



## An Afrocentric Approach to Analysing isiZulu Novel Inkululeko Engakhululekile (2020)

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### **Abstract**

Language and culture are deeply connected, and one cannot discuss culture without considering the language associated with it. Literature plays a crucial role in harmoniously integrating these two elements. To avoid the lingering effects of colonization, it is essential to analyse isiZulu literary texts through the lens of African values. This study aims to explore how African cultures are taught in prescribed isiZulu literary texts using a qualitative method of textual analysis. The research adopts the Afrocentric paradigm as its conceptual foundation. The paper first presents the context, methodology, and theoretical framework of Afrocentrism before employing the Afrocentrism approach to analyse a text. The paper underscores the importance of teachers and prospective teachers investing time in learning and understanding the Afrocentric approach to literary analysis. This endeavour is crucial for the decolonization process, especially in language teaching within educational institutions.

**Keywords:** *Afrocentrism; Culture, African Values; IsiZulu literature*

### **Introduction**

Formal education is a way of sharing knowledge that was adopted after the settlement of colonizers. Not only did this change the way of imparting knowledge, but it also influenced the beliefs and values of people. This is evident even in literature analysis. African literature is largely analyzed following the Eurocentric approach. In other words, African literature is analyzed by placing the values of the Europeans at the center, information is looked at from the European point of view. This continues to marginalize the values of Africans. Thus, hinders the progress of decolonization. It would be a fallacy to say decolonization is achieved when African literature is still analyzed with only the Eurocentric approach.

In a quest for decolonizing education, scholars such as Dlamini (2018) and Mkabela (2005) have realized the need for adopting an Afrocentric approach in conducting research. Dlamini (2018) did a study utilizing Afrocentrism to explore African values in literature. As much as his study looks at the English literature, it proves that there is a gap that needs to be filled in this regard, for all African languages not

just English. IsiZulu being one of the languages that pride itself in the rich heritage that is preserved in literature deemed it important to be analyzed in the approach that will look at its content from an African point of view, with African values at the forefront.

IsiZulu literature is a combination of poetry, drama, and prose that is influenced by the cultural expressions as well as historical experiences of the AmaZulu people. In the quest for decolonization and fully conquering inclusivity, it becomes important to utilize and recognize the Afrocentric approach in analyzing isiZulu literature by placing traditions, values, and experiences of the AmaZulu people at the center while challenging Eurocentric approaches that have long dominated literary analysis.

This article probes the importance of adopting Afrocentric methodology in examining isiZulu literary text. It surveys the underlying principles of Afrocentrism and its potential to reveal deeper meaning in literature while empowering the AmaZulu voices in literary discourse. Moreover, the impact of the Afrocentric approach in promoting cultural appreciation, closing the gap between past and present, and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the isiZulu literature. The study acknowledges the importance of inclusivity and cultural sensitivity; however, it seeks to go beyond the limitations inflicted by colonial legacy.

This article firstly dives into the theoretical framework by explaining the Afrocentric approach which is used as the basis for analysing literature. Secondly, the Afrocentric approach will be used to analyze selected IsiZulu literary works. The isiZulu novel, *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (Sibiya, 2020) is carefully selected for its unique theme of homosexuality with the aim of highlighting that a text can be analysed by looking at the values and not focusing on its theme. Moreover, homosexuality needs to be understood from an African perspective.

## ***Theoretical Approach***

An Afrocentric research approach is employed in this article. As a philosophical framework, Afrocentricity prioritizes African values in response to Eurocentrism's emphasis on European perspectives and values. Its roots can be traced to the 1950s, influenced by Marcus Garvey, but the term "Afrocentricity" gained prominence in the 1970s, popularized by Asante (Chawane 2000: 78; Mazama 2001: 387). Molefi Asante is a key figure in the development of Afrocentric theory, notably through his influential publications (*Op cit.*). Asante (1991: 171) defines Afrocentricity as a viewpoint that places African experiences at the core, seeking to establish the rightful centrality of the African perspective in various contexts, including education.

Contrary to being a mere parallel to Eurocentrism, Afrocentricity, as argued by Asante, does not prioritize African values at the expense of other perspectives, but rather acknowledges and values diverse viewpoints Asante (*Op cit.*). Schiele (1996: 286) outlines Afrocentricity's objectives, which include advocating for an alternative social science paradigm that aligns with the cultural and political realities of African Americans, dispelling biased representations about individuals of African descent, and promoting a worldview that encourages human and societal transformation toward spiritual and moral ends, appealing to various cultural groups.

