

BEYOND *DUDLU NTOMBAZANA!* – THE VOICE OF S.E.K. MQHAYI

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses selected poems produced by S.E.K. Mqhayi, a well-known writer of isiXhosa poetry whose work was published in several isiXhosa early newspapers. Mqhayi is also acknowledged as the first prominent isiXhosa writer to produce poetry and novels, and is credited with initiating the transition from oral to written literature at the beginning of the 19th century. In this article, selected poems are analysed against the backdrop of gender relations among amaXhosa. The article sets out to discover how Mqhayi was able to depict and praise women and their contributions in early amaXhosa society.

INTRODUCTION

As implied in seminal studies by Schapera (1965), Cope (1968), Jordan (1971), Kunene (1971), Okpewho (1992), Opland (1998) and others, *izibongo* ('praise poetry') are composed and directed at men, rather than women, despite the fact that many women have acquitted themselves in their fields of specialisation or service. Barber (1991, 270) is more specific about this lack in terms of praises honouring

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women. Writing about the *oriki* (praises) for women she states that women's public faces are less differentiated than those of men. Barber (ibid, 271) adds that though everyone agrees there were historically important women, their personalities rarely emerge in stories about the past. These women are almost submerged in the family or cult in which they operated and lived.

The aim of this article is to establish whether women are ever honoured with praises or chronicling – and if so, how this is done. The article focuses on the poetic techniques employed as well as the gender issues raised. S.E.K. Mqhayi (1857–1945), the great *imbongi yesizwe jikelele* ('the national praise poet or bard') has been identified as a poet whose works may provide a basis for research in this regard. Describing his mettle both as a writer and oral poet, Qangule (1979, vii) notes that Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi has been declared the most successful of all modern isiXhosa writers, having been proclaimed 'The Shakespeare of the Xhosa language'. Qangule (ibid, 23) cites Yali-Manisi (1952), who had a high regard for Mqhayi and stated the following:

Ngumbhali weencwadi zaxak' amadoda,
Zaxak' izazi, zaxak' iingqondi.
 'He is the author of books that puzzled men of power,
 They puzzled men of knowledge, they puzzled great minds.'

Qangule (1979) also cites Ngcwabe (1974) in respect of Mqhayi:

Umbhali weencwadi, igqirha lesizwe, umxoxi weendaba,
Imbongi yesizwe jikelele!!!
 'The writer of books, the healer of the nation, the news columnist,
 The national bard indeed!!!'

In the view of both Yali-Manisi and Ngcwabe, it is clear that Mqhayi was a prolific writer and an *imbongi* (praise poet) of great repute. Mqhayi's works touch on many different subjects, which in turn makes him of national interest. That he is published across different literary genres is further proof of his calibre as an author. In this article, Mqhayi's poems provide a useful basis for investigating the techniques used to praise women.

The poems selected for discussion are drawn from Mqhayi's poetry anthology *Inzuzo*, published in 1943. Although the poems are published in written form, the researcher believes they were first orally rendered before being written down, as events around the poems appear to suggest.

As the fields of traditional leadership and politics are dominated by men, it is no surprise to find that there are a limited number of poems about women, hence the selection of two poems for analysis:

Umfikazi uCharlotte Manyhi Maxeke (Mqhayi 1943, 43–44); and

Unkosazana Minah Thembeke (*Intokazi kaRhulumente Philip Soga*) (ibid, 68–70).

It is common among young amaXhosa men to voice the following compliments for girls as they pass by: *Dudlu ntombazana!* ('What a beautiful [well-endowed] girl you are!'), *Thambo lam lekhentakhi!* ('My Kentucky [chicken] bone!') and so on – hence the title of this article. As stated earlier, such comments show appreciation for a girl's physical appearance. These expressions are quite beautiful, but lack any substantial content.

