

The Reconciliation Process in Post-Apartheid South Africa through Zakes Mda's *Madonna of Excelsior*

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ABSTRACT

At the present moment in history, there is a renewed interest in defining and redefining nationhood in the processes of dealing with past and reconciliation. Discourses of past and reconciliation have emerged in recent years in nations struggling with the legacies of colonialism. These would include the injustices and oppression inflicted on those natives who could not defend their motherland from oppressors. One such country, South Africa faced forty-six years of atrocious colonization known as apartheid or racial segregation where the blacks and coloured were suppressed by the white colonial masters. Despite apartheid being abolished in 1994, Democratic South Africa is still plagued with social ills and there is still a widespread of racial discrimination between the whites and the blacks. The Truth and Reconciliation Committee was set up right after apartheid was abolished, to help facilitate a truth recovery process. Forgiveness has been forwarded yet redemption and reconciliation are somewhat elusive, as discrimination and instability still exist due to the stigma apartheid has left. This research paper "Apartheid and the Reconciliation Process in the Post-Apartheid South Africa" looks into the novel by Zakes Mda entitled *The Madonna of Excelsior*, which deals with the issues of the process of reconciliation between the present and the past. In this paper, we investigated if the masses are willing to forget the past in order to create a better future for the new generation of the new South Africa.

Keywords: Apartheid, colonialism, racism, reconciliation

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INTRODUCTION

This statement can very well be considered as having political significance in the process of reconciliation. South Africa became a democratic country in 1994 after forty-six years of apartheid. With democracy, the

Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) was set up in order for South Africans to tell their stories of the past, which would allow for the process of reconciliation to take place. The setting up of the TRC to investigate crimes against humanity had both positive and negative effects. Many criticized the TRC for “[being] as little more than an archive of apartheid-era crimes, unable to ‘right the wrongs that had occurred’” (Giddens, 2006, p. 484), but there were some who felt that credit should go to the Commission, for healing did take place after apologies and forgiveness were given between the perpetrators and victims, as a victim declared, “[d]on’t we want peace for South Africa? How are we going to find peace if we don’t forgive? My husband was fighting for peace for all of South Africa. How can you correct a wrong with a wrong?” (Hayner, 2002, p. 3).

Thus, the process of reconciliation is imperative in order for South Africans to come to terms with humanity of those who inflicted pain, in order to foster reconciliation. South Africa’s past President Thabo Mbeki defined reconciliation as “the peaceful coexistence of a healed population from past injustices of apartheid, living in a non-racial, non-sexist society with sustainable quality livelihoods” (Boraine, 2001, p. 348). Erin Daly and Jeremy Serkin state that “[r]econciliation embodies the possibility of transforming war into peace, trauma into survival, hatred into forgiveness; it is the way human being connects with one another against all odds. It exemplifies the potential for strengthening humanities and

generosity of spirits that is also immanent in human nature” (2007, p. 4). Apologies and forgiveness need to be given for the society to ensure healing takes place for them to coexist peacefully.

The process of reconciliation is seen taking place in the novels by Zakes Mda. These novels depict the pain of apartheid and the scars that are left in the lives of the affected people. Despite all these, there are signs of sincere efforts made by the characters to end their enmity, for the sake of reconciliation. This paper examined if this writer ends his novels in a positive note where hatred and inequalities between the blacks and whites and fellow blacks are overcome and if the characters reconcile with themselves and others in order for the true ‘rainbow nation’ to emerge.

