young unmarried ministers of religion, so far no research has been carried out handling this aspect of his novel. This study then is ground-breaking in the study of Mtuze's literary works, in particular, and isiXhosa literature, in general.

II. THE CONCEPT OF COMPETING

'Competing' is the continuous tense of the verb; compete. To compete generally refers to a situation where two or more people or objects work towards attaining the same goal and

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only one of them is to attain it. In the words of Pearsall (2001, 291), it means to "strive to gain or win something by defeating or establishing superiority over others". Rooney (1999, 388) views competing as "to do something with the goal of outperforming others or winning something, ... to be able to put up a contest against somebody or something else and have a chance of winning." In line with these definitions, this study analyses the contest put up by Nomasomi and Nondima, assisted by their parents, over Ntobeko who is a young and single pastor in the narrative under scrutiny. It is interesting to see who wins this race, as the ensuing section discusses and reveals.

III. ANALYSIS

It often happens that, when a young unmarried male minister arrives at a new place, some girls hope to be wedded to him. Even parents tend to encourage their daughters to avail themselves for marriage by him. With the encouragement of their begetters, these daughters may even compete for this purpose. In the novel, Ntobeko is portrayed facing this challenge of young women who contend over him among his church members, as:

Kaloku oonokrawuzana babesebezisasaze
ngolwamaXhosa ezithi umfundisi uselisoka
kunjalonje ufuna intombi ezitshoyo. Zazikho
ke iintokazi esezibona ukuba eso sikhewu
siyavalwa endalweni....

Lo mcimbi ke wawungelula kuba inkosikazi
kaNdudumo, uNomabhadi, wayegqatse zisuka
eyona nzwakazi yakha yantle kwezo lali,
uNomasomi, intombi emehlo makhulu
aphahlwe lihlathi lamashiya neetuma
eziqhamileyo ezimtsho oyijongileyo ahiliteke.

(For those who knew had already spread through the telegram of amaXhosa that the minister was still a bachelor and wanted a proud girl. There were maids who saw that that vacuum should be closed in nature...)

This matter was not easy because the wife of Ndudumo, Nomabhadi, had already selected the most beautiful girl in those villages, Nomasomi, a maiden with large eyes surrounded by dense eye-brows and whiskers that bewilder the one who looks at her.) Mtuze, 1985, 5)

The telegram of amaXhosa referred to in the excerpt symbolises the manner of spreading news by the word of mouth. This method was used exclusively before the availability of the technology of writing, telephones, fax, and email and so on. It was the cheapest form of spreading news as

no payment was applicable. It was also fast as each person would tell the next one and so advertise the tidings.

The broadcasting of the news of the pastor's being unwedded indicates the seriousness with which this issue is regarded. It is meant to make girls aware that those who want to fill this vacuum may avail themselves. The above words then indicate the readiness of the lasses to close the gap of Ntobeko's being a bachelor. The only way to do so is by offering themselves for him to marry them. The reference to "nature" reveals how these maidens would justify this as it is "nature" that does not allow a man to stay single. In fact, even the Bible encourages that a man should marry by expressing; "It is not good that the man be alone" (Genesis, 2: 18). As the story in the novel presents a Christian religious context, this assertion could also be used to justify these girls' wish to be taken to wife by this man of the cloth. It should be noted that, in this regard, Mrs. Ndudumo has already kept someone (Nomasomi) ready for Ntobeko. This proves the involvement of parents in preparing their daughters for getting united with the clergyman, should the latter be interested.

The competing of female children for the churchman becomes apparent in the words:

Amasi ayebekwe elangeni. Kwahle kwacaca ukuba ugqatso lumphakathi koNondima noNomasomi. Engazi nto nje yena umfundisi ezi ntombi zazifuthwa, ingulowo umfazi enga seleyibona intombi yakhe ingumfundisikazi.