Having touched on these simple praises, it is worth mentioning that clan praises are shared by everyone among the amaXhosa, as is the case in many African cultures. Girls are therefore also praised by using their clan names. The clan praises are, however, at a much higher level in terms of status than the simple praises used by young men. For the purpose of this article, it is of interest to establish whether girls and women receive any other forms of praise beyond these simple praises.

THE SELECTED POEMS BY S.E.K. MQHAYI

Umfikazi uCharlotte Manyhi Maxeke

"Ndesuka ndingunina kwaSirayeli" (*Gwebi* 5: 7).

Le ntombi kaManyhi noko ingumSuthukazi, yaqala ukulibona ilanga kweli lizwe lakowethu lakwaNgqika; yafunda apha yawela ukuya eMerika isuka phakathi kwethu apha; yade yabuya nelo xhoba liyimfundo yeza nalo ekhaya; latyiwa ngawo onke ama-Afrika – into leyo ezingabeleyo iimfundi neemfundikazi. Ide yendiswa kwasithi, ingazendisanga, siyendisela kulo mfana kaMaxeke, kwaNdondele, emaGqunukhwebeni. Ngakho oko

1

*Shukumani bafazi
Ushenxil' uMamarhixirhixi;
Ufinyis' amagruxu.
Ushenxil' okad' esakh' umzi,
Egutyul' irhanga namanxila;
Egodus' amahilihil' agoduke;
Kubuy' amadungudwan' emazweni.
Itye lesiseko seTiyopiya!
Shukumani bafazi!*

2

*Igqibil' intomb' asemzini;
Igqibil' intomb' aseLusuthu;
Umfazi wamaNywabe kwaGatyeni;
Ukhe wabek' iinyawo kwelabatshwana;
Kusapho lukaKhama nolwabaRolweni;*

Wabek' amabele kubaThembu, -
 Kumabandla kandaba kaZondwa;
 ETyhalharha kwingcwaba likaNgangezwe
 Maz' emabele made yaseAfrika, -
 Okwanyis' usapho lukaNtu luphela;
 Azi nonyaka yaphusile nje, -
 Logangwa yintokazi kabani na?
 Menzelen' ilitye lokukhunjulwa,
 Ze siqhayisele ngal' amavilakazi.
 Az' angaz' alityalwe kowabo;
 Az' angaz' alityalw' emhlabeni;
 Az' angaz' alityalw' eAfrika!
 Nci! Ncincilili!!!

'The late Mrs Charlotte Manyhi Maxeke

"Arose a mother in Israel." (Judges 5:7)

This daughter of Manyhi even though she is MoSotho she was born in our country in the land of Ngqika; She went to school here and travelled to America from among us; She ultimately returned with that prey which is education and brought it back home; all the Africans benefitted from it – something rare from educated men and women. We then handed her over for marriage; she did not marry without consulting, to the young man of Maxeke of the Nywabe, Gatyeni, Ndongela clan of emaGqunukhwebeni. Therefore

1

Stand up women
 The scraper has shifted;
 The one who removes refuse.
 Gone is the one who has been building a home,
 Removing the idle and the drunkards;
 Sending home those who like to be away from home;
 And those who travel without purpose come home.
 The foundation stone of Ethiopia!
 Stand up women!

2

This daughter has now finished;
 The daughter from Lesotho has finished;
 The wife of the Nywabe, Gatyeni clan;
 She once visited Botswana;
 The family of Khama and of the Barolong;
 And set foot in Thembuland, -
 At the land of the people of Ndaba of Zondwa;

In Tylarha at the grave of Ngangezwe
 Woman of Africa with big breasts, -
 To feed the entire family of Ntu;
 Now that this year it no longer yields milk, -
 Which woman will come to the rescue?
 Erect a stone in her memory,
 And then with it spite the lazy ones.
 So that her people should not forget her;
 So that she should not be forgotten in this world;
 So that she should never be forgotten in Africa!
 I stop!’

