

Twinship as a Narrative Strategy in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*

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Abstract

*Zakes Mda, a South African post-apartheid writer employs twinship as a narrative strategy in the explication and rendition of his literary works. He uses this strategy to explore his sensitivity of the situations in South African new democratic society. His attempt is to explore the prevailing circumstances existing in South Africa after the demise of apartheid system of government, the institutionalized segregation policy that came into existence in 1948. He thus looks at the polarities of the exhaust apartheid and the popular democracy with a critical insight to read the two systems, the past and the present. Mda's use of twinship as a narrative strategy portrays a continuous relevance in the post-colonial age. He shows the relationship between the past and the present, apartheid and post-apartheid. He uses twinship to show the dichotomies of post-colonial life, highlighting the importance of human values in transforming "Post-colonial cultural identities". In *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness* he adroitly employs twinship to weave in the past in the present in South Africa. His choice of characters, Toloki, Noria, and his son of immaculate conception Vutha, in *Ways of Dying* and *She plays with the Darkness*, Mda uses the characters of Radisene and Dikosha as a twining strategy to portray the social binaries and assert the role of the marginalized individual in the process of societal transformation. Radisene and Dikosha are born of the same mother the same year but not of the same father. Thus, by the circumstances of their birth, they are regarded as twins in the novel. Twinship in *She Plays with the Darkness* depicts Mda's use of a potential "warp and woof" of twinship in his fiction" (Bell and Jacobs 135). The splitting of Radisene and Dikosha marks a division within one identity, that of their family as they are their mother's only children.*

Keywords: Twinship; birth; darkness; dying.

Introduction

Mda's narrative strategy is metonymic and of fundamental duality in the art of writing. He employs diverse approaches to draw home his message to his audience and to address and highlight the issue at stake in the contemporary South African society of his numerous approaches, the most striking and pertinent is his use of twinship to explore his sensitivity of the prevailing situation in the Post-Apartheid South Africa. South Africa is still battling with the binaries of the apartheid era and the present post-apartheid realities. Mda uses twinship as a strategy in his narratives in such effective ways that it draws consciousness and to arouse emotion. This agrees with Frank Lucas when he says that "Style is the effective use of language... to make statement or rouse emotions, style is the man" (123) he concludes. Mda's effective use of twinship captures Crystal and Davy's idea of style in their position that "style is the effectiveness of the mode of expression" (10). This accordingly means using a strategy in the most effective way that its relevance looms extraordinary within and without.

Mda's strategy is determined and shaped by the social events and circumstances within the state of South Africa, past and present. Recognizing this Babajide notes:

We should recognize that a person's style is formed and Shaped by the aggregate of his social and political Background, religious indignation, culture values, experience, educational attainment, geographical local and exposure (42).

This notion foregrounds Mda's literary style, his strategy as is the case for all other writers. Mda adopt a variety of style to adequately explore his social concern as a post-apartheid writer.

Twinship in the *Ways of Dying* and *She Plays with the Darkness*

Twinship, according to Bell and Jacobs is ‘a humanistic concept, a perception of brotherhood and sisterhood as a fundamental and inescapable bond’ (10). Mda’s use of twinship as a narrative strategy portrays a continuous relevance in the post-colonial age. He shows the relationship between the past and the present, apartheid and post-apartheid. Mda uses twinship to show the dichotomies of post-colonial life, highlighting the importance of human values in transforming “Post-colonial cultural identities” (Attwell, 2005).

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda uses Toloki and Noria as twins to show these binaries in post-apartheid South Africa. Attwell had argued in the *Heart of Redness* (1995) that “undoubtedly, modernity introduces splitting; a splitting of political allegiances and subjectivities” (99), but claims the metaphorical and existential power of twinning which is on the basis of tradition that twinship is a single identity. Mda thus in placing Toloki and Noria together as twins, though not biologically but relatively, shows that winning and splitting involves some difficulties, a weaving of pattern and tensions that give definition to South Africa post-apartheid/post-colonial space. Mda uses twinship to show the relationship between tradition or past and the present, highlighting the tension inherent in this. The identical nature of events and situation as well as the political drama that is going on in the South Africa represents the twinship between Toloki the professional mourner, and Noria, the servant, prostitute and mother. The social impetus in the novel dramatizes the lamentation of death and the occasion of the funeral became ritual enactments of the memory and loss of relatives, a source of continuity and a form of relation for the larger black urban community. Also, Mda uses this twinship strategy to highlight the imaginative weight and historical context to the experience of the migrant laborer and the rite of passage from a poverty-stricken rural life to the even severe conditions of urban existence. Toloki’s journey to achievement economically is twined with Noria his ‘homegirl’ from the same rural village. This is “a journey to the city in search of love and fortune” (60).