(Everyone was waiting to see. It became clear that the competition was between Nondima and Nomasomi. While the minister was not aware, these girls were being prepared, each woman imagining her own daughter being the minister's wife.)(Mtuze, 1985, 6)

The competition of the girls, supported by their parents, over Ntobeko is not a secretive matter. This view is deduced from the proverb *Amasi ayebekwe elangeni* which literally means that curd was put in the sun. This expression is generally used to refer to a situation where everyone is to see the outcome of an adventure. It stems from the practice of putting milk in the sun for it to become curd. The milk is often exposed to light and heat. Everyone who passes by often sees it as it is not hidden. In the same manner, the battle over the minister is portrayed as exposed to everybody; hence everyone in the church is waiting to see which young lady he will ultimately choose.

Also, of note is the involvement of parents in this rivalry, as it is the mothers who prepare the girls. The preparation of the daughters is illustrated by the verb *zazifuthwa* (they were being prepared). *Ukufutha* is generally the practice of giving a person a vapour bath where an open pot with boiled wormwood or gumtree leaves is placed in front of one and the latter covers oneself with a blanket over the pot for the vapour to rise and make one sweat (Kropf and Godfrey, 1915, 110). This is also a method of curing flu among the traditional Africans. In this context this verb signifies how the mothers are using herbal extracts to make their daughters attractive to Ntobeko.

This contest between the mothers of the girls becomes more vivid when Ntobeko is preaching at a church service one day, as the narrator reveals:

Lo gama atyatyadula njalo umfundisi uMaMaduna umana emfila-mfila kanti yena uNomabhadi umana ejonga kuNomasomi ngathi uthi makaqinise umqolo, ingakumbi kuba loo mtshato amfunela wona ungcwele, nomfundisi uyayazi loo nto. Kube kanye adibana amehlo abo, baxexebulana kakubi. Kaloku uNomabhadi wayesele ekhutyekiswe nakukuba umfundisi acele uNondima ukuba ahlabele, ade ahlabele noZuko kuThixo Ophezulu, indumiso emele kuhlatyelwa ngumfundisi kuphela!

(As the minister is continuing Mrs. Maduna is getting restless while Namabhadi often looks at Nomasomi as if saying she must push harder, especially that the marriage she wants for her is holy, even the pastor knows that. At once their eyes met and they looked at each other badly. This is because Nomabhadi was already offended even by the pastor's asking Nondima to lead a song, and to even lead Glory to God Who is Most High, a hymn that should be led by the cleric exclusively!) Mtuze, 1985, 10 - 11)

Mrs. Maduna is Nondima's mother while Nomabhadi is that of Nomasomi. The restlessness of Mrs. Maduna, Nomabhadi's seemingly encouraging Nomasomi, their looking badly at each other, and Nomabhadi's taking offense at the minister's requesting Nondima to lead a praise song; all indicate the great extent of the competition between these women for their daughters over Ntobeko. It is worth noting that in this contest Nondima seems to have an advantage as Ntobeko stays with the Madunas already.

The idea of the rivalry manifests itself even after the service, as the author narrates:

Yena uNomabhadi wayelikhupha libe tsole elithi intombi yakhe uNomasomi iye yazitsho ezinye iintombi zafa likhwele, kuba umfundisi umane encuma ejonga kuye xa kuculwayo. Uthe le nto imtsho uNondima wagushu-gushuza into engapheliyo. Lada laya kuthi tshoco elaloo mini zithe ndi kuloo lali ezibabaza ukushumayela kukamfundisi, ukucela injezu kwakhe nokugushu-gushuza kukaNondima.

(Nomabhadi was saying directly that her daughter Nomasomi made other girls jealous, for the minister often smiled looking towards her when the congregation was singing. She said this made Nondima restless throughout. That day, the sun set with the news of the preaching of the minister, his show-off and Nondima's restlessness, in the village (Mtuze, 1985, 11)

These words depict how proud Nomabhadi is because, according to her, her daughter made other maidens jealous and especially that Nondima seemed restless. The fact that this matter is the talk of the town indicates how this contestation is a matter of public consumption as Nomabhadi does not keep it a secret.

