



## The African National Congress's Individualistic Culture as Expressed in Duma Nqanawe Yangempela Poem: 'Not Yet Uhuru'

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### **Abstract**

This article delves into the individualistic culture depicted in Duma's poem 'Not Yet Uhuru,' available on YouTube (2021). The discussion centers on how the poem reveals the individualistic tendencies within the African National Congress (ANC) political party, focusing on four key areas: corruption, unemployment, nepotism, and public service delivery. Given that the ANC is the dominant political party in South Africa, it is incumbent upon it to address the needs of South African citizens. This study utilized textual and audio analysis, drawing data from an audio poem on YouTube. The study is grounded in reader-response theory, which highlights the authors' perspectives on their experiences and observations as a key aspect of expressive writing. The findings indicate that Duma's poem unveils the individualistic conduct of the ANC's leadership. Duma acknowledges in the poem that while not all ANC leaders are driven by greed, the majority are. The study suggests that poems like 'Not Yet Uhuru' deserve more attention as they can effectively bring attention to the government's misconduct and prompt improved treatment of the people who elected them.

**Keywords:** *Individualism; Individualistic Culture; Poem; ANC; Corruption*

### **Introduction**

Since 1994, South Africa has reclaimed its independence from colonial rule and has experienced significant societal changes. These changes include the emergence of communist and civil society groups and the landmark democratic election led by the late Nelson Mandela on April 27, 1994. This pivotal moment restored hope and faith among all South Africans and solidified the African National Congress (ANC)'s support base. However, other political parties have emerged in recent years, leading to a fragmentation of traditional voting lines. According to Gumede's report for the Democracy Works Foundation in 2019, the splintering of South Africa's political landscape and the rise of new parties can be attributed to "appalling corruption, mismanagement, and the populist exploitation of black grievances to maintain power by the ANC leadership." Following the emergence of democracy in South Africa, it is evident that while the government has changed, the fundamental struggles have not shifted entirely.

Instead of tackling issues surrounding racial divisions, there is now an internal struggle within the black community. Many black South Africans are experiencing hardships at the hands of their people who prioritize personal gain over the well-being of others. Despite having the power to choose their government through voting, the citizens continue to endure challenges comparable to those faced during the apartheid era. The prevailing government does not consistently prioritize the best interests of its people, as echoed in Duma's poem 'Not Yet Uhuru,' which suggests that true freedom has not yet been achieved. Despite assurances from the government that its people are free, widespread unemployment, nepotism, corruption, and inadequate service delivery indicate that the country is far from genuinely free.

This study focuses on the individualistic culture as expressed in Duma's poem 'Not Yet Uhuru' and will be done through a comprehensive discussion encompassing the topics of corruption, nepotism, unemployment, and poor service delivery. There is research conducted in other different spheres focusing on similar subject matter worldwide. Yaman et al. (2010) conducted a study on individualistic culture, focusing on parenting in individualistic cultural countries by Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands. Yaman (*Op cit.*) underscored the importance of sensitivity and authoritative control in Turkish immigrants and native Dutch families. According to Blue and Humphrey (2021), youth living in Western societies are increasingly adopting individualistic social orientations, which may be linked to reduced well-being outcomes. Their findings also suggest that youth in individualistic cultures may experience higher well-being outcomes. Even though, there are studies of this nature, it is for the first time that young poets as Duma are recording poems that tackle issues of corruption, unemployment and nepotism, and poor public service delivery. Therefore, this article delves into the South African politics paying careful attention to the political party in power.