RECONCILIATION IN *MADONNA OF EXCELSIOR*

In *Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda shows how important it is to respect every individual as a citizen of South Africa, irrespective of colour, creed or race. This novel also shows how the characters overcome their identity crisis in their road to reconciliation. This novel focuses on two different eras: the period surrounding the trial of the nineteen people caught for going against the Immorality Act and the decade which led to the democracy of South Africa. The juxtaposition of these two eras depicts how the intolerance of the white against the blacks and coloureds began to change as South Africa moved towards democracy which created a multi-racial society. In

an era of violence and racial prejudices, Mda's novel presents a community slowly overcoming its past that was full of racial intolerance. In this novel, the coloured children who are involved in the Excelsior trial, who once were the shame of the community, became the symbols of the new 'Rainbow Nation'. *Madonna of Excelsior* also shows that remembering the past apartheid trauma must occur in order to bring about reconciliation. Niki Pule is seen as the Madonna of Excelsior, a character who will begin to heal the town of its racial division. Niki's role as Madonna is epitomized through her racially mixed children and through her being a model for Father Frans Claerhout, a well-known South African painter. Niki, the Madonna, represents the true 'Rainbow Nation' as she is the mother of different coloured children, Valiki, who is black, Popi, who is a mulatto and Tjaart, Popi's half brother, who is a white, and she tells Popi, "I care about all my children... [n]ot only those of my womb" (Mda, 2004, p. 128). This shakes the very foundation of apartheid South Africa by having coloured children who became the symbols of the multi racial society. However, identity crisis becomes another dilemma faced by these rainbow children. Popi's identity crisis is overcome when she dedicates her time to the politics of the town council. Her entry to the Movement, a political wing fighting for the rights of the blacks shows her determination to change the old system which has been suppressing the blacks for a long time. Mda highlights the fighting spirit of the black women

who seek a representation in the political institutions. Popi comments that "she was no longer going to be a bystander, or a side walker who minded her own business. A side walker who had done no wrong and would therefore not run away" (Mda, 2004, p. 152). By doing so, she wishes to eliminate the traces of the past apartheid. To Popi, only with the demise of the apartheid regime will South Africa be able to go through the process of reconciliation, which will lead to its better future. Popi's identity crisis is removed when she remembers the time when her mother used to take her to a white painter, Father Frans Martin Claerhout, also known as the 'Trinity' (Mda, 2004, p. 5). Niki used to go to the studio to pose nude in front of Father Claerhout, who painted her and many other women, in which she earned some income to bring up her children. Popi interprets a new nation from her understanding of the society, as it evolves from apartheid, by remembering the paintings. Almost every chapter of this novel describes these paintings with multi hued Madonnas, "a Madonna with blue flowing locks [...] a face of brown, yellow and white impasto" (Mda, 2004, p. 104). All these Madonnas are reincarnations of "Popi-and-Niki of the flesh" (Mda, 2004, p. 105). When Niki and Popi pose for Father Claerhout, Niki knows that "this is not the first time a white man has seen her naked" (Mda, 2004, p. 13). She remembered her rape ordeal by white men and the shameful incident where she had to strip naked in front of Stephanus Cronje, who saw her as a sexual object. To father Claerhout, his painting of the naked

nun with bare breasts and black nipples is a work of art. He does not take advantage of their being naked in the way other white men have done nor does he humiliate them. Instead, he allows their internal beauty to be exposed. This reveals the future of Popi, who realizes that beauty is skin deep and that the skin colour should not be used to judge her character. Popi views the paintings, which have been converted into post cards by Father Claerhout, in which he has drawn "Mother Mary with brown baby Jesus at a crossroad" (Mda, 2004, p. 217). Mwangi points out that:

The messiah is given a brown body [by Father Claerhout] to signify his relocation from foreign and mystical mythology to the gritty reality of the South African situation. It is people like Popi, who have been marginalized by both apartheid and post apartheid regimes, who would be the saviours of the new Republic

(Mwangi, 2009, p. 183).

The Trinity's idealist vision of a world where human identity is not limited by racial identity initiated Niki and Popi's healing. The Trinity's paintings of brown Madonnas and white Madonnas, whose "world has nothing to with the outside world of miscegenation, are carrying babies with slanting eyes. Babies that look grey at first glance, but have the colours of the rainbow if you look hard enough, God promises us through the rainbow that He will never

destroy the world again" (Mda, 2004, 92). Niki finds peace while posing for Father Claerhout.