Mdas uses Toloki and Noria to showcase the historical events and a social-political context and draws on the typical events of the years between 1990 and 1994, before the democratic elections. The rituals of death which are celebrated in the novel are depictions of the continuities between the past and present. They are performative tempers establishing the substance of community memory which connects the living and the dead. The twinship strategy portrays the co-existence of the worlds of the living and the dead in traditional African society and by translation the South African society as a reflection of the past and the present. It also depicts the social relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors in a given society, taking South African as such. Couran and Murray assert that

In *Ways of Dying* Toloki is able to act as a performative mediator as Mda adopts traditional performance techniques, at once affirming Old traditions and reworking them to suit the needs of the new Society emerging in South Africa at the time and becomes the Embodiment of the community’s dynamos towards survival... (Bell And Jacobs 93).

The twinship relationship of Toloki and Noria enables them to look inward towards each other to understand themselves and each other to know how to make possible adjustments. This principle and idea established by Mda in this strategy is captured in Kole Omotoso’s argument that

There is a way in which those who are oppressed eke out a living... And develop mechanisms for their existence. The daily rituals of ‘Their lives come to constitute cultures in their own rights culture that Do not receive much attention from those who concern themselves’ With the study of the dominant cultures of our societies... But the Struggle against oppression is not the first thought of those Oppressed. Their first concern is to get on with living their lives with ‘The minimum pain – physical, mental, and psychological – possible’. In order to do this, they evoke a number of deities who have come to ‘Be known as the Trickster Deities’. Trickster God and Goddesses of the Black oppressed ... (2004).

In presenting Toloki as a twin with Noria, Mda is giving imaginative sensitivity and experiential weight to the traditional and township culture by filtering them through knowledge relative to African culture and South African apartheid and post-apartheid culture. Thus, in *Ways of Dying*, it could be argued that the temporal and the spatial states of transition are joined together in a presentation of extreme violence and morbidity, which inflects and directs the course of the narrative, as the central characters.

Toloki and Noria, find themselves searching for new means of survival and continuity within drastically new Geographic's and volatile socio-political conditions. Again, Mda uses this twinship in *Ways of Dying* to show the survival and revival, a restoration of human dignity. Mpho Mantjui notes "Mda sees love and respect as a way of living. Through love individuals can be pushed to uplift themselves, as well as their communities"⁽⁹⁾. He sees this novel as articulating how ordinary people are achieving the ideals of rebuilding the nation. He states "... it is creativity that duels the love between people: 'The development of individuals sometimes lies in their creativity and Toloki and Noria are creators in their own right' (9).

The twinship of Toloki and Noria is indicative of the collective role of gender in nation building. Throughout the novel, Mda creates tension by exploring contrasting idea and values; the rural and urban, beauty and ugliness, poverty and wealth, spirituality and the material world, and love and hate. He underscores by this the need for a new phase of renaissance. With this Mda recalls the clarion call by African feminists to include the women folk in their political social order. Hasim, Shireen has noted in this regards that, "the constitution protects women's right on many levels, in practical terms, high levels of gender violence, as well as continuing poverty, reveal the need to protect and apply this right. Women still make up the majority in communities at the margins of economic freedom in South Africa", (2002).

Mda distinguishes the political world from the world of Toloki and Noria. They live in a squatter town which is distant and irrelevant. It is this world where Noria and the woman such as Madimbhaza go about their daily struggle of feeding and clothing the community. Here twin depicts unity, progress and development. He portrays the burden of the woman in a social environment like the community, and by translation Post-Apartheid South Africa. Mda shows that whether in the urban or rural setting women are the ones who bear the burden of the poverty caused by the conflict of patriarchy and the economy. The narrator notes:

Toloki notices that the people who are most active in the affairs
Of the settlement are the women. Not only do they do all the
Work, but they play leadership roles. At this meeting, they
Present the most practical ideas to solve the various problems.
The few male residents who are present relish making high-flown
Speeches that speeches that display eloquence, but are short on
Practical solutions (172).

In *She plays with the Darkness*, Mda uses the characters of Radisene and Dikosha as a twining strategy to portray the social binaries and assert the role of the marginalized individual in the process of societal transformation. Radisene and Dikosha are born of the same mother the same year but not of the same father. Thus, by the circumstances of their birth, they are regarded as twins in the novel. Twinship in *She Plays with the Darkness* depicts Mda's use of a potential "warp and woof" of twinship in his fiction" (Bell and Jacobs 135). The splitting of Radisene and Dikosha marks a division within one identity, that of their family as they are their mother's only children. Radisene leaves Ha Samane. The Mountain village, to town Maseru and becomes Ambulance chaser. He makes his fortune from accident victims as he represents himself as a lawyer and Insurance Broker. Dikosha on the other hand occupies a world of beauty, communing with cave paintings, musicians and dancers, charming and eating snakes, and sustaining herself, un-ageing for decades through encounters with figures conjured to life from the walls of the cave of Barwa, an ancient cave near her village. Mda thus seems to draw the dichotomies between apartheid South Africa, the traditional Africa society, in Dikosha, and the exuberance and flamboyant lifestyle and the flaggerant bestiality of the post-

