

ANALYSIS OF 'AFTER THE BATTLE' by S.E.K Mqhayi

Mqhayi got his inspiration for his poems from listening to the elders as they shared their stories about the struggles and triumphs of Xhosa greats like, Hintska kaKhawutu and Gcaleka kaPhalo. His works consistently called for Africans to be united. He took an opinioned stance on issues that would normally be filed as inconsequential. The narrative poem "After the Battle", articulate this by beseeching his people to "hear" him. His words are soulful in conveying the message of the impending "Gilikankqo". He denounces the people's behavior towards each other and urges them to see the impending colonization of their land as of critical importance. His use of imagery creates a potent tactile, visual, auditory and olfactory sense of participation by his audience. Mqhayi starts his poem off by grabbing the people's attention, exclaiming; "Ho-o-o-o-yini! Ho-o-o-o-yini!" (line one) He uses exclamation marks to strengthen the tone of his oration to the people. One visualizes Mqhayi standing on a podium addressing his people. He desires their attention and implores the people to listen to his words, 'although his position amongst his comrades was that of a normal person as opposed to a chief or warrior'. "It's me that's talking, a man of no worth! (line 2) It's me that's talking, a man who knows how to speak! (line 3) What kind of creature did you think I was' (line 4) One who says things that can't be said?" (line 5) The country's labor is metaphorically linked to a woman in childbirth. There is a direct comparison between the country and a woman about to give birth. The land is given human attributes by having the ability to feel pain. The use of the word "Today" (line 6-7-10) emphasizes the forthcoming hardships of the country as a result of their ignorance and its disastrous outcome. "Today the country's in labour;" (line 6)

Today the land's in pain;" (line 7) "As if a doe who spurns her own fawn will be born." (line 11) The use of the word "spurn" suggests that the people were not only living in ignorance, but rejected the knowledge that would help them. 'As if they were shooting themselves in the foot.' The trumpet was a signal for the warriors to gather together and marked their beginning journey to war. They were "armed to the teeth;" (line 15) and one pictures the warriors in full war regalia, marching to their destiny. Zanzolo was determined in his ferocity to overcome his opponent. His focus would not be deterred by idle chit-chat. Raw and pure anger emanated from his eyes. His agitation resulted in him breathing heavily as if he was a race-horse biting at the bits at the start line. The fight between the clans was upon them. "We saw the flames flash from his eyes, (line 17) We saw the smoke billow from his nose, (line 18) We heard the shrilling of whistles in our ears." (line 19) Zanzolo's face emanated his feelings. His brows are likened to clouds on a thunderous day. These hang threateningly heavy in the sky, just as his brows hangs over his eyes. "Today those brows are like clouds on a thunderous day," (line 23) No one dare approach him as his anger is so great that his people even feared him. Zanzolo brings chaos to Rharhabe's land which is the focal point of his chieftom. This is amplified by the statement; "Oh! The things that occur on this earth!" (line 28) In their quest for expanding their territorial domains, brothers turned against each other. The battle was so fierce that the warriors' deaths were extensive. Warriors wore crane feathers in their head-dress as a sign of their bravery on the battlefield. The bodies of

the warriors are personified in the statement, crane feathers piling up on each other. "Crane feather piled on crane feather,

at Hoho;" (line 30) The battle took place in Keiskamma in Ciskei on the Hoho hills. In lines thirty to forty epistrophe is used in the repetition of the word "Hoho" which emphasizes the massacre taking place. In their eagerness to overcome their opponents, their bodies and clubs clashed, this created a thumping sound. One gets the sense that the sound of thumping echoed over the hills. "Iron bit into flesh, at Hoho; (line 31) Club clashed against club, at Hoho; (line 32) The oxide thudded, at Hoho; (line 33) There was thumping here and there and there, at Hoho;" (line 34) It is not literally possible for iron to bite into flesh; therefore it is a metaphor for something made of iron with a serrated or sharp edge that is able to cut into human flesh. Such was the force of the battle that when a warrior died there was not even time to acknowledge his passing. "Someone passed on without prayer, at Hoho; (line 35) He joined the multitudes in a moment, at Hoho;" (line 36)

Lines thirty seven to forty illustrates the revolutionary cycle of life as the flesh of the dead is broken down. "The vulture fed with his dogs, at Hoho;' The buzzard fed and left more for the raven, at Hoho;' The hyena fed and passed on to the wild dog, at Hoho;" The green fly fed and left more for the maggots, at Hoho;" Mqhayi implores the warriors to cease their fighting. He commends them on their courage, determination and victory. He urges them to return to their homes and families which have been neglected, to set their affairs in order.

"There are rows and rows of things you must tackle." (line 49) Mqhayi uses rhetorical questions to strengthen his argument to the people on their knowledge of the impending dangers ahead. The colonizers' brought the Bible with them in order to subjugate and convert the people to Christianity. The term 'weighty' (line 53) could lead one to believe that the bible was the epitome of the expected changes, whereas it was the British who brought about the change. He asks the people to send someone to examine and interpret the book (the Bible) because by the time it is important, they would have aged considerably and their anger would have subsided. The prophecies of the prophetess Nongqawuse also exacerbated the winds of change. "Bright Ears" and "these flowing-hair nations!" is a direct referral to Caucasian peoples physical attributes. Mqhayi uses an exclamation mark on his last question to the people. This statement motivates his frustration at the peoples' erroneous disregard for an undesirable future. "Haven't you heard of the visions of old man Khulile? (line fifty one) Haven't you heard what will come to pass in this land? (line fifty two) Haven't you heard of the weighty Book that's impending?" (line fifty three) "Haven't you heard of the prince who will speak?" (line fifty six) "Haven't you heard of a girl who will speak?" (Line fifty nine) "Haven't year heard of Bright Ears who are coming?" (line sixty one) "Haven't year heard of these flowing-hair nations!" (line sixty three) In line ten and sixty seven Mqhayi's repeats his plea to the people in the poem by reminding them of the impending 'Gilikankqo'. This is in the hope that the reader will become aware of the central focus of the poem. He uses the word to heighten the emotional impact of the piece and create a set tone for the poem. "Today it's as if Gilikanqo'll be born," (line 10) "When it gives birth I say it will bear Gilikankqo;" (line 67) Anaphora is used in lines sixty nine to eighty two.

The repetition of the group of words “Go home but stay watchful,” is used as a strategic means of producing deeper levels of amplification and emotional impact. There will be war and bloodshed of such intensity that the felled warriors’ blood would form pools. “mankind will come to an end;” (line 70) This figurative statement could mean that when the land is invaded, changes will occur and life as they know it will cease.

Times will become so grim that your own “fathers will sell you;” and vice-versa. “darkness will descend;” (line 79) It is the beginning of the end of life as they know it. This poem aspires to enlighten us to the plight of the Xhosas in the days preceding and during the colonization of South Africa by the British.

This colossal event changed the history of the people of Africa. Traditions and culture were irrevocably lost, so much so that the effects can still be felt in present times. History only ever showed us the white man’s perception of the historical occurrences but never elaborated on what the indigenous people had experienced. Mqhayi seeks to give us a greater understanding and some medium of clarity on the colonization of our people. For this reason he got the title – Imbongi yesizwe jikelele – The poet of the whole nation.