It is important to clarify that while the objectives mention African Americans, Afrocentricity is not exclusively for African America, but it is an inclusive philosophy that originated in the American context, initially addressing the neglect of African American values and experiences. In this article, Afrocentricity will be utilised with values of the South African Nguni people in mind, specifically AmaZulu people.

This study is deeply grounded by the five Afrocentric cannons that explains how an afrocentric study should be conducted. Those are *Ukweli*, *kujitoa*, *ujamaa*, *uhaki* and *utulivu*, all named in the Swahili language. These cannons, according to Dlamini (2018: 26), have been widely used in studying data relating to Afrocentrism in areas of policy, art, law, leadership, psychology, agriculture etc. Upon seeing the gap, Dlamini (*Op cit.*) employed the same cannons in the study of English literature. This article then becomes the foundation in the usage of these cannons to study isiZulu literature. These cannons were first theorised by Reviere (1996) who identified them from Asante's basic principles of Afrocentricity. Not only did she theorise the cannons, but she also deemed them as a valid representation of all African communities. All these canons are rooted in the Ubuntu belief that says, I am because we are.

## Discussion

The discussion presents the analysis of of the novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020). Since the approach used is that of Afrocentricity, the analysis will focus on the presentation of African values in the novel. This will be done by firstly giving the author's biography, summary of the novel, then later discussing the African values as they appear in the novel. Those values are respect, gender roles, work ethic, oral tradition, dignity and integrity, spirituality as well as ubuntu.

## Author's biography

Dumisani Sibiyi is a renowned author who was born in the rural Nquthu in KwaZulu Natal. He is the second born of three siblings. Sibiyi was raised in a loving home with a mother and grandmother while his father was working in Johannesburg. The love from his family instilled values of being a true African human being. One of the African values, storytelling, helped to Raise Sibiyi and his siblings. His grandmother used to tell stories and folktales, this was a way of educating and instilling African values to the growing generation. His love for writing was cultivated by his isiZulu teacher who always saw potential in all his works. Sibiyi published several novels, namely; Kungasa Ngifile (2002), Ngidedele Ngife (2006), Ngiyolibala Ngifile (2010), *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020) and many others. This study found that Dumisani Sibiyi is suitable for the role of an author who could best display African Values because of his affiliation and pride with African people and culture. He is viewed as an Afrocentrist because his works deal with the challenges of African people.

## Summary of the novel

*Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020) discusses many themes, one of the prominent ones being homosexuality. The novel presents the story of the Ndlovu family who are blessed with a child with two sexual organs. The parents chose to surgically remove the male organ because they already had three boys. While their child grew up to realize that she has feelings for other girls, their oldest son grew to realize that he has feeling for other guys. As much as the prominent theme is homosexuality, this article will not focus on thematical analysis, rather analysis of the portrayal and centralisation of African values. Values that will be discussed shortly are respect, oral tradition, gender roles as well as spirituality.

## Respect

Respect is one of the fundamental values in the African people, it is of utmost importance to the people in question, AmaZulu. According to Mbele *et al* (2015: 87) The concept of respect, whose isiZulu equivalence is *ukuhlonipha*, is an essential component of African culture, and it forms the foundation for existence. They further elaborate that For Africans, *ukuhlonipha* provides guidelines for living, including appropriate clan-based inter-generational behavioural patterns, as well as ways to honour and revere

ancestors. This value is evident in the novel from the very first chapter. The author presents the first characters in the novel as MaSibisi. MaSibisi is introduced in the following line:

...*abanye babephuma izinqola eziya koRichards Bay lapho bezokwazi khona ukuya olwandle beyopholisa imizimba, nakuMaSibisi kufike ngezinkani ukushisa.*

...others where driving to Richards Bay where they would be able to go to the beach to cool down their bodies, the heat was too much even for MaSibisi.

(Sibiya, 2020: 2)

This is the very first line where the readers get to identify one of the character, and the author carefully chooses not to present her by her first name, but rather her surname. In the AmaZulu people, adults are not referred to by their first names, their surnames are seen as most appropriate. For females, a prefix Ma- is added to their surname to signal that they are female. A prefix Ma- is used to symbolise ‘the daughter of’. In other words, for MaSibisi, Ma- represents that she is the daughter of Sibisi. Moreover, one’s origin is kept at all times, hence, the use of ones paternal surname as a name should one get married. For instance if a daughter of Ndlovu gets married to Dlamini, she will be referred to as MaNdlovu wakwaDlamini. Which means daughter of Ndlovu who is the bride of Dlamini. Ma- is not the only prefix that is used in this regard, in some cases a prefix Ka- is used, for example KaMadondo, KaMajozi and many others.