The poem *Umfikazi uCharlotte Manyhi Maxeke* is a tribute to Charlotte Maxeke who, according to Qangule (1979, 127) was a founder and President of the Bantu Women’s league, which was a branch of the African National Congress. Among her other leadership positions and initiatives, Qangule (1979) states that she founded the Wilberforce Institute in Pretoria; opened a college at Ramokgopa in Pietersburg (the present Polokwane); opened a labour bureau for black women at the Magistrate’s Court in Johannesburg where she was employed as a black welfare officer; and she gave evidence before a number of South African government commissions regarding black affairs. In *The encyclopaedia Africana dictionary of African biography*, Volume 3 (1995, 153–154), she is described as one of South Africa’s prominent African women leaders.

Mqhayi makes a call to women to stand up, urging them to ‘Wake up!’, to follow the example of Maxeke, whom she calls *uMamarhixirhixi* (Qangule [1979] translates this as ‘the scraper’). Maxeke is referred to as someone who has been instrumental in building the community and who has been involved in church matters, as suggested in *Itye lesiseko seTiyopiya!* (‘The foundation stone of Ethiopia!’).

The poet states that Maxeke has done her bit in life. By referring to her as *intomb’ asemzini* (‘a girl from elsewhere’), he foregrounds the fact that she was born a MoSotho, who married into the Gatyeni clan, taking to husband the Reverend Marshall Maxeke of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Maxeke’s service among the African people is notable, as the poet highlights her visits, among others, to Thembuland. The reference to her breasts feeding the children of *Ntu* (‘Africa’) is further evidence of her service to the people of the continent. This service is true evidence of her patriotism. As a patriot the poet proposes that a memorial (monument) be built in her honour. Even though the poem is a tribute to someone who has died there is no overt sadness as a result of the death, instead the poet celebrates the life of the hero, Maxeke. The call to women to emulate her good work creates tension in the poem because, the deeds of this hero seem unlikely to be attained by anyone else, just as the Biblical text (Judges 5: 7) suggests – she is an exceptional mother of Africa. The poet acknowledges Maxeke for her excellent

national service and urges those who come after her to take up the baton and press on. The extent of her service is reported by Qangule (1979, 127) who cites an extract from *South African Outlook* (1939): ‘She sacrificed comfort and sleep for duty.’ This extract captures Maxeke’s commitment to national service. The preface, written in prose, provides biographical information on Maxeke, emphasising her educational training in America which she shared with all Africans upon her return. Her character as an exceptional person emerges in this part, as the poet states that it is rare for educated Africans to share their education with everyone. The preface ends with the phrase, *Ngakho oko* (‘therefore’), which is similar to the *izibongo* (‘praise poetry’) formula *Hoyini!* (‘Don’t you want to listen to me?’). This suggests that the poem is a performance which was written down (or documented) after the performance. The vast difference in the number of verses between the two stanzas suggests that the poem was only divided into stanzas after it had been reduced to writing, otherwise it was (or is supposed to be) in paragraphs.

Family background and ancestry

The preface in prose form provides a detailed family background, reflecting pride in *Le ntombi* (‘This girl/daughter’). Maxeke’s maiden name was Manyi. Even though she was MoSotho by origin, she was born in Fort Beaufort (in the Ngqika area). She married Marshall Maxeke, a Gqunukhwebe, whose clan names were Gatyeni, Mnywabe and Ndongela (ancestral names). Through marriage Maxeke was associated with her husband’s family, yet she was also respected by her family, as is evident in *Ide yendiswa kwasithi, ingazendisanga...* (‘We then handed her over for marriage, she did not marry without consulting...’).

Motherhood

In stanza one Maxeke is referred to as *uMamarhixirhixi* (‘the scraper’), which suggests that she was particularly concerned about doing the dirty work, as suggested in the verse

Ufnyis’ amagruxu.

‘The one who removes refuse.’

This kind of work is what a mother does for her family, especially for her children. That she looks well after her family is suggested in the following verses from stanza one,

Ushenxil’ okad’ esakh’ umzi,

Egutyul’ irhanga namanxila;

Egodus’ amahilhil’ agoduke;

Kubuy' amadungudwan' emazweni.

