

Hermeneutic Analysis: Making Sense of Symbolic Expressions in *Izibongo* of King Shaka

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Abstract

A substantial number of scholars have previously documented African praise poems, including those that relate to the Zulu kings and queens. To a large extent, these recordings only focus on the content and structural approach to this genre of orality, with little attention paid to contextual meaning. As such, issues of metaphoric expressions are perpetually ignored, which by their very definition contain the underlying meaning and purpose for the crafting of such poetry. Therefore, this article addresses the problem of hidden meaning in Zulu kings' praise poems that many writers on the subject have missed. As it has long been established that praise poetry, from a Zulu perspective, was/is a story about the life and times of a particular king, a hermeneutic paradigm was used to conduct an inquiry into the most prominent king in the history of the Zulus—King Shaka, the founder the great Zulu nation. The study reveals that reference to this kind of poetry as “praise” itself is problematic, since the craft was used as an evaluation of the king. It both praised and critiqued the king's reign. With regard to King Shaka, the study reveals that Shaka was a revolutionary and a freedom fighter, contrary to the popularly held view that he was a brutal despot who went around killing innocent people to satisfy his own ego.

Keywords: *izibongo*; hermeneutic; metaphors; symbols; imagery; Shaka

Introduction

In the Zulu tradition, the kings' *izibongo* was an exercise for both appraising as well as finding/expressing fault with his reign. This means that through the performances as well as insights of bards, the rest of the (king's) subjects were able to inquire into the life and reign of the king. Bards enjoyed the special privilege of being the only members of the king's subjects who could lay bare even the dirtiest "linen" of the king to the public without facing consequences. Bryant (1929), Samuelson (1929) and Grant (1929) were early recorders of Zulu oral traditions in Southern Africa, followed by Cope (1968), Nyembezi (1958) and Gunner (1984). More recently, Turner (2007) has extensively documented the genre of Zulu *izibongo*. But, much of the documentation of *izibongo* belongs to a tradition in the study of oral literature in which the primary emphasis is on the text as a literary form rather than on function, context or performance.

However, bards did not always use simple language in their craft. Bards liked to incorporate figures of speech such as metaphors, symbols, imagery, allegory, comparison, representation and simile. Metaphor commonly refers to saying one thing while intending another, and making implicit comparisons between things linked by a common feature, perhaps even violating semantic rules (Holcombe 2015). But the most fundamental definition of metaphor is provided by Hawkes (1972, 1), who says that metaphor comes from the combination of the Greek words *meta*, which means "over," and *pherein*, which means "to carry." According to Hawkes (1972, 1), this "carrying over" describes the blending of the features of one concept into another in a unique combination that results in a new shade of meaning. With this action, the creator of a metaphor transcends the walls of limited expression into personal sense making and identity. From this perspective, "'metaphor' itself is a metaphor, meaning the carrying across of a term or expression from its normal usage to another" (Holcombe 2015).

Izibongo of a king were an inquiry into the king's life and times. The study makes an inquiry into King Shaka's life and times as expressed through metaphors in his *izibongo*. As such, a social constructivist worldview or approach is used to conduct an inquiry into king Shaka's *izibongo*. However, not the whole body of King Shaka's *izibongo* is used; instead some excerpts from *izibongo* of King Shaka will be used throughout the article to meet the purposes of this study. Consider, for instance, the following:

*Ulusiba gojela ngalaphaya kweNkandla,
Lugojela, njalo ludl'amadoda.
Indlondlo yakithi KwaNobamba,
Indlondl'ehamb'ibang'amacala.*
(Nyembezi 1958, 22)

(The feather that swallowed beyond Nkandla
It swallows as it eats men

Old-Mamba from Nobamba
Old-Mamba that goes around causing trouble)

Problem Statement

Defining *izibongo* as praise poetry is itself problematic. *Izibongo* are a form of poetry that praise as well as critique the king's reign, life and times. It is, in fact, a critical analysis and evaluation of the king's life and times. However, it is not the intention of this article to dwell on the problems caused by the term "praise poetry" with reference to *izibongo*. The study is a critical analysis of symbolic expressions found in King Shaka's *izibongo* to elucidate some hidden meanings in the text as expressed by Zulu bards.