apartheid South Africa, in Radisene. Dikosha is natural and traditional in her features and thus presents a reality which she fashions outside of her own Basotho tradition and outside of Radisene's materialistic modernity as her own kind of modernity. Sprelim. Macdonald notes that "unlike the "traditions" of her rural neighbors, or her brother's greedy consumption of the new materials and meanings of the lowland, Dikosha's is a modernity based on the re-creation of life through another past, which she selectively combines with various new elements, as well as those of traditional Basotho society" (Jacobs & Bell, 136).

Being patriotically denied the opportunity of good modern school and acquiring Western education, she finds solace in the cave Barwa. Mda notes about the cave:

The cave of Barwa and red and black paintings of big-buttocked
People chasing deer with bows and arrows, or dancing in a
Trance-like state. Dikosha was spellbound by one painting
especially, which showed a dancer with the body of a woman
and the head of a beast. It was a fierce looking beast that no
One had ever seen before. Dikosha saw herself as the monster-
Woman-dancer, ready to devour all the dances of the world,
Imbuing herself with their strength and staiming, and then
Dancing forever and ever, until the end of time (16).

As a fierce dancer she aspires to internal, self-contained power of the beauty of her own new culture. Mda uses Radisene and Dikosha to dissect the Africa polity and underscores the political nuances plaguing the society's past and present. In her critical engagement with the Past and the Present, and in her extreme responses to the structure inequality of her society, Dikosha seems less to embody tradition or the past in the monolithic sense of the term, than she does an increasing kind of constructive continuity. This constructive continuity marks both an awareness of those elements of the past and the present, which are surely worth salvaging, as well as a stringent critique of those elements that are culturally destructive. The twinship of Radisene and Dikosha is a crucial factor in their respective desire for self-made status in Ha Samane. They both refuse to be fully engaged in the rituals of their community. This refusal for Dikosha is supplanted by her cultural identity and achievement which results in her reconciliation with her community. But for Radisene, his refusal to embrace his history and community is his lasting statement. The twinship of Radisene and Dikosha is not only maintained between them, but also constitutes in their respective twinships with their community, Ha samane. Being culturally oriented, Dikosha finds lasting value in her society, despite her denial of education by the traditional patriarchy and her initial moves towards isolation, she becomes integrated in her society as a renewed individual. Thus, she finds fulfillment in her integration and society subjectivity which speaks of the need to actively create cultural identity in the post-colony. Stuart Hall has argued for such a process of re-creation that, "while seeking the ever – deepening, understanding of historical process fundamental to post-colonial identity, is nonetheless also a process of continual creative regeneration" (Bell and Jacobs 144).

Mda presents the post apartheid situation as a ritual. The twinning of Radisene and Dikosha in the conflict pantomic situation is representative of the situation in the post-apartheid nation of South Africa. Dikosha has become one of the figures in the ritual activities of Ha samane. Mc Allister in Turner asserts that "Ritual involves an interpretive re-enactment of experience" (82, 104); he notes further by "placing experience within the content of basic values and beliefs, allowing people to reaffirm and adjust to changed circumstances"(68).

Dikosha hears confessions and transforms them into rituals in which subjective experience are expressed and reflected upon by member of a society. Individuals thus situation their experience in her ritual performance. Bruce Kepferer notes that "ritual is universalizing of the particular and the particularizing universal" (McAllister, 69). Dikosha's most powerful assertion of herself comes, though, after Shana's death on the day of his funeral. As it comes to a close, Dikosha makes her statement on the matter through

dance, "... she danced her last tribute to Shana. Then she walked away to her rondavel. People of the village applauded in spite of themselves" (Mda. 168).

In this twinship relationship between Radisene and Dikosha, Mda is showing the elements of discrepancy in the past which are features of the present. In the phase of frustration, Dikosha finds solace in the care of Barwa exploiting the situation and the new environment to her advantages. This puts her in a world of beauty, relating with cave paintings, museums and dancers, charming and eating snakes, and sustaining herself, rejuvenating herself for decades through her encounters with figures conjured to life from the works of the cave of Barwa. This assertive nature agrees with the post colonial theorists that African's and mankind as a whole should exploit any situation to their advantage. This Mda uses Dikosha to establish the traces left by the ancient past of the Barwa people who predated Dikosha's Basotho people in the region. They are of another displaced and erased people who are absent physically from what is now Lesotho. In this way, Dikosha's reality which she draws out outside of her own Basotho tradition and outside of Radisene's materialistic temper, is its own brand of representation of a new way of life. Unlike the traditions of her rural neighbors or her brother's greedy consumption of the new materials and meanings of the lowland, Dikosha exploits her condition to her advantage and reintegrates into her society for the benefits of all. Thus, Dikosha is a new creature based on the re-creation of life through another past.