'Gone is the one who has been building a home,
Removing the idle and the drunkards;
Sending home those who like to be away from home;
And those who travel without purpose come home.'

She built the home and cleaned away all the dirt from the area and surrounds. All those who did not like home would return home. In stanza two she is referred to as *intombi* ('daughter'), a term indicative of pride. Next she is referred to as *umfazi* ('wife'). Both terms show the respect the poet has for Maxeke, who comes from a respectable background.

Mother Africa

Maxeke was widely travelled, having visited various parts of Southern Africa and abroad. The expression used to describe her travels is *wabek' iinyawo* (i.e., 'she put feet') – the places where she set foot are mentioned, but it is remarkable that the poet varies the phrase and instead employs *wabek' amabele* ('she set the breasts'), to indicate her motherly nature. She visited Thembuland as a mother of the nation, and this can be interpreted to mean she showed her motherly generosity to the inhabitants of that region.

As the mother of Africa she is referred to as

Maz' emabele made yaseAfrika,
'Woman of Africa with big breasts.'

Big breasts are associated with generosity and her ability to reach out to the many who need help. This is captured in the verse

Okwanyis' usapho lukaNtu luphela
'To feed the entire family of Ntu.'

As a mother Maxeke, was deemed to have been looking after all the African people – a national rather than local service.

A married woman

Among themselves, married women refer to one another as *Ntomb' asemzini* which is directly translated as 'daughter from another family'. This occurs in verse one of stanza two. The meaning of this reference is that a married woman is in that specific family by marriage. This form of address implies that she is an outsider.

Umfazi wamaNywabe kwaGatyeni
'The wife of the Nywabe, Gatyeni clan.'

Here, Maxeke is represented as a possession, as if she is owned by the clan into which she married. This may sound belittling, but in the culture of amaXhosa it means she now belongs among her husband's clan and indicates how proud the family is of her. The proposal for a memorial stone in her honour is proof that her new family is proud of her. A memorial stone will remind them of her:

Az' angaz' alityalwe kowabo;

'So that she should never be forgotten by her family/by her home.'

This verse may refer to both Maxeke's maiden and marriage families. The poet therefore demonstrates the esteem in which Maxeke was held by both groupings. She was equally the pride of her country (*kowabo*).

METAPHORS

Death

In stanza one, verses two and three, death is referred to in euphemistic terms as *ushenxile* ('she has moved or shifted'). This can be interpreted to mean that for an important person death is like moving/going to another place. In other words, such a person does not die, instead s/he moves on to render a service elsewhere (above).

In stanza two, verse 11, the poet asks:

Azi nonyaka yaphusile nje?

'What will become of them as this year she has dried up of milk?'

Yaphusile ('her milk dried up') is a euphemism: in dying, her breasts dry up and she can no longer feed her children. This is a gender-specific metaphor for the death of an eminent female.

The strong woman

That Maxeke was a strong woman who made an invaluable contribution, is expressed in stanza one, verse eight:

Itye lesiseko seTiyopiya!

'The foundation stone of Ethiopia!'

In Maxeke's African Methodist Episcopal Church she was a pillar of strength, representing the church at national gatherings. According to Qangule (1979, 127) she did missionary work throughout the Republic of South Africa. She was therefore highly valued by her congregation.

IZIBONGO TECHNIQUES

Opening and closing formulae

The poem follows a prose preface which closes with the conjunctive *Ngakho oko* ('therefore'). The conjunctive serves to signal a new and different genre after the prose. This sudden twist is followed by a sharp call to all women, *Shukumani bafazi* ('Stand up, women'), which is a typical *izibongo* formula similar to *Hoyina-a-a!* (the full text is *Anindihoyi na?*, ['Don't you want to listen to me?']).