Methodology

It has already been established in the introductory section that this study adopts a social constructivist worldview, which, according to Creswell (2009), assumes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. As such, this study assumes the phenomenological research strategy of inquiry. Creswell (2009, 13) explains that the phenomenological research strategy is adopted when the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about the phenomenon as described by participants. According to Moustakas (1994), understanding the lived experiences marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning. An ideal situation in this regard would have been to engage bards currently involved in the crafting of Zulu kings' *izibongo*. However, the researcher has elected to focus on the analysis of existing texts on King Shaka's praise poetry. A few excerpts from the *izibongo* of King Shaka were selected and analysed and eventually interpreted to deduce meaning embedded in metaphors employed in the construction of the *izibongo* under investigation. Hermeneutic analysis is used as an interpretative method to elucidate the meaning contained in the metaphors used by Zulu bards in constructing *izibongo* of King Shaka; it is therefore necessary to first explain what is meant by hermeneutic analysis.

The rationale for choosing certain excerpts for an analytical study and explication of King Shaka's *izibongo* is twofold; first they, in the researcher's view, clearly summarise the life and times of King Shaka's reign, and second, they contain symbolism that clearly shows both the implicit and explicit means bards used to craft the kings' *izibongo*.

A Definition of Hermeneutic Analysis with Regard to Explicating Zulu Oral Art

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation (Crotty 1998) and is situated in the interpretive paradigm. Schleiermacher founded modern hermeneutics early in the 19th century by recognising the potential for its use to understand human sciences (Crotty 1998). Later in the same century, Dilthey expanded the use of hermeneutics for

understanding cultural systems and organisations (Dilthey [1883] 1988; Paterson and Higgs 2005). The philosopher Heidegger understood hermeneutics to be more than a methodology for interpretation (von Zweck, Paterson, and Pentland 2008). For Heidegger, hermeneutical phenomenology represented how *Dasein* (the meaning of being) is understood (Heidegger 1962). Heidegger's student, Gadamer, extended this ontological exploration of understanding and became a crucial figure in philosophical hermeneutics (Koch 1996). Essential constructs that underlie philosophical hermeneutics were described by Gadamer as metaphors and included the hermeneutic circle, dialogue, and the fusion of horizons (Gadamer 1981; Weinsheimer 1985).

On the other hand, *hermeneutic analysis* is a special type of content analysis where the researcher "interprets" the subjective meaning of a given text within its socio-historic context (Ezzy 2002, 24). Unlike grounded theory¹ or content analysis,² which ignore the contextual meaning of text documents during the coding process, hermeneutic analysis is a truly interpretive technique for analysing qualitative data. This method assumes that written texts reveal an author's experience within a socio-historic context, and should be interpreted as such within that context. Therefore, this study looks at the context of the text, especially the usage of symbols as metaphors in the *izibongo* of King Shaka kaSenzangakhona. This is done with great consideration of the specific meaning of a particular symbol within the broader isiZulu language and culture, given that general meaning can be altered given the context in which it is used for a specific person's/king's life and times. For example, *lusiba* (feather) can symbolise flight, yet in Shaka's *izibongo* it is used to refer to wisdom.

Therefore, the researcher continually shifts between a singular interpretation of the text (the part) and a holistic understanding of the context (the whole) to develop a fuller understanding of the phenomenon in its situated context,³ which German philosopher Martin Heidegger called the hermeneutic circle. More generally, hermeneutics is the study of interpretation and the theory and practice of interpretation. Hermeneutics offers not only deeper explanations of the surface meanings involved but also deeper explanations in terms of underlying meanings. This is done through the treatment of both the connotations and denotations of symbolic/metaphoric expressions in the crafting of *izibongo* of King Shaka. The article offers deeper explanations of both the surface and underlying meanings of the symbols.

¹ An inductive approach to the study of social life attempts to generate a theory from the constant comparison of unfolding observations.

² Content analysis involves coding and classifying data, also referred to as categorising and indexing, and the aim of context analysis is to make sense of the data collected and to highlight the important messages, features or findings.

³ Ernesti insists on various forms of holism in interpretation: the parts of a text must be interpreted in light of the whole text, and both of these in light of an author's broader corpus and other related texts (Chisholm 1911).