This calmness is in contrast to her earlier vengeance towards Stephanus Cronje which resulted in his suicide, the birth of Popi and the Excelsior Trial, events which rupture the community. Popi, who is angry with her identity, seeks revenge against the township for continuously undermining her integrity. She is overflowing with feelings of vengeance, but, "no one told her that vengeance had a habit of bouncing against the wall, like a ricocheting bullet, and hitting the originator. Look what happened to Niki when she filled her loins with vengeance! It was because of that vengeance that Popi was not a prisoner of the perpetual doek on her head, of blue eyes and of hairy legs" (Mda, 2004, p. 137). Niki and Popi now realize that it is reconciliation, and not vengeance that will bring the society closer. Ultimately, Niki and Popi move beyond a sense of racial identity. Gandhi, who started the Satyagraha Movement, believes that patience is the best virtue to cultivate when faced by violence: "I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world" (Riso, Don, & Hudson, 1996, p. 379). Gandhi continues that: "[i]t is not that I do not get angry. I do not give vent to anger. I cultivate the quality of patience as angerlessness, and, generally speaking, I succeed.[...]. It is a habit that everyone must cultivate and must succeed in forming by constant practice (Kripalani, 2004, p. 99).

Popi's reconciliation with her white half brother comes with her mother's constant reminder to her that it was not a wise idea to fight Tjaart. Popi later finds out that Tjaart is ill and is lying on his deathbed. Tjaart sends Johannes, who raped Niki during the apartheid days, to Popi and Niki to tell them that he wanted to see them "to make peace with Popi" (Mda, 2004, p. 251). Johannes too, seizes this chance to make peace and advises Niki that "[w]e can't live in the past forever. Bygones should be allowed to bygones" (Mda, 2004, p. 252). Lying on his deathbed, Tjaart realizes that he is slowly losing his power against the blacks in the post apartheid South Africa. A white acquaintance of Tjaart, Gys Uys, who visits him in the hospital, senses that Tjaart's illness is due to the hatred he has for the white apartheid regime which gave in to the demands of the black leaders who fought for the dismantling of apartheid and who wished to see reconciliation to take place. Gys Uys sympathizes with his condition:

We all know that we used these children to fight our wars. And then we discard them. All of a sudden they find that they live in a new world in which they do not belong... We have all the wealth and the influence and are now in cahoots with the new elite. Things like affirmative action do not affect us at all. But what about these young men who had to kill and be prepared to be killed on our behalf

(Mda, 2004, p. 248).

It is obvious that the realization of the older white generation, who feel that they have come to terms with the end of apartheid, has created a lot of anger in the younger white generation who still hate the blacks, as Reverend Bornman points out, "[w]e regret the past and yet are fearful of the future" (Mda, 2004, p. 249). It is undeniable that the past posed new challenges to the post apartheid South Africa where racial issues are far from being settled, yet if every individual is willing to forgive for a better South Africa, this process of reconciliation and redemption will take this society towards its goal. Tjaart, finally moving towards this process of reconciliation as he recognizes that his illness is due to his own anger and desire for vengeance for the end of apartheid and, is being destroyed by his own anger. He acknowledges that "his ancestors are telling him to make peace with [the blacks]" (Mda, 2004, p. 251). Tjaart begins the reconciliation process through an open acknowledgement of their relationship: "I wish you had known him Popi [...]. Our father [...] he was not a bad man" (Mda, 2004, p. 253). It is true that it will take a long time for Tjaart and Popi to reconcile but we do see forgiveness in Tjaart which will augur well for a better future of the new South Africa. Before Popi leaves, Tjaart gives her a depilatory cream and tells Popi "you are a lady, a beautiful lady" (Mda, 2004, p. 254). This declaration by Tjaart makes Popi's realize her inner beauty and her new positive self-image:

Lately Popi spent all her mornings looking at herself in the mirror,

admiring her blue eyes, and brushing her long golden-brown hair [...]. She wondered why she had been ashamed of it all these years, why she had never noticed its beauty. She brushed it and combed it over and over again[...]She had taken to wearing the isigqebhezana, the micro mini skirts of the new millennium, displaying her long yellow-coloured legs that bristled with golden-yellow hair[...]She would not shave her hairy legs. Her hairy arms. Even her armpits. She rejoiced in her hair and her hairiness

(Mda, 2004, p. 256).