In an oral performance, the opening formula is rendered in a loud voice so as to draw the attention of the audience who are often celebrating at a feast and might not hear without being invited to do so. The *imbongi* employs the opening formula to invite everyone to listen. As Maxeke was a national figure it is as if Mqhayi is addressing a big gathering of people at her memorial service.

With regard to the function of the opening formula, Mokitimi (1998, 51) states that the introductory technique helps the artist capture the interest and response of the audience, since in oral literature performance the interaction between artist and audience is essential. Mqhayi is known for the closing formula, *Nci Ncililili!* As Mqhayi demonstrates in this poem, his opening formula (which differs from his usual one) is evidence of individual creativity (ibid, 57). There are also variations in the closing formula, which demonstrates the artists' individual creativity.

Repetition

According to Okpewho (1992, 71) repetition is a fundamental characteristic feature of oral literature, with both an aesthetic and a utilitarian value: it is a device that not only gives a touch of beauty or attractiveness to a piece of oral expression (whether song, narrative or statement), but also serves certain practical purposes in the overall organisation of the oral performance. As the poem *Umfikazi uCharlotte Manyhi Maxeke* shows features of being an oral performance, it is logical that one would need to examine instances of repetition – such oral performances would feature an *imbongi*, which Mqhayi was.

The call to women to take action (first verse of stanza one) is repeated in the closing verse of the same stanza. Since the call is only made in the first stanza, such repetition lends finality to the call, as it is made once and for all.

As regards Maxeke's work, the poet makes use of the initial repetition in stanza one:

Egutyul' irhanga namanxila
Egodus' amahilihil' agoduke
 'Removing the idle and the drunkards;
 Sending home those who like to be away from home.'

This repetition of verbal items emphasises the work she did. That she would work tirelessly is suggested by the use of the consecutive form of verbs in the verses.

That she did all she had to do, is expressed through the repetition in stanza two in verses one and two:

Igqibil' intomb' asemzini
Igqibil' intomb' aseLusuthu
 'This daughter has now finished;
 The daughter from Lesotho has finished.'

The lexical repetition in these two verses, coupled with syntactic repetition, adds to the fact that Maxeke has fulfilled her duties and has now departed. As regards the aesthetics of the poem, the verses have a beautiful appeal both to the eye and the ear. This repetition is complemented by the repetition in verses 14 to 17 of stanza two. This last part of the poem is evidence of piling, which Okpewho (1992, 83) defines as coupling one detail/idea with another, so that the whole performance builds up to a climax. The poem is constructed in such a way that it builds up to a climax. This is achieved through piling, a perfect device to narrate a life history when paying tribute to an individual. Mqhayi, as *imbongi*, employs this technique successfully in this poem.

Unkosazana Minah Thembeka (Intokazi kaRhulumente Philip Soga)

“Wathi uDyaftha Yini na le, ntombi yam!” (Gwebi 11: 35)

1

Wawel' uNomagaxagaxa!
Yawel' inkosazana,
Intomb' akwaDlomo komkhulu;
Umafungwa ngabaThembu, -
 KwaZondwa kwaMadiba.
 KwaHala nakwaNdaba;
 KwaCedume nakwaBhomoyi.
 Waxelelen' amaz' olwandle,
 Namhl' ev' isifuba senkosazana,
 Qobokazana lingalalanga mzini,
 Lingalal' emzini lilahlekile!!!

2

Hamba Thembeka ntombam!
 Ujonge eMpuma bejonge eNtshona;
 Wajonga kwicala lezazi!
 Hamb' uzubuye kakuhle,
 Nokungabuyi kusalungile,
 Kwabuy' abaneempondwana!

Usale wen' usikhonzela,
 Ukhonzela thin' ezizweni.
 Wawel' uNomagaxagaxa!
 Intomb' eengubo zimgxashe,
 Zixak' iinkokeli neenkosi.