In this regard, *lusiba* (feather) represents a part, while the holistic understanding of the context is derived from the whole, which is *Indlondlo yakithi KwaNobamba, Indlondlo eham'ibanga' macala*. In this context, *Indlondlo* (old black mamba) is known for its feather (*usiba*) between the eyes, which is associated with the wisdom of the “dead” (*amathongo*). Shaka rose to power, like *indlondlo*, from nowhere or below the shrubs of social uncertainty into prominence. It was as if the “old” or the dead have risen from their deep sleep, or as if an old dream that had been put to sleep has finally risen and it sent fear to *izithutha*, those fools who were still clinging to the old and unjust ways of life; *Asiphoth' Intambende Menzi ka Jama Siyemazulwini, lapho nezithutha zingeyukufika; Zobasakhwele, kwephukamazwane* (Let's weave a cord of destiny / O Menzi, scion of Jama, / That, to heavens beyond the reach of spirit-forms / We may climb [so long must the cord be] / The spirit-forms will break their tiny toes / If they dare to climb) (Ngubane 1976, 132).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on the subjective experiences of individuals and groups. It is an attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their lifeworld stories. This school of thought believes that interpretations are all we have and description itself is an interpretive process. To generate the best interpretation of a phenomenon it proposes to use the hermeneutic cycle (Merleau-Ponty 1962) (See Figure 1).

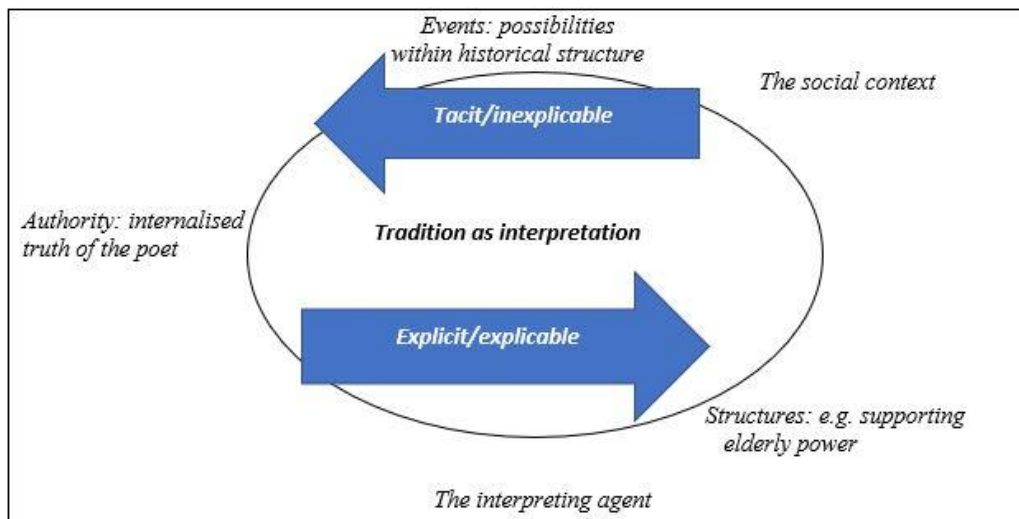


Figure 1: Contextualising tradition

“Hermeneutic research emphasises subjective interpretations in research on meanings of texts, art, culture, social phenomena and thinking. Thus, the strategy forms an opposite to those research strategies that stress objectivity and independence from interpretations in the formation of knowledge” (University of Jyväskylä Koppa 2010).

The Hermeneutic Circle

The basis of Heidegger's circle of understanding is the hermeneutic circle, a process that explains "how what is understood forms the basis for grasping that which still remains to be understood" (Bontekoe 1996, 2). As described by the hermeneutic circle, understanding is gained by alternating between considering a phenomenon as a whole and as something composed of individual parts. When the phenomenon is viewed as a whole, the integration of individual parts to create and define the entire experience is recognised. Conversely, when the phenomenon is considered in terms of individual parts, the importance of the whole in contextualising or illuminating each piece is recognised (Bontekoe 1996). By circuitously viewing a phenomenon as a whole and as the sum of individual parts, the researcher gains knowledge to build increasing understanding of the experience.

Semiotics

Peirce (1995),⁴ on the other hand, focused on three aspects of signs: their iconic, indexical, and symbolic dimensions (see Table 1).

Table 1: Three aspects of signs

	Icon	Index	Symbol
Signified by	Resemblance	Causal connection	Convention
Examples	Pictures, statues	Fire/smoke	Flags
Process	Can see	Can figure out	Must learn

The basic concern of this study is how meaning is generated and conveyed, with particular reference to excerpts from Shaka's *izibongo*. A text, such as the excerpt from King Shaka's *izibongo* mentioned above, can be thought of as a system of signs, and the meaning in the poem stems from the signs and from the system that ties the signs together.

In semiotic analysis, an arbitrary and temporary separation is made between content and form, and attention is focused on the system of signs that makes up a text.

⁴ Modern semiotic analysis can be said to have begun with two men—Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Peirce called his system semiotics, and that has become the dominant term used for the science of signs. Saussure's (1966) semiology differs from Peirce's semiotics in some respects, but as both are concerned with signs, I will treat the two as more or less the same in this chapter.