Mda also portrays a white member of the Excelsior Town Council, Lizette de Vries, who acknowledges that social changes are necessary for South Africa. Lizette plays an important role in the reconciliation process as she becomes the newly elected Mayor of Excelsior. This is seen when Tjaart insisted that the Afrikaaner language be spoken in the council meetings, Lizette quickly responded, “[i]nstead of eliminating Afrikaans, we should rather say that our proceedings should be in Sesotho as well. We all speak Sesotho in Excelsior, don’t we?” (Mda, 2004, p. 171). Lizette’s role as a mediator goes beyond the politics of race and identity and she uses her energy towards the social transformation of Excelsior. She also becomes critical of Tjaart for the disrespect he shows towards

Popi when he comments on Popi’s unshaved legs, “[w]hat do you know of culture when you can’t even shave your legs?” (Mda, 2004, p. 187).

Lizette’s comment, “[y]ou can’t talk to a lady like that” (Mda, 2004, p. 187), shows that the time has come for the white male to show respect towards a black woman, as this encourages political partnership of the blacks and whites. By depicting women in the political arena in his novel, Mda stresses the importance of the post-apartheid era’s social and cultural transformation occurring in South Africa. Mda’s depiction of Valiki joining politics and his election as the first black mayor of Excelsior reveals that the blacks, who were marginalized during apartheid, are elected to higher posts in post apartheid South Africa. By elevating the blacks to higher social status, Mda suggests that the blacks are capable of leadership. In a country where the blacks were not allowed to vote, the transition period led to the first democratic elections. Valiki envisions South Africa belonging to both blacks and whites, “Next year we have a general election [...]. We shall be liberated and we shall be one people with the Afrikaans. That’s what the Movement stands for, One South African nation” (Mda, 2004, p. 47).

It is evident here that this novel functions as a means of transforming and changing the present; so that the process of reconciliation can take place for a better future of South Africa. If in the beginning of the novel, the characters are still seen dwelling in the past, all the characters realize dwelling in the past for too long will shatter the peace process

which is vital to South Africa. It also shows how the whites learn to respect the Other as they see this as the only way to achieve racial harmony. They realized that by respecting the blacks, they are helping the blacks to heal the wounds created by apartheid. In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, the blacks finally accept that their beauty lies in their coloured identity and that they too, have the rights to live in dignity. On the other hand, the whites start to respect the blacks, whom they earlier saw as the Other. They become conscious of that fact that it was a matter of time before the apartheid regime would collapse. Therefore, it is important to coexist with the blacks to ensure racial integration. The only way towards reconciliation is for everyone to respect each other, get rid of racial barriers and learn how to forgive for the sake of a peaceful South Africa. Therefore, forwarding forgiveness is also important for peaceful coexistence to occur. It was a dream of Valiki of *Madonna of Excelsior* to see an election that would liberate the blacks of South Africa and build a nation where racial barriers will be removed in order for a new South Africa to emerge. This dream came true for all black South Africans when South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994 after forty-six years of apartheid. After casting his vote, Nelson Mandela said, “[t]his is for all South Africans, an unforgettable occasion. [...] It is the beginning of a new era. We have moved from an era of pessimism, division, limited opportunities, turmoil and conflict. We are starting a new era of hope, reconciliation and nation building” (ANC Today, 2010: para. 1). On 10 May