3

Lalani zinduli zolwandle!
 Phantsi konyawo lomNgqikakazi, -
 Umty' omhle owasukw' eMgwali, -
 EQwanti naseNgquleni.
 Wev' umfutho wooSongcangcashe, -
 Yee bhoo amabele kweleMbokothwe;
 Yeza ngobulawu kwelakowayo, -
 KooBonkolo noomaXonxa;
 KooziNdwana noomaCacadu;
 Njengelekaz' akwaThixo!!!

4

Zuzixelel' izizwe neentlanga, -
 Thina kwaNtu besihlala noThixo,
 Sesity' esandleni sakh' esihle,
 Sisalusa sithombisa
 Sizeka sisendisa;
 Ehambahamba phakathi kwethu
 Simnyusel' amadini nemibongo
 Esezal' amanqath' eenkomo zethu;
 Imimang' izele izivivane,
 Imvula zazisin' imivumbi.
 Sikholwa kuvuko lwabafileyo!!!
 Ncincilili!

'Miss Minah Thembeke (Daughter of Rhulumente Philip Soga)

"Jephthah said, Alas, my daughter!"

1

Nomagaxagaxa travels overseas!
 The princess travels overseas,
 The daughter of the Dlomo clan of the royal house;
 The one by whom the Thembu people swear, -
 The Zondwa of Madiba.
 Of Hala and Ndaba;
 Of Cedume and Bhomoyi.
 Tell the waves of the sea
 That today they feel the chest of a maiden,

The maiden who never sleeps at another person's house,
Should she do that she got lost!!!

2

Go Thembeke my daughter!
You look to the East while they look to the West;
You are looking in the direction of the wise!
Go and come back safely,
Even not returning is all right too,
The ones with small horns returned!
Stay behind and serve for us,
You are serving for us in foreign countries
Nomagaxagaxa travelled overseas!
A girl with colourful robes,
Making leaders and chiefs confused.

3

Go down you hills of the sea!
Under the foot of the Ngqika woman, -
A beautiful lace that was tanned at St Mathew's, -
In Qwanti and in Ngquleni.
She responded to the influence of the Songcangcashe's, -
She visited the land of Mbokothwe;
She came to her own country to her family relations, -
To Bonkolo and to Xonxa;
To Ndwana and to Cacadu;
Great General of God's place!!!

4

You should tell the nations and races, -
We Africans lived with God,
Eating from His hand which is beautiful,
Doing male and female initiation rituals;
Giving *lobola* and handing girls over in marriage;
He moved among us,
Giving sacrifices to Him, propitiating Him
And He in turn inhaling the smell of fat from our cattle;
The valleys had many heaps of stones for worship,
The rains were heavy and nonstop.
We believed in the resurrection of the dead!!!
I disappear!'

The title gives a clear indication that the poem is in honour of Miss Minah Thembeke.
The explanation within brackets gives the name of her father, Rhulumente Philip

Soga. The biblical text from Judges 11: 35 serves as a subtitle, appearing as if Minah Thembeke is being compared to Jephthah's daughter who disgraced her father.

According to Qangule (1979, 133), Minah Thembeke Soga was born in Lady Frere, in the Eastern Cape. She qualified as a teacher at Mgwali Girls' Institute (St Mathews in Keiskammahoek) before teaching at public schools in Kimberley for 15 years. She was the only African woman delegate to the Tambaran Conference in Madras. As a result of the impression she made at the Madras Conference she was invited to join the post-Madras team in the United States, where she remained for several months. On her return to South Africa she addressed meetings in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Inanda, Dundee, Kimberley and Cape Town, and at Adams College.

With regard to her outstanding achievement at church, Qangule (ibid.) quotes *South African Outlook* (1940):

One particularly notable occasion was on Sunday, December 17 when Miss Soga spoke in St. George's Presbyterian Church, Johannesburg. It had been reported that this was the first time that any woman, White or Black, had occupied this pulpit. It was an experiment calling for courage and faith on the part of Dr Bruce Gordimer but such confidence proved to be fully justified when Miss Soga faced that large and deservedly critical audience with her thoughtful intelligent and inspiring address.