Categorising the Forms of the Zulu Oral Tradition

The Zulu Language Board has categorised the Zulu oral forms as divided between poetry and prose (Groenewald 2003; Ngubane 1976; Turner 1991). Under poetry are the following:

- 1) *Imilolozelo* (lullabies)
- 2) *Amahubo* (hymns/songs)
- 3) *Izibongo* (Praise criticism poems, names)

Under the category of prose are the following:

- 1) *Izinganekwane* (folktales)
- 2) *Izisho and Izaga* (proverbs and idioms)
- 3) *Iziphicaphicwano* (riddles)

However, *amahubo* are also divided according to those appropriate for weddings, funerals, politics, war, hunting, and work, while *izibongo* on the other hand are divided according to *Izihasho* (praises for ordinary people), *Izibongo zezinto noma izilwane* (praises criticism poems for things or animals), *Izibongo zamakhosi nabantu abaqavile* (praises criticism poems for kings and other important people), *Izithakazelo* (clan names/praises), *Izangelo* (composed by mothers for children or about their married life) (Groenewald 2003; Turner 1994).

Categorising Zulu Oral Poetry

There are at least four (4) categories of oral poetry found in the isiZulu language and traditions. And they are the following:

- 1) *Izilandelo* (word games children play)
- 2) *Izandelo* (A poem a mother may compose for her child which she uses to pacify her/him, and, more importantly, she may employ it to speak about her marital situation)
- 3) *Izinkondlo* (poems, *isimekezo*/bridal song)
- 4) *Izibongo* (surnames, clan names, praise criticism poetry)

Categorising *Izibongo*

Since the focus of this paper is on *izibongo* of King Shaka, it is also imperative to place this genre within the broader context of *izibongo* as found within the broader isiZulu traditions. They are categorised as follows:

- 1) *Izibongo zamakhosi* (criticism poetry)
- 2) *Izihasho* (exposé or résumé poetry)
- 3) *Izibongo zomndeni/uzalo* and *Izithakazelo* (identity names and poems)

The Historical Context of Shaka as Zulu King

Shaka was an illegitimate child to Senzangakhona kaJama Zulu, a prince ruling over a tiny and weak Zulu clan whose only claim to fame rested on the excellent quality of tobacco it produced, and Nandi ka Mbengi Mhlongo, a princess of the equally unimportant Langeni clan. Shaka was born around 1785 after a tumultuous love affair between his father, who was a married chief, and his mother who was not yet married.

When the Langeni people reported to Senzangakhona's Zulu clan that Nandi was expecting a child, the Zulu clan responded through Mudli, a senior relative to Senzangakhona, that the girl was not pregnant, but suffering from a women disease called *ishaka*. When the baby boy was born, the Langeni people promptly sent word to Senzangakhona's headquarters and the Zulus to come and see their *ishaka*. Nandi gave the baby the name Shaka to always to remind herself of the rejection by Senzangakhona and her humiliation by her own people who sent her unceremoniously to Senzangakhona's homestead and, above all, to plant an abiding motive in Shaka which would eventually define his life's purpose.

From Shaka's birth to a tender age, Nandi drilled in his mind the idea that he was a man of destiny. Nandi wanted Shaka to be the greatest leader that part of the world had ever seen, partly to vindicate herself, and also to punish Senzangakhona for humiliating both her and her children. As Shaka was growing up, Nandi stopped calling him Shaka; instead she lovingly called him Mlilwana: "blazing little fire." Nandi foresaw the day the little fire would reduce to ashes the political and social structure that had hurt and wounded her and her children so much for many years. While self-vindication on the part of Nandi and Shaka was a powerful influence behind their attitude to men and events, it not the only one. Mother and son set out as a team on a mission to establish a social order in which it would never be a crime for a person to be a child of his or her particular parents—a society in which a person could realise the promise of being human regardless of antecedents, sex, or status.

Both had a vested interest in a society in which they would be able to make the best of their choices. Nandi saw herself and her children as victims of the greed of the aristocratic families of her time in the sense that, on one hand Nandi and her children were regarded as an embarrassment, as the children were born outside proper marriage, while on the other, they were seen as extra mouths to be fed by both the eLangeni and Zulu clans. She awakened in Shaka the hatred for aristocracy that made it impossible for him to leave behind heirs who would reimpose the deprivation he had fought against. He believed that anybody with the requisite qualities had the right to be a king of the nation he was to found. Nandi was constantly pointing to the strife in Natal and the clamour people raised against it as a challenge which Shaka had to accept; she taught him at all times that his destiny was to set the heavens themselves on fire in a bid to vindicate himself, his mother and her children, as well as to correct an historical injustice. His duty to all the people who were punished for being children of particular

parents was to overthrow the rule of the unjust conservatives and substitute it with a just society in which merit fixed the position of the citizen in national life.