1994, Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa and it was this election that witnessed South Africans coming together after more than forty-six years of segregation between the blacks and the whites. The elections of 1994 were the most important milestones in South African history. It was a time where the relationship between coloureds became possible as the nation resolved to overcome the differences dividing its population. Desmond Tutu's dream of the Rainbow Nation was realized and against all odds, the parties concerned came together and decided to face the future as one united force. South Africa's victory was celebrated across the world and, “[t]he pariah state had emerged like a butterfly from its chrysalis into the sunlight of international acceptance” (Sparks, 2003, p. 2). Unfortunately, the celebration was not meant to last long. Although violence subsided after the elections, a dissonant chorus of overdrawn black expectations and exaggerated white's fears posed new challenges for the young democratic country as the new government had hardly any experience in running a country. After the elections, President Mandela's assurance throughout the election campaign “of more jobs, more housing, better education and health services - still reverberated across the country” (Meredith, 2006, p. 655). One of the most important factors aiding the process of transition or the turbulent times in South Africa was the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which was to help re-negotiate the race relations of South Afrikaners.

Its purpose was to offer a platform on which perpetrators and victims could tell their stories and break their silence of the past while undergoing the process of reconciliation. Forgiveness was necessary, and in order to forgive and move on, people had to know first what exactly was to be forgiven. The nation was allowed to speak in its multitude of voices, breaking the silence, revealing the atrocities of the apartheid period, opening wounds inflicted by apartheid and simultaneously attempting to heal those wounds. Victims were encouraged to engage in narrating their past experiences as the beginning of healing process. In April 2004, South Africa organized her third democratic elections since the end of apartheid, and even if many of the problems that persisted during the apartheid government still occupied the current administration, democracy in South Africa could be considered to have consolidated itself. Ironically, despite this consolidation, South Africa is still engulfed in crime and violence. People are still living in abject poverty and fighting for recognition in a society that has been denied of equal opportunities by the oppressive white government. The country too, has to deal with illegal immigrants that contribute to a rise of unemployment and crime. Although South Africa has enjoyed economical and political stability, the injustice of social inequities still remain in the country and pose a threat to the future. Only when the needs of the poor and those who were suppressed are addressed that South Africa would have a real chance of overcoming

its violent past. It is through literature that these voices can be heard as literature can be considered a medium in which a society with all its good and evil can be assessed, and in which the marginalized are given a voice to speak about their anguish and ill treatment. Literature has also been used to address the social transformation of South Africa since the end of apartheid. Most often, it is not the silenced people themselves who take a stand and tell their respective stories, but acclaimed novelists who write about the apartheid past that disrupts the reconciliation process in South Africa. Imagination and creativity have been sidelined throughout history and it is these writers who bring these elements in their writings to make readers feel the pain that apartheid has brought. According to Fuentes, “[h]umankind will prevail and it will prevail because, in spite of the accidents of history, the novel tells us that art restores the life in us that was disregarded by the haste of history [and] [l]iterature makes real what history forgot (2006, par. 33). In South Africa, the past injustice has to be exposed for the purpose of current reconciliation.

Zakes Mda also takes the readers on a journey through the shifting psychological landscapes of its characters, white and coloured, who are desperately trying to adjust to present day South African realities, while still trapped in the old order. It is not only described the history of black-white relationship but also deals with the black anti-apartheid struggle and the corruption of the new black elite, thus providing an insight into the present. Tjaart Cronje, a

white character in this novel, also refuses to accept the changes taking place in the post-apartheid. Tjaart Cronje still feels that he is living in the apartheid era where the whites dictated to the blacks. In the Town Council meetings, we see that he still fights for the right to speak Afrikaans during their meetings. He enforces his cultural identity on others and is protective of his linguistic identity as an Afrikaans speaking person. He is still dominated by apartheid mentality that the Afrikaans are God-chosen people and that the blacks they rule are savages.

This belief is deeply ingrained in him and denies him of coming to terms with reality that the whites have lost their power over the blacks. In this novel, we also see Popi, a coloured girl facing identity crisis. If Tjaart is seen, still living in an illusionary world where his white identity is still supreme in the post-apartheid era, Popi is seen as still having identity crisis despite truly being in the post-apartheid world. Her racial identity as 'coloured' represented the shameful past of her mother, which becomes symbolic in the apartheid era where women were treated as sex objects. Black skin colour is still a social stigma in Tutu's rainbow nation.