With such an illustrious character reference Miss Soga earns the name *Nomagaxagaxa*, as she seems to be carrying everyone's expectations on her shoulders. Everyone is excited about the fact that she is going overseas, to Madras. The poet dispatches her with the message to tell the other nations that Africans have always lived with God. That Soga is the first female representative from Africa at the conference in Madras is implied in the following verses from stanza one:

Waxeleden' amaz' olwandle
 Namhl' ev' isifuba senkosazana
 'Tell the waves of the sea
 That today they feel the chest of a maiden'

This also implies that it is the first time a female travels by sea.

In stanza two, the poet commands Soga to travel overseas and come back home afterwards. However, if she does not return, she should serve her country abroad. This double-bind message causes tension in the poem, as the reader is bound to read the biblical text from Judges 11: 35 where it is stated: 'Jephthah said, Alas, my daughter!' as his daughter had disgraced him. It is as if the poet warns Soga not to disgrace her country in a similar manner. The opening biblical text is in opposition to the celebratory spirit of the poem as a whole, hence the tension.

Gender issues

Soga is of royal blood, as she comes from the Madiba clan. In stanza one she is referred to as *inkosazana* ('princess') and *Umafungwa ngabaThembu* ('The one by whom abaThembu swear'), which is in line with her being the first-born daughter of abaThembu. This recognition is cultural, as amaXhosa respect royalty as well as a first-born daughter.

That Soga as a maiden is special, is expressed when the poet informs the waves,
Namhl' ev' isifuba senkosazana
 'That today they feel the chest of a maiden'

People's trust in her is expressed through the usual way of encouraging women to succeed:

Qobokazana lingalalanga mzini
Lingalal' emzini lilahlekile!!!
 'The maiden who never sleeps at another person's house
 Should she do that she got lost!!!'

This is what is said to young girls in order to get them to carry out a chore they have been asked to do. Soga is being encouraged to go on the trip and to be brave. In stanza two, the poet refers to her as *ntombam* ('my daughter') and *Intomb' engubo zimngxashe* ('A girl with colourful robes'). The reference to her as *intombi* shows pride in her. It gives a sense of her being a national figure, a woman of the nation. That she is special is further illustrated by the call made in stanza three for the waves to calm down under the foot of the Ngqika woman (*umNgqikakazi*). That a woman will tame the sea is a sign that Soga has supernatural powers, thus confirming the assertion by Machaba (2011, 14) that women have special powers, hence their association with witchcraft.

In stanza three verse six, the poet reports that Soga visited the land of Mbokothwe, employing the verb for visited (*hambela*) in *Yee bhuu amabele ...* ('She spread her breasts'). Besides the literal meaning, which can be pejorative (meaning she was a loose woman), this metaphor stands in the place of the generic expression *Ukhe wabeka unyawo...* ('She set foot'). The metaphor selected by the poet is gender-specific, yet the reader is curious to know which metaphor the poet would have used, had it been a man. In stanza three, verse ten, the poet refers to Soga as

Njengelekaz' akwaThixo!!!
 'Great General of God's place!!!'

General is a rank reserved for those in the military, thus Soga's status is enhanced because she is given the same title. On an equal footing with highly ranked soldiers, the title also refers to her prowess and bravery in doing the work of God. As a woman,

she is described in heroic terms befitting a delegate to such an auspicious event like the conference in Madras.

Izibongo techniques

In stanza one the poet gives Soga the name *Nomagaxagaxa*, an equivalent of *isikhahlelo*, ‘a praise name’. The name alludes to Soga’s responsibility of carrying with her all the troubles of the people of her country. The poet uses *iziduko* (‘clan names’) to identify Soga with her ancestry and her family, the Sogas of the Dlomo clan and the given clan names: Dlomo, Zondwa, Madiba, Hala, Ndaba, Cedume and Bhomoyi. Repetition is achieved with both initial and final linking employed throughout the poem. Stanza one uses initial linking in verses one and two; and in verses five, six and seven. Initial linking is used again in stanza four in verses three, four and five. Through this device the poet succeeds in keeping together the units that are linked. The announcement that Soga is going overseas is repeated in the initial position in the two verses. The series of *iziduko* given in verses five, six and seven is held together by initial linking, thus emphasising her genealogy.