Radisene on his part flags off as dubious, materialistic fellow on being frustrated by the rural community where nothing tangible happens. He goes to the urban area, Maseru, where he becomes ambulance chaser, through this process, he becomes fabulously wealthy. He thus uses his position to revenge on Trooper Motshohi who had previously maltreated him for breaking curfew regulations. As a payback, he sizes his wife Tampololo seeing that he was no longer gainfully employed by government, and now his, Radisene's, driver. Mda in this is showing the nature of the attitude of Africans in the new South Africa which promises respect for every individual irrespective of color and tribe. He is showing that Africans who find themselves in the shores of wealth become tools of maltreatment against their fellow Africans for sheer reason of being placed on a higher cadre of the social strata.

Mda uses twinship strategy in *She Plays with the Darkness* to capture the ritual disposition of the Africans. He draws to memory the relationship between Shana and Father-of-the-Daughters, and between Shana and Dikosha. In the Cave of Barwa, Dikosha silently to the confessions of men of Ha Samane, revealing their secret deeds and she says nothing in response. This confession relieves the men of their spiritual burden. Conversely, Dikosha shares her world of schism with Shana, a boy who finds security and co-habitation with the family of Father-of-the-Daughters. He finds favour in Dikosha and they share their world together. Shana actually is a herd boy to Father-of-the-Daughters. The narrator notes:

Mother-of-the-Daughters was surprised when she heard rumours
That Shana was spending his nights in Dikosha's house. She was
Certain that Shana spent the evening with the family and slept at
Night in the hut reserved for the herd boys. And all the boy's
Vouched that Shana was there every night (135).

As a herd boy seeking security from patriarchy and Dikosha being frustrated by the same system she finds solace in the new found relationship. Both Shana and Dikosha become entwined in love and aspirations that "she loved untainted air of the night, which were peaceful and full of dreams which featured Shana". Also, Shana in his herdboy's rondavel had Dikosha featured in his dreams "(134). Dikosha shared the world of music, African culture with Shana. Mda here shows the unity of the unusual in human relationship, picturing the South African apartheid and post apartheid situation, thus begging for a proper reconciliation and unity of all divisions in the new states.

Shana was herd boy to Father-of-the-Daughters. He was at his disposal and at the appointed time bids Dikosha the final goodbye, at the first and last voice of utterance to her that "please keep my sekgankula

for me ... until I return” (166-167). His statement that “I am going to a far way mountain; I will see you when I come back” (167) denotes an eternal journey of no return. It denotes a final separation which is orchestrated by Father-of-the-Daughters’ action. He takes Shana to the far away mountain crevice and kills him. People were surprised to see an exhausted Father-of-the-Daughters returning with his cutter only the next day morning, as he carries the limb body of Shana. This action of Father-of-the-Daughters is reminiscent of Okonkwo in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) when he kills Ikemefuna who calls him ‘father’. Mda in this episode depicts the interpretive re-enactment of experience’ and echoes MC Allisters and Turner (82, 104). The South African history of abuse of humanity by the white minority rule is reflecting itself in the post-apartheid era of black majority rule. Hence it is now black against the black which sounds like a continuity of apartheid in post apartheid period.

Thus, Mda is not only using twinship as a strategy to show unity and reconciliation but uses it also to show that the situation in South Africa cannot be said to be resolved as the binaries of apartheid are still featuring in this post-apartheid era.

Mda in *She Plays with the Darkness* attempts to provide a poetry of the function of the exclusive writer in bridging the binaries of post-colonial existence. Mda is thus using the twinship of Radisene and Dikosha to establish the estrangement of apartheid, the unification of post-apartheid South Africa in the event of a true reconciliation in the new Rainbow Nation. Hence in the final pages they are symbolized by two odd doves feeding among a flock of chickens. Radisene and Dikosha are necessarily split and twinned with each other and their twin, their community. *She Plays with the Darkness* thus demonstrates the power of twinship and its humanistic implications over the force of division of the post-apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, therefore, it could be said that Mda’s use of twinship in *Ways of Dying and She Plays with the Darkness* is exploited to feature the place of history, culture and unity in any given society. The post-apartheid South African situation which appears as a dilemma is understandably a social construct that could be put in place by the personalities involved or twinship in the social issue.

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