The writer continues to present a second character by using his surname in the line as follows: “*Athathe ucingo lwakhe achfoze inombolo kaNdlovu*” (She took her phone and dialled Ndlovu’s number), (Sibiya, *Op cit.*). Ndlovu is a surname for AmaZulu people. The use of his surname is the sign of respect for adult, and also, it is a way of the writer to preserve the African values in his writing. That value being respect and sense of identity. Moreover, the use of baba in line “*Yebo, baba sengiqala ukusikwa* (Yes, sir I am starting to have contractions)” (Sibiya, 2020: 3) is also a sign of respect. A word *baba*, whose English equivalence is father, is used when referring to fathers, either by their wives, children or anyone who might be the same age as their children. This is used as opposed to using their names. The use of words such as ‘*mkami*’, ‘*nkosikazi*’ ‘*mama*’ to refer to wife, and words such as ‘*mnyeni*’ ‘*baba*’ to refer to husband, as well as surnames are all signs of respect that is one of the utmost important values of the African people at large.

### Oral tradition

Oral tradition can be defined as a dynamic and highly diverse oral-aural medium for evolving, storing, and transmitting knowledge, art, and ideas. In other words, oral tradition, also known as orality, is the transmission of ideas and knowledge through the word of mouth. This form of communication was used in the olden days to educate, still used even today. IsiZulu has diverse oral art that is transmitted orally, one of them being clan names, isiZulu equivalence being *izithakazelo*. Izithakazelo are clan names that represent the family history by ancestral names and well as narration of incidents that occurred in ancient history. It is through izithakazelo that some people learn that they are related to each other.

In the novel, Sibiya uses izithakazelo in conversation between his character. For instance, in this line “*Ngiyezwa, Bhovungane wami* (I hear, my Bhovungane)” (Sibiya *Op cit.*) In the mentioned line Ndlovu refers to MaSibisi as Bhovungane which is the clan name of the Sibisi surname. Bhovungana is one of the ancestors of the Sibisi clan. The characters continue to use clan names as Ndlovu continue to refer to Masibisi as Hlase, which is also a clan name of the Sibisi surname. MaSibisi also uses clan names to refer to her husband Ndlovu, this is evident in the following line: “*Wahamba kancane weGatsheni*” (You are walking so slow Gatsheni)” (Sibiya, *Op cit.*). The use of clan names in the African people is valued as it gives one sense of belonging and ensure that one knows of one’s roots. To be called by a clan name gives people pride.

Not only does the writer make his characters to use each other's clan names, but he also uses clan names when narrating. This is seen when the writer narrates that Ndlovu ignores the question that was coming from his wife. In his narration, Sibiyi referred to Ndlovu as *Mfo kaGatsheni*. Gatsheni is the name of the Ndlovu family. The use of *Mfo ka-* signal indicated that he is the 'son of-', it is used when referring to male people to indicate their ancestral lineage.

*Izithakazela* are not the only form of oral art that is presented in the novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekili*, the author also uses proverbs and idioms (*izaga nezisho*). Proverbs and idioms are sayings that contains hidden meaning. Mieder and Dundes quoted by Mbathu (2019: 5) explains proverbs as sayings that are in a fixed form, marked by shortness and sense. In other words, proverbs are short saying that are aimed at passing ideas or messages in a hidden manner. *Isaga* that says *Inyanda yemuke nezibopho*, which is used to basically means that a mother a new-born baby both died, is used in a novel. This proverb is used by the author when narrating that, it is not always a case that pregnant women who go to the hospital will come back with their babies. There are instances where a woman will go to the hospital with the hope of coming back home with a healthy child, but they come back empty handed or even both the mother and the child don't make it out alive.