It cannot be denied that the past plays a pivotal role in the present chaotic condition of South Africa. Despite this chaotic condition, this novel demonstrated a commitment towards the process of reconciliation. The characters also contribute to the process of reconciliation. For many years, South Africa has been caught up in conflict, war and social disparities as a result of apartheid.

Hence, in order to resolve this conflict, reconciliation was deemed necessary for victims of apartheid to heal and come to terms with their tormented past and to move forward in order to pave the way for a better future. In order to reconcile, one has to come to terms with humanity, which is part of the process of recovering from apartheid, and forging a new state in which blacks and whites can form equal partnership.

Equal partnership can also be realized if the society recognizes and understands the concept of coexistence. This would mean relinquishing 'white supremacy', hatred and vengeance which could lead to disharmony. In order to strive for harmony, it is important to accept that no one is perfect and that as humans, we do make mistakes and the only noble thing to do is to adopt the concept of forgiveness, which leads to reconciliation. For a nation to heal itself and restore the dignity of the black people of South Africa, reconciliation must take place.

The process of reconciliation has brought about positive attitudinal change among races that could lead to peaceful coexistence. It conceptualizes the process of reconciliation into three dimensions of attitude needed for the better future of South Africa. These dominant attitudes would be coming to terms with humanity. The next one would be accepting the coexistence of blacks and whites, followed by accepting the fact that humans err. It is important for all of South Africans to come to terms with humanity in order to secure a better future for all its people. The values of humility, love, compassion, tolerance, kindness are

much needed to ensure that society moves forward in its efforts towards healing. These values are needed to bring people together towards the common goal of progress and harmony, find solutions that are meaningful, just and beneficial to all towards rebuilding broken lives and shattered dreams.

Bakshi, Mangold and Weinert quoted Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi: “[y]ou must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty” (Bakshi *et al.*, 2002). Bakshi quoted Parekh as saying, “Gandhi saw humanity as an indivisible, organic whole, tied together by the expectation that every man is responsible to and for others to be deeply concerned about how others lived” (Bakshi *et al.*, 2002). Humanity resides in mutual respect, tolerance and commitment of people to put up with one another that will allow for peaceful coexistence instead of hate and contempt that existed during the apartheid era. Love, tolerance, kindness and understanding are qualities which can replace the deep seated hatred of apartheid. It would be these qualities that would enable South Africans to move towards reconciliation.

This is a process through which society moves from a divided past to a shared future. In *Madonna of Excelsior*, Popi realizes that love and tolerance are the essence of humanity which creates an atmosphere where human learns to respect and understand one another. In order to love humanity, one has to love oneself. There must be reconciliation within before

one reconciles with others. Popi is at first faced with identity crisis due to her being a coloured child. It is the white friend of Popi, Lizette de Vries who entreats her to love herself and be proud of her beauty and identity.

With this rejuvenated self, Popi casts aside her anger and hatred for the whites and says, “[m]y shame went away with my anger” (Mda, 2004, p. 260) and she liberates herself from the entrapment of race and identity. She ends up treating her white half brother, Tjaart, with kindness. Tjaart realizes that with the collapse of apartheid, his superior white status collapses, too. He accepts the coloured Popi as his half-sister and treats her with kindness and helps her to accept her true identity. Popi and Tjaart are seen as the younger generation who represents the promise of a new nation. This then is a reconciliation that comes from love and kindness. Popi’s mother, Niki too never ceases to love her step-son Tjaart. Her unconditional love for him is seen throughout the novel when she says, “I care about all my children, Viliki, [...] [n]ot only those of my womb” (Mda, 2004, p. 133). Niki represents the true new South African woman whose love and kindness have no bounds.