It was therefore Shaka's destiny to accept and face this challenge not only to demonstrate that he was a better man than his good-for-nothing father, but, above all, because he would be obeying the order issued by the ancestors. The order was issued to Senzangakhona in the 1780s through the mouth of a poet who had defined the destiny of the Zulu clan in the following lines:

Asiphoth' Intambende Menzi ka Jama
Siyemazulwini, lapho nezithutha zingeyukufika;
Zobasakhwele, kwephukamazwane
(Ngubane 1976, 132)

Let's weave a cord of destiny
O Menzi, scion of Jama,
That, to heavens beyond the reach of spirit-forms
We may climb (so long must the cord be)
The spirit-forms will break their tiny toes
If they dare to climb

The yearning expressed in the poet's lines above can trace its roots far back to when Malandela named his infant son Zulu. In the name he chose, Malandela responded to the challenge to become a living ideal and to the call of the ages. The Zulus say he spoke to generations still to be born; in all that, he made an enduring commitment to posterity. However, neither Zulu ka Malandela, nor his successors, like Mageba, Ndaba, Jama, and Senzangakhona, had lived up to the expectation. It took an illegitimate child born outside wedlock, who had to endure humiliation for the sins of his parents, to live up to that expectation. Shaka became the king against all odds. In fact, throughout the history of the Zulu clan, no one could be fairly described as a king before Shaka. All those who came before him ruled over a very small and unimportant clan occupying an equally small area.

Contextualising Symbolism and Signs in Zulu Traditions

Victor Turner (cited in Deflem 1991) inferred the properties of symbols from three levels or fields of meaning: the exegetical, operational, and positional meanings of ritual symbols. The exegetical meaning is obtained from questioning indigenous informants about observed ritual behaviour so that a symbol's manifest sense (of which the ritual subjects are fully aware) can be revealed. The informants may be ritual specialists or laymen. Exegesis can also be derived through the analysis of myths, through the fragmentary interpretations of separate rituals or ritual stages, and through written or verbally uttered doctrines and dogmas. In exegesis, the meaning of a symbol may rest on three semantic foundations: (a) the nominal basis, or the name of a symbol in ritual and/or non-ritual contexts, (b) the substantial basis, or the culturally selected physical

characteristics of symbolic objects, and (c) the artifactual basis, or the symbolic object after it has been moulded and fashioned as a product of human activity. A symbol's operational meaning, which reveals its latent sense (of which the subjects are only marginally aware), is derived from observing not only what is said about a ritual, but also what is done with it and how it is used. This includes observation of the people who handle the symbol in the ritual activity, as well as inquiries about why certain people are absent on particular ritual occasions. The positional meaning of a symbol refers to its relationship with other symbols in the total ritual complex and reveals the symbol's hidden (from the ritual subjects' unconscious) senses. In a given ritual only one or a few of the meanings of the polysemous symbol may be stressed or become paramount at different stages of a ritual, so that a symbol becomes fully meaningful only in relation to other symbols of different ritual performances.

When applying Turner's theory to the study of symbolic meaning in *izibongo* of King Shaka, the exegetical meaning will be subjective, as explained by the person performing or reciting the *izibongo*, that is the *imbongi* (bard). The operational meaning will be based on objective observation by the researcher that deals with the purpose of *izibongo* of Shaka in the Zulu society. And, finally, the positional meaning will take all symbols into account and concerns the relationship between them.

In discussing the poetic features of Zulu kings' personal praises, I will focus on imagery, and pay little or no attention to structure. My view is that most of the critics on Zulu *izibongo* mentioned earlier have extensively focused on structure; instead, this study is about meaning and context. As Finnegan observes, "[t]he imagery in this form of poetry (i.e., criticism poetry) provides a striking contrast to the much more straightforward expression in prose. By far the most common form is that of metaphor" (Finnegan 1977, 133). Metaphors used in Zulu ~~praise~~ criticism poetry are commonly based on animals (wild animals and birds, less commonly domestic), and natural phenomena like the sun, wind, storms, lightning, rivers and pools, et cetera. Let us take these separately to see how frequently they occur in Zulu personal ~~praise~~ criticism or résumé poetry. However, before any attempt to decode/decipher symbolic expressions can be made, it is advisable to first identify and understand the general properties of the dominant symbolism in any given culture. The following are four properties of dominant symbols that characterise and categorise the functional nature of symbols in a culture:

- Condensation: Many things and actions are represented in a single iconic formation, e.g., the national flag of South Africa represents unity, power, and loyalty.
- Unification: Many disparate significates are interconnected and unified by the common possession of certain analogous qualities, e.g., blood (from menstruation), river, and serpent are all connected by the quality of flowing or crawling on the earth's surface.