The following line: "Izingane zakhe kwakufanele azondle, kwazise isisu asikweletwa" (He was due to feed his children, because a stomach cannot be credited), (Sibiyi, 2020: 40), presents a proverb "*isisu asikweletwa*". This proverb explain that in everything one does, they still need to eat or provide food to one's dependent because one has to eat. Eating cannot be postponed for other day but it should happen daily. *Izisho* (idioms) also appear in multiple instances in the novel. For instance, "*Wabuyela endlini edinwe ethelwa ngamanzi*, (she went back to the house fuming with anger)" (Sibiyi, 2020: 24). This line presents an idiom that is normally used when someone is extremely furious. When not used in context, this idiom is written as *Ukuthelwa ngamazwi*. Another idiom that Sibiyi utilises in this novel is *Ukuwuhlaba inhlali*, this idiom is used in context as following: *wawuhlaba inhlali phezu kokuba ebona ukuthi uphoko lwaluchitheka*. This line explains how Ndlovu ignored the fact that MaSibisi was fuming in the kitchen because their boys did not bother to clean the house while their parents were away. *Ukuwuhlaba inhlali* is an idiom that is used when someone is not paying attention, not taking something serious or ignoring something. In this case, it was Ndlovu ignoring MaSibisi's anger.

*Ukucela empuzini* is another idiom used in the novel. This idiom is used to symbolize running away. This idiom is used in context as follows: "*Sasha isicathulo phakathi kwamahlombe kuMthokozisi wabhensa, kodwa waqhubeka nokucela empunzini*", this line explains that MaSibisi hit Mthokozisi with a shoe at the back, he bends but continued to run. Although these are not the only idioms and proverbs used in the novel, a conclusion that the use of idioms and proverbs in the novel is a way of preserving the richness of isiZulu and its oral art can be made.

## Gender roles

Colonization came with many changes to several things, one of them being gender roles. It introduced an idea that role should not be divided according to gender. Other words, every gender can perform any duty, they should not be separated. However, for African people, this is not always the case, there are certain roles that are preserved for certain gender. More especially in rural areas or in people who want to remain true to the teachings of the great grandparent who lived in the olden days. Separation of roles according to gender is evident in the novel.

In the second chapter of the novel, the writer present Ndlovu and Masibisi coming back from the hospital where the surgery of their child took place. When they come home, they find the house dirty with dished all over the place. Amid MaSibisi's tiredness, she had to attend to the dirt house and start cooking. All this happens while Ndlovu is resting. African people view the duties of cleaning and cooking as those of women. In the olden day women were not working, but their duty was to take care of children and the

household. As much as they are also working now, they are still expected to come back home and continue with their duties of taking care of the house, their husband, and children. This is evident even in these lines:

*Ngakusasa uMaSibisi wavuka ekuseni njengokwejwayelekile. Wapheka iphalishi ukuze izingane zithi ziqambe ziya esikoleni zibe sezikutholile okuya ethunjini.*

The following day MaSibisi woke up in the morning as usual. She prepared porridge so that her children can eat before going to school.

(Sibiya, 2020: 31)

Bearing in mind that MaSibisi was also tired after the long trip they took going to and coming from the hospital for their child's operation, MaSibisi did not get enough time to rest, but because taking care of everyone is her duty, she had to wake up and prepare for her children to go to school. The value of gender roles is also evident when Nosipho was restless, not even once does she write narrates to the readers that Ndlovu was also waking up to take care of the child, but it was MaSibisi who kept on waking up. Moreover, she does this without complain. This is because she understands that this is one of the values of being African, it is her duty to take care of kids, husband, and household, just like it is her husband's duty to take care of everyone financially. The relevancy of this in this time and era can be debateable in another time.

To further highlight gender roles, Sibiya (2020: 37) states:

*Kumele alakhe leli khaya lakwaNdlovu. Yiwona msebenzi athi uma ezogana ephuma kubo kwaSibisi wathi uyowenza uma efika emzini.*

She must build this Ndlovu household. It is the duty that she said she would fulfil when she left her Sibisi family and got married.

This line summarises the duty of a wife in a family, which is to build the household. A wife is expected to build by ensuring the wellbeing of her husband, children, in-laws as well as maintenance of the house.

Gender roles is evident even in children, because in isiZulu it is believed that children should be trained as early as possible to know their roles. Hence, it was an issue for the character MaSibisi to see her boy child enjoying cooking. This is narrated by the author as follows:

*Nakuba lalibuye limkhathaze uMaSibisi ikhono elidlondlobalayo likaMthokozisi ezimbizeni, wayetheneka Amandla uma indodana yakhe imtshela ukuthi iningi labapheki abahlonishwayo emhlabeni bangabantu besilisa.*

Although Mthokozisi's growing cooking skill used to bother MaSibisi, she would be defeated when her son tells her that most well respected chef worldwide are males.