In stanza two the poet uses counterpoint, a technique defined by the *Concise Oxford dictionary of current English* (1990, 264) as a contrasting argument, plot, idea or literary theme, used to set off the main element. The poet writes:

Hamba Thembeke ntombam!
Ujonge eMpuma bejonge eNtshona;
Wajonga kwicala lezazi!
Hamb’uzubuye kakuhle,
Nokungabuyi kusalungile,
 ‘Go Thembeke my daughter!
 You look to the East while they look to the West;
 You are looking in the direction of the wise!
 Go and come back safely,
 Even not returning is all right too.’

It is through the use of this contrast that Thembeke stands out as an exceptional woman. She is even associated with the biblical wise men from the east – an association that alludes to her religious standing as a firm believer.

Mqhayi, as can be expected, has extensive knowledge of genealogy, as demonstrated when he lists Soga’s clan names. He is also knowledgeable about the places with which he associates her. As an *imbongi*, Mqhayi knows African traditional religious systems, he commands Soga to tell the nations of the world that since time immemorial the amaXhosa have known God and the resurrection of the dead. This extensive knowledge is expected of Mqhayi as *imbongi yesizwe jikelele* (‘the poet of the entire nation’). The closing formula, *Ncincilili!* is typical of Mqhayi. It is not

inappropriate to read this poem as an orally performed one, since its representation in writing came after the performance.

CONCLUSION

Here, Mqhayi praises two heroines for their excellent/heroic achievements. He employs the same poetic techniques as he would when praising male heroes, as attested to by the metaphors employed in the selected poems. Even though Mqhayi uses images that could be misconstrued as stereotypical, this does not seem to be the case since the whole poem lauds great achievements. In *UDon Jadu*, Mqhayi engages a young man with a group of girls who force him to choose one of them as his lover (*ukwenzisa* as the game is called in isiXhosa). Although Dondolo, the young man, finally complies, Mqhayi (in an aside) makes the character declare that he is trying to get the girls to go to school so that they can be educated. To this character, the game *ukwenzisa* is a side-show which is taken seriously by girls. As a man he is engaged in the more serious business of getting the nation educated.

Mqhayi is an advocate of justice, as demonstrated through the selected poems in this study. That Mqhayi is ahead of his time in advocating for justice for all – and in particular for women – is observed by Saule (2014):

This being Women's Month, how can one explain the fact that Mqhayi published an essay in 1924 (27 August *Umteteli wa Bantu*) closing it off with a poem celebrating women's power with regard to the Women's Manyano, of which Charlotte Maxeke was one of the leaders. Earlier on he had declaimed a full eulogy directed at the youth that was gathered at Mngqesha, *Komkhulu kwaSandile* during an Ntsikana Memorial Ceremony, saying:

Amaqobokazana angal'endleleni, yazini kunyembelekile!

Amadoda oyisiwe, makuphathe abafazi:

Siwanika iliZwi, alishunqula

Siwanike imfundo, ayishunqula,

Siwanike ukongamela, akushunqula,

Sibangawanika umhlaba, awushunqula

Sibangawanika ubukhosi, abushunqushunqula

Young women entrusted with a task, difficult as might be, will stop at nothing to see it through successfully.

'Men are overwhelmed, let women take over

We give them the Word, they cause chaos

We gave them education, they blundered

We gave them authority, they corrupt it

We gave them the land, they sell it

We give them kingship, they cause hostility'

This poem is clear evidence that Mqhayi has great respect for heroines and he certainly does not relegate them to such simple praises as ‘*Dudlu ntombazana!*’, instead he employs the highest praises for women by using the same format as for men. In this way he fully acknowledges the achievements of women.

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