- Polarisation: Symbols typically possess two distinct poles of meaning; one normative (moral rules of society) and the other sensory (natural and physiological processes).
- Polyvalence: Dominant symbols always have more than one meaning and link into many domains of culture at a variety of levels.

Making Sense of Symbolic Expressions in *Izibongo* of King Shaka

It is explication I am after, construing [interpreting, reading, understanding, taking to mean] social expressions on their surface enigmatical. But this pronouncement, a doctrine in a clause, demands itself some explication. (Geertz 1973, 5)

As stated earlier on in the introductory paragraphs, the intention of this article is to critically analyse some connotations (meanings, implications, suggestions, associations, undertones, subtexts, inferences, references, overtones, nuances) and denotations (meanings, significances, substances, connotations, gist) in King Shaka's criticism poetry; it is therefore crucial to begin by examining individual parts as expressed in the excerpt from King Shaka's *izibongo* quoted above.

The excerpt possesses at least four dominant symbols with various properties, as stated above. These symbols include the following: *usiba* (feather), *indlondlo* (old black mamba), *Nobamba* (Jama royal residence), and King Shaka himself. For example, *usiba* (feather) and *indlondlo* (old black mamba) are both connected by the quality of "wisdom"; *indlondlo* (old black mamba) is associated with standing tall, and is fearsome (formidable, terrifying, frightening, terrible); *Nobamba* is an iconic figure representing unity, power, and loyalty; and lastly, King Shaka has more than one meaning and links into many domains of culture at a variety of levels, as a ruler/leader, respected, fearsome, in possession of the wisdom from the ancestors or shades, standing tall above the rest.

Symbols can transform a king into something which no ordinary language can express. In this way, a king can either be enlarged to become something bigger or be reduced into something small or useless. For example, *usiba* and *indlondlo* represent a status beyond the ordinary—that of flying to the highest spiritual realm, and wisdom of the shades. Somewhere in Shaka's *izibongo*, there is a line which reads thus:

Ilemb' eleq' amany' amalembé ngokukhalipha
(Nyembezi 1958, 19)

(an axe that exceeds other axes with sharpness)

In this portion Shaka is likened to a sharp axe that surpasses other axes. However, the phrase "sharp axe" is a metaphorical expression of wisdom and decisive action. Shaka's brilliance and brightness is further expressed in another portion, later on in his *izibongo*, when the bard says the following:

*ilang' eliphume linsizwa
lathi liphezulu lansasa
ilang' eliphandl' elinye ngemisebe
ngoba liphandl' elaseMthandeni*
(Nyembezi 1958, 21)

(the sun that rose without rays, but when high, it became like a star
The sun that blinded another with its rays,
As it blinds the sun of EmThandeni homestead)

Being sharper and brighter than the rest is also expressed through a metaphor of *ilanga* (the sun) with very bright rays. Through his brightness and sharpness, Shaka made his rivals blind, blunt, and stupid. Through his extraordinary character and courage, Shaka made even the other brilliant individuals look ordinary. Shaka's war tactics made other chiefs and kings look like their spears have turned blunt.

As *indlondlo*, he did not only possess or display the wisdom associated with the dead/shades/ancestors, but he was fearsome and commanded respect attributed to the *indlondlo* (old black mamba) itself. *Indlondlo* is by far the longest and deadliest snake in the land of the Zulus. It is feared and respected as *Inkosi yamadlozi* (king of the shades/dead/ancestors). As a king, he was also viewed as the ruler of both the dead and the living. Hence, it was through this association that the old dream of Mandela of an ideal life was realised. Shaka represented that ideal of a nation that is so immense and high that it touches the sky, *Izulu*, like the sun.