The fact that she shows her unconditional love towards Tjaart suggests that she has forgiven those who have victimized her, as forgiveness is essential for reconciliation. Popi too, is seen as the younger generation who represents the promise of a new nation. She is committed to adapt to the post-apartheid era, even if it means tolerating her

black neighbour who has done her wrong. She feels that she has to come to terms with this situation if she wants to continue her new life. Her aim is to forget the past and to carry on with life which leads to integration in post-apartheid South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Countries torn by war and conflicts often pursue reconciliation as a means to bring about peace. In South Africa, during the apartheid regime, the blacks and whites were hostile towards each other. With the abolition of apartheid, these people who were foes agreed to coexist and compete peacefully rather than violently. This peaceful coexistence or interracial tolerance could be defined as the willingness of people of different races to trust each other, get along with each other and to reject racial stereotypes. It is time for the blacks and whites to treat everyone as equal by treating them with dignity and respect those who have been victimized. In doing so, these people come to interact with each other more in order to break down racial barriers. This will ultimately lead to greater understanding and acceptance of one another. Huyse, in his chapter "The Process of Reconciliation", states that "[w]hen the shooting stops, the first steps away from hatred, hostility and bitterness is the achievement of non-violent coexistence between the antagonist individuals and groups" (Huyse, 2003, p. 19). He further quotes Martin Luther King, "those who do not learn to live together as brothers are going to perish together as fools" (Huyse,

2003, p. 20). It is important to preach the doctrine or the virtues of interracial harmony to every South African as this will lead to mutual understanding and respect. Michael Battle reflects on the strong interdependence of human beings as he quoted Desmond Tutu, "[w]e say a person is a person through other persons. We don't come fully formed into the world [...]. We need other human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness, we are made for family, for fellowship, to exist in a tender network of interdependence" (Battle, 2009, p. 54).

To the South Africans, that is what coexistence or Ubuntu is. Ubuntu sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of brotherhood. To coexist has always been difficult due to racial tensions that South Africans had to endure during apartheid. The issue of xenophobia and racial prejudice too has created a hostile environment, which is detrimental for the peace of South Africa and the characters in the novel *Madonna of Excelsior* accept that in order for reconciliation to take place, coexistence is vital, which paves the way to nation building. Popi is seen to have buried her feelings of racial prejudice in order for reconciliation to take place. She realizes that they have to treat everyone as equal despite their creed and colour. This will ensure a peaceful coexistence among the people of the new South Africa.

Coexistence among humans is needed for everyone to live in harmony. Lizette even reprimands Tjaart for displaying a racist attitude towards Popi as she reminds him not to talk disrespectfully to her during

their political meetings. Lizette's defence of Popi shows the solidarity between the different races in the struggle against racism. The one common factor in these novels is forgiveness as it is only through it that one begins to understand humanity and with forgiveness comes acceptance, tolerance, love and ultimately the forging of a common national identity.

Reconciliation is about acknowledging one's mistakes and being responsible for them. In South Africa, it was important to establish the TRC to facilitate the victims of the atrocities confront the perpetrators to bring about the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation requires that victims of the atrocities are heard as this will purge them of negative emotions that are destructive. Everyone should steer clear of vindictiveness as it is dangerous and capable of causing discord. Therefore, one has to learn how to forgive even though it can be extremely difficult. However, it becomes easier when the perpetrator is forgiven of the crime.

The victims of atrocities can control their emotions and can choose to forgive their oppressors. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Laureate and Chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) said, "You can only be human in a human society. If you live with hate and revenge, you dehumanize not only yourself, but also your community. You must forgive to make your community whole" (Scott, 2010, par. 4). Through forgiveness, hatred and vengeance are replaced with compassion and understanding; this would then serve as a basis of morality, revealing a path for others to follow.

Forgiveness demands courage, responsibility and acceptance. It can eliminate the trouble of hate carried by victims as well as purge the oppressors of their collective guilt. This would then surely bring forward harmony.

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