

The Concept or Regaining Dignity and the Manifestations of this Process in Post-apartheid South- African Literature

© Zuzana Luckay

Abstract for presentation at the African Studies Association of UK (ASAUUK) conference 'The Presence of the Past. Africa in the 21st Century' held at University of Central Lancashire, Preston, United Kingdom, in September 2008

The central topic of my PhD research is the concept of regaining dignity and the manifestations of this process in post-apartheid South African literature.

Whether a quality or state of being worthy of esteem or respect, dignity is a very complicated and sensitive issue for various reasons. Still, a sense of worth is of utmost importance to all of us. The deliberate degradation of this worth has often been used as a power-tool in history.

In the past few decades the role of dignity has changed significantly worldwide, but especially in countries, which underwent radical political changes.

I believe that dignity cannot be granted or given, instead it is the circumstances, which allow it to be upheld that can be created and maintained. In an unjust political system (like apartheid or communism) the circumstances for maintaining dignity are rather difficult or lacking altogether. Nonetheless, the end of an oppressive system does not entail the consequential appearance of dignity. In my PhD thesis I investigate the mechanisms of the process of regaining dignity, the circumstances for its maintenance and its various aspects on a social and individual level.

Dignity has sociological, psychological, philosophical, legal, moral, cultural, ethical etc. aspects but I am taking literature, language and the text as the focal point for studying the phenomenon. I examine the sources and aspects of dignity and its role in the lives of individuals via contemporary South African literature. For my analyses I am using a selection of contemporary South African novels in English.