Shaka is also reduced to something small when *imbongi* says the following:

*igawu bazawuliluma,
bazawuliphimisa,
bakhumbul' amagaw' abebesi*
(Nyembezi 1958, 19)

(a watermelon, they will bite,
They will spit out,
And remember the young and unripe watermelons)

When Shaka was born, he was reduced to a small stomach bug, as he was given the name Shaka, the name of a stomach bug that affects women as if they are pregnant. After birth, he was sent together with his mother to his father Senzangakhona's residence, but later he was thrown out. He was again taken back by his mother's eLangeni clan, only to be thrown out again later. It was as if people from both sides were biting into and spitting out some unripe melon; this was owing to his sin of being born out of wedlock to his mother who was a very young girl. This humiliation by his father's and mother's clans is also expressed by his bard, when he says:

Inteth' egolwe nganti zamkhonto kwaMalandela

(Nyembezi 1958, 20)

(a locust hunted with spears' sticks at Malandela territory)

Here Shaka is reduced to a locust, another insect (as he was earlier referred to as *ishaka*, the bug that causes the stomach to swell), which is poked with spears or sticks by the people of his clan. A locust is an insect that usually hops around, from place to place, although they can fly too. Shaka was such a character who “hopped” from village to village as he was conquering different clans to forge one united nation. The locust metaphor is also significant, especially in light of the trail of destruction (particularly to people’s livelihoods) that it leaves as it “hops” from one place to the next.

Another property of dominant symbols is “unification,” whereby disparate significates are interconnected and unified by the common possession of certain analogous qualities. For example, blood (from menstruation), river, and serpent are all connected by the quality of flowing or slithering on the earth’s surface. Nyembezi (1958, 21–22) refers to Shaka in the following way:

*Umthombo wamanzi wakwaNobamba,
Engiphuze kuwo ngagangatheka
Ngaze ngaphos' ukudliwa nazimamba,
Ebezilala ehlozini nasephungweni*

(spring/river of Nobamba
Where I drank,
Nearly eaten by mambas,
Who rested in a nearby shrubs)

Clearly the mambas and the river are unified by a common characteristic, that of slithering on the surface of the earth. Moreover, their movement is never a straight one; they wind and twist as they slither on the surface of the earth. The land of the Zulus is known for its long and rushing streams or rivers, similar to the fast movement of a long black mamba.

A mamba, like all other snakes, does not chew its prey; it simply catches and swallows it. As such, the *imbongi* refers to King Shaka as

*Lusiba gojela ngalaphaya kweNkandla,
Lugojela njalo ludl'amadoda.*
(Nyembezi 1958, 22)

(the feather that swallows beyond Nkandla,
It swallows as it eats men)

This draws our attention to the fact that the old black mamba is said to have a feather between the eyes, which is similar to what Shaka was known for: a feather on his

forehead, between his eyes. Shaka's method of building one powerful nation was not to crush his rivals (chew), but to swallow them into his kingdom, like a snake that swallows its prey whole into its stomach.

Conclusion

Metaphors are therefore critical in our understanding of King Shaka's life and reign as king. We use metaphors to group areas of experience ("life is a journey"), to orientate ourselves ("my consciousness was raised"), to convey expression through the senses ("his eyes were glued to the screen"), to describe learning ("it had a germ of truth in it"), et cetera. Even ideas are commonly pictured as objects ("the idea had been around for a while"), as containers ("I didn't get anything out of that") or as things to be transferred ("he got the idea across") (Smith 2002).

The use of metaphor in poetry is one of the most important aspects of poetic style that must be mastered. Metaphor can be described as a figure of speech in which a thing is referred to as being something that it in some way resembles. For example, a fierce and fearsome person, like Shaka, is referred to as *indlondlo* (an old black mamba). Shaka is also described as a ferocious sun fire that blinds others, *ilanga eliphume linsizwa, lithe liphezulu lansasa*. In this way, metaphors are used in poetry to explain and elucidate emotions, feelings, and relationships to other elements that could not be described in ordinary language. Gary Smith (2002) states, "an easy way to understand metaphor is to view a metaphor as a simile without the word 'like.' A simile compares two things in a clear fashion."