It is ironical that after all these attempts by the congregants to have Ntobeko marry among their daughters, when he decides to tie the knot, he weds someone who is not among them. He marries a girl by the name of Nontlanywa from

Mount Coke, without even involving them, as the narrator shares:

Athi esamana emhleba esenjenjalo umfundisi amarhamente akhe, wangena ecaweni ngenye imini ehamba nentombi athe yinkosikazi yakhe. Eneneni umsesane owawumenyezela kuhle komnye waloo minwana ithambileyo wawuxela ngokwawo ukuba injalo loo nto. Akubuzwa ukuba inkosikazi ngumamni na, iyeyaphi na, uthe ukuphendula umfundisi, 'Yintombi yaseMkhangiso, kwaNdabeni, uMaKrila isiduko.'

(While his congregants often gossiped about the minister, one day he came into the church with a lady he claimed to be his wife. Of course the ring that shone well on one of those soft fingers proved by itself that that was the case. When they asked him the wife's clan name, and where she was from, the pastor answered, 'She is a lady from Mount Coke, of the Ndabeni family, by the clan name of Krila.')

(Mtuzze, 1985, 26)

Ntobeko's marrying Nontlanywa seems to have caused some disappointment, as the author says: *Ngeli xesha iimazi ezinamehlo abukhali zazisezibonile ukuba ulusu losapho lukaMaMaduna luntshingi-ntshingi* (By this time women with sharp eyes had already noticed that the countenance of Mrs. Maduna's family was fidgety) (Mtuzze, 1985, 27). Mrs. Maduna and her family's uneasy appearance may be caused by the fact that Ntobeko has chosen someone else over her daughter.

As the foregoing discussion reveals, desiring to be married by a minister of religion, even to the extent of competing over him, can cause ill-feelings within the congregation. It is interesting that, after Ntobeko's wife passes away later, he weds Nondima, over whom he chose someone else earlier. This may be interpreted as though he was, indeed, meant to marry her. In fact, this is implied by the comments of some church members, who notice Nondima's commitment to the work of the church, as:

Le nkuthalo ingaka yenza ukuba kube kho abathi kuyabonakala ukuba olona bambo lukamfundisi lwaluyile ntombi kakade.

(This so much diligence caused some to say it is apparent that this girl was the real partner of the minister from the onset.) (Mtuzze, 1985, 51)

Of note is the noun *ubambo* (a rib). In isiXhosa a woman who is happily married is metaphorically said to be *ubambo* (rib) of her husband. This stems from the biblical account of Eve who was created from Adam's rib as his wife (Genesis, 2: 21). It is in this light that Nondima is viewed to be Ntobeko's rib, meaning that she is his perfect match.

IV. CONCLUSION

This essay has explored Mtuzze's illustration of the competition of girls over young and single ministers of religion in the novel *Indlel' Ecand' Intlango* (1985). That has been done by considering the contestation between Nomasomi and Nondima, who are members of Ntobeko's congregation and are assisted by their parents, over him, as they desire that he marries them. The discussion has revealed how Ntobeko chose someone else, Nontlanywa, who is not even among the

members of his church and, after the latter's death, weds Nondima.

Mtuzze's success in depicting the competition discussed above is made possible by portraying Ntobeko as a young and single minister, and having Nondima and Nomasomi, whose parents are desperate that they get married to the pastor. The mothers of these young females not hiding that they are in contestation for their daughters to be wedded by the cleric makes the contention convincing. The author's use of language that includes symbolism, proverbs, metaphor and irony vivifies the contest and makes it more convincing.

Ntobeko's marrying Nontlanywa, who has no role in the competition, reflects how independent he is in choosing a wife for himself. He is not influenced by the fact that there are girls who have already availed themselves to be wedded by him. Even the actions of the parents do not make him succumb to the pressure. One would probably expect the contestation to sway him to marry Nondima as he stays with her family already. His decision to go for Nontlanywa then reflects how firm he is in standing his ground.

Mtuzze's presentation of the competition above should make unmarried ministers of religion, in the real world, understand that they might be watched by girls who would like to be married to them, even to the extent of being in the running over them. They should also understand that the parents of the ladies may not be innocent in such situations. This then should make the clerics careful in their conduct among congregants. They should be able to make independent life decisions without being influenced by what the congregants do.

Based on the above discussion, it is recommended that authors of literary works produce more stories that illustrate the challenging circumstances that surround the lives of ministers of religion in particular, and people who are in positions of responsibility in general. Scholars of literature should then scrutinise such works to reveal the meaning of the stories to the public.

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