(Sibiya, 2020: 45)

MaSibisi was bothered because cooking is seen as female duties, it is therefore tabooed when a boy child grows up enjoying cooking. Boys are expected to love doing duties that are viewed as being designated for them, which are taking care of the garden, playing soccer and all the hard labour. This is when girls are trained to be good wives who will be able to fulfil their duties of taking care of their households.

## Spirituality

In defining spirituality, Knoetze (2019: 1) highlights that it is not only concerned with religion but the quest for meaning of life, however, when that quest is an explicit reference to God or the Divine, then that spirituality is religion. Mbiti quoted by Knoetze (*Op cit.*) further outlines that the characteristics of spirituality are beliefs, practices, ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and norms as well as religious officials and leaders. Looking at the explanations, it can be deduced that spirituality refers to an understanding of life and how people view it, one of those views being in believing in supreme powers. African people are spiritual beings, most of the spirituality comes from understanding that there is a divine or supreme power above them. Hence other believe in God, while other believe in ancestral powers.

In his novel, Sibiyá highlighted this value through the showcasing in the believe that the is God who is the creator of all things. This is evident in the following lines,

*Ekugcineni kodwa, nguMdali osemukelisa lezi zipho eziyizidalwa zakhe thina esizibiza ngezingane zethu. Ngakho-ke wayezokwamukela noma mtwana muni aphiwa nguSomandla.*

At the end, it is the Creator who gives us these gifts that are His creations, that we refer to as our children. Therefore, she was going to accept which ever gender given to her by the Creator.

(Sibiyá, 2020: 4-5)

The word Mdali refers to the supreme being that is believed to being the creator of all things, including people. The above lines suggests that children are a gift from uMdali, it also suggests that uMdali decides on the gender of each child. This shows that African people believes that uMdali is really a powerful being, hence the usage of word Somandla, which also refers to the supreme being, but this time referring that being as having all powers.

The line, “*Cishe futhi kuyisu likaMdali ukuthi odokotela babe nokuphikisana*” (Maybe it is God’s plan for doctors to have a disagreement). This line is suggesting that, since doctors were not suggesting the same gender for the Ndlovu unborn child, it might have been God’ doing to surprise the family at the birth of their child, ironically, they were indeed surprised as the child was born with two genitals.

The supreme power is referred to by many names amongst the isiZulu speaking people. So far in the article, two of those names have been mentioned, which are mdali and Somandla. Another name that AmaZulu use to refer to the supreme power is Simakade. In the novel, this name appears as follows:

*Ubuhle bayo babenza abantu batuse baphinde badumise ubukhona bukaSimakade.*

(It beauty made people praise and appreciate the presence of God)

The above line shows that people see God in everything, the line explain the beauty of the child, but the child’s beauty is viewed from a point of appreciation of God’s work.

AmaZulu does not only believe in good spirits, but they also believe that there are bad spirits as well. In other words, as much as there is God who is a good spirit, there are also some bad or evil spirits. This is also evident in the novel in this line: “*...ungafunga ukuthi kukhona imimoya emibi emphazamisayo uma elele.*” (You would swear that there are bad spirits that disturbs her in her sleep.) This line is explaining that the child, Nosipho kept on waking up and crying at night as if there were bad spirits that were disturbing her. In this line, the author wanted to highlight that African people or AmaZulu know that there is God, but they also believe that there are some bad spirits that wonders around, those spirits they may be weighing heavily on children, hence, the writer says it makes the child to cry at night.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The article looked at the analysis of isiZulu novel *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020) using an Afrocentric approach. Some of the African values were discussed as well as how they are presented in the novel. The values that are discussed are respect, oral tradition, gender roles and spirituality. The availability of these values in the novel, proves that literature can be used to teach African values to the upcoming generations.

In conclusion, decolonization can be fully realized through the adoption of Afrocentricity. Researchers in the language field should embrace Afrocentricity when analyzing African literature. Adopting this approach will ensure that upcoming generations are taught through placing their own values at the centre, which will in turn provide a clear view of the world through the exposure to both Afrocentric and Eurocentric perspectives.

In the chosen novel for this study, numerous topics remain ripe for further exploration. For instance, researchers could delve into the novel's language aspects, or analyze the theme of economy which is one of the sub-themes in the novel. Additionally, the novel introduces the concept of spirituality, specifically witchcraft, which warrants further investigation.

In education institutions, adoption of Afrocentricity is crucial to making learning experience authentic for students. This can be achieved through incorporating Afrocentric perspectives into curriculum, assessments, and policies. Therefore, this approach creates additional opportunities for conducting further research in these areas.

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