The study was guided by an inquiry into aspects of *connotations* as well as *denotations* with regard to the Zulu language and traditions towards an analysis of symbols as applied to *izibongo* of King Shaka. As such, issues relating to both implicit as well as explicit meanings derived from metaphoric application of cultural expressions within the broader isiZulu language were examined. Consider, for example, the following:

*Indlondlo yakithi KwaNobamba,
Indlondl'ehamb'ibang'amacala
(Nyembezi 1958, 22)*

(the old-black mamba of Nobamba,
Old-black mamba that causes trouble wherever it goes)

Indlondlo (black mamba) is the longest snake in the land of the Zulus. It is feared for its venom and aggression and it is quick in striking an enemy or its prey. In this regard, both its length and colour send fear to everything in its way or confronted with it. This is explicitly attached to the character of the symbol in the form of *indlondlo* in *izibongo* of King Shaka. The same could be said in relation to the word *KwaNobamba*, which was the royal residence of Jama ka Ndaba, grandfather to King Shaka, the son of Senzangakhona. Explicitly, the name refers to a place of grabbing and a royal residence.

A name can sometimes be given to a place in relation to an event (historical or current) that took place there, similar to a name given to a child, person, animal, or tree, due to attributes associated with it.

But, on the other hand, tacit or inexplicable meaning can be attached to a name such as *indlondlo* and *Nobamba*. In referring to Shaka as *indlondlo*, the *imbongi* (bard) is implying that King Shaka is king not just of the ordinary people, but also of the *yamadlozi* (shades/ancestors/dead), as *indlondlo* sometimes is affectionately referred to as *inkosi yamadlozi* of the Zulu nation. But another deeper meaning could be that Shaka represents *amadlozi*, or was brought by *amadlozi*, to make their dream come true; *Mageba lazihlonza* was said when his great grandfather Mageba (father to Ndaba, who is father to Jama) was born. Through him, Mageba's dream for a continuation of the Zulu lineage to the throne was realised—*lazihlonza* came true.

As stated earlier, this dream was first espoused by Malandela when he named his infant son Zulu (sky, heavens) to mean the sky and to indicate that in him was the root for a future where the people would excel beyond any imaginable height, which is likened to the realm beyond the infinite universe itself. This dream persisted right up to the times of Senzangakhona, father to Shaka, Dingane, and Mpande (who all became kings of the Zulu nation in succession to one another), and it was to be expressed through the mouth of the *imbongi* when he said the following:

Asiphoth' Intambende Menzi ka Jama
Siyemazulwini, laphe nezithutha zingeyukufika;
Zobasakhwele, kwephukamazwane

(Ngubane 1976, 132)

Inkatha yesizwe was a coil made out of grass picked from where paths meet, all over the land of the Zulus, and it was mixed with certain human body parts from defeated enemies of the king, as well as animal body parts of powerful beasts, and also included sacred herbs and roots, which were wrapped in a python skin. This was placed in a special hut called *esikhupheni*, accessible only to the king, his doctors, as well as the special queen like queen Langazana of Senzangakhona. It is said that a king would spend time in *esikhupheni* before great national ceremonies such as *umhlanga*, *ukweshwama*, *ukubutha amabutho*. Here, the king was attended by his special doctors, one after the other, and treated with special medicines in preparation for coming ceremonies.

It was these attributes of the *Inhlwathi* (python) that *imbongi* associated King Shaka: a power that grabbed (*Nobamba*) the nation together. It should also be noted that in those times there were no border patrols as we have today; innate and enigmatic loyalty was the only power that kept people inside the kingdom. *Inhlwathi* or *umonya* was also associated with the presence of *amadlozi*, shades, during the ritual of rain formation in the history of the Zulus (Berglund 1976). This association of *inhlwathi* with *Inkatha*, as well as *Nobamba*, further illustrates the idea that *Nobamba* was not just a royal residence

of Jama ka Ndaba, but *umuzi weDlozi* (house of the ancestor) and an *inkaba* (umbilical cord) as well as life giver of the Zulu nation.

Imbongi was right when he said:

*UQangabhodiya wawoMkabayi.
UNdaba ngiyameba, ngimuka naye,
Ngimbuka kwehla nezinyembezi,
Kuba sengathi ngibuk'isihlahla soMdlebe.
Ndabezitha!*

(Nyembezi 1958, 26)

(The favourite of Mkabayi.
The king I gaze non-stop, I gaze till tears roll down,
As if I look at *umdlebe* tree.
Salute!)

Indeed, *Shaka*, *Indlondlo*, *Nobamba*, *Mkabayi*, and the ancestral dream of becoming a great nation where individuals were afforded freedom to be what they want to be was like *umdlebe* tree, which attracts people and animals alike towards itself to feed. This was a time of great prosperity and a taste of ideal life, the times of Mfecane, which those who still ate with *ingxwembe endala* (old spoon aristocracy) did not want. It was a time when many different people descended into the land of the Zulus attracted by its cry, which in turn, like the *umdlebe* tree, fed the kingdom and all who were drawn to it.

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