Poets are living artists who use words to analyze the world through their eyes, everything happening, and even politics. Nqobile Musawenkosi Duma is one of the oral Zulu poets known as 'Nqanawe Yangempela.' As a writer, Duma is interested in the country's affairs, as is evident in his poem, which mentions several ANC leaders. According to Harrison & Boyd (2003: 5), "There is a persistent tendency in democracies to regard politics as somehow disreputable, unclean, a 'dirty' business. This is partly due to the perceived dishonesty of politicians, who are all 'in it for themselves'... and such negative views can be heard in every bar room in the country." Duma found it imperative to voice his observations regarding the activities within the ANC government for this very reason. As a young poet, Duma utilized his art to reveal the unethical conduct of the ANC through his poem, which is thoroughly examined in this article. This demonstrates that, despite political leaders' attempts to persuade citizens and offer assurances, they are aware that the party is primarily focused on itself and does not genuinely prioritize the welfare of the people. Consequently, this article holds great importance as it functions as a vehicle for advocating for change and regaining freedom.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts qualitative methods to gather the data for this discussion. Qualitative research is a subcategory of social science study that collects and analyzes non-numerical data. It intends to comprehend and elucidate social phenomena by studying particular groups or regions. Qualitative research is conducted to understand better how people perceive their surroundings (Atkinson, 2022: 65). Although there are several methods for doing qualitative research, most of them are adaptive and emphasize keeping rich meaning when processing data. Therefore, this study utilizes textual and audio analysis within the qualitative research method. Textual analysis assists the reader or viewer in uncovering potential interpretations of the product because there is no correct interpretation (McKee, 2001). Audio analysis is the method used to examine and interpret recorded sound content (McLoughlin, 2009). The study will utilize Duma's 'Not Yet Uhuru' poem from YouTube (2021) as a primary source. Additional supporting sources such as articles, journals, books, and academic texts will be consulted to bolster the claims made.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The study employs reader response theory. Mart (2019) explains that reader-response theory is based on the idea that a literary work occurs in the interactive relationship between the reader and the text. Attention is redirected from the text to the reader (Trisnawati, 2009). According to reader-response theory, literature should be viewed as a form of performance art, with each reader creating their own, potentially unique, interpretation of the text. This approach focuses on the reader or audience and their experience with a literary work rather than on the author or the content and structure of the work. The researchers found this theory suitable because they examined how the ANC party governed, as depicted in Duma's poem, from their perspective. This hypothesis aligns with the findings of the debate, which reflect the scholars' interpretations of what the poetry conveys.

### **Defining Individualism**

Ossowski (1963), cited in Mogodi (2002: 53), defines individualism as a product of industrial capitalism and emphasizes the political-economic conception of “everyone for himself, and all for the rich, nothing for the poor.” Similarly, Hofstede (2001: 225) argues that individualism is concerned with the notion that “everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her family.” Contrarily, individualism assumes that individuals are the best judges of their interests and that making choices contributes to their personality development and society’s welfare (Khan, 1987: 126). From the definitions above, it can be deduced that “individualism” refers to living as a highly individual without regard to other people and fostering independence.

Individualism may also be presumed as a society being a collection of individuals, each considered self-fulfilling, self-contained, and self-sufficient entities. As Mogodi (*Op cit.*) mentioned, this concept of individualism was first used in France through senses designating the rights of individuals and is associated with capitalism. Fraser and Jaeggi (2018: 25) define capitalism as an element of social division between those who own private property and those who own nothing except labor power. Individualism and capitalism share similar social, economic, and political dimensions, which should be regarded as standing in some solid relation. While individualism is associated with industrial capitalism, Ossowski (*Op cit.*) further attests that individualism takes man out of society, makes him a sole judge of what surrounds him, and deserts him to his capabilities.

Simmel (1971: 223) maintains that individualism is “grounded on opposition of interest, not harmony of interest, and under this concept, everyone is required to find his place by struggle, by pushing back others or being pushed back by others.” This means that individualism has a sense of rivalry or competition, and everyone for himself against all the rest. It pays no significant attention to the group or majority. Hence, it is the opposite of collectivism. Collectivism is therefore associated with communism; it focuses on the collection or group of people instead of individuals. However, in this study, the focus will not be on collectivism but individualism, as presented in the selected poem, 'Not Yet Uhuru.'

### **Individualistic Culture**

Before the individualistic culture is defined, it is paramount to start by defining the term “culture.” Culture is a way of life practiced by a particular nation or people in a specific place where they do certain things in a certain way. They have a lifestyle that includes certain practices that everyone should follow. Grossmann and Santos (2016: 4) state that individualistic culture is individual-bounded and socially disengaging; individuals report greater happiness, i.e., pride. Individualistic culture focuses on embracing one's success and expresses individual identity. It views a person as separate from others. Individualistic culture is self-interest, autonomy, and self-reliance, which are more valued in socialization (Harwood et al., 1995) and Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2007). In addition, individualistic culture fulfills the needs and desires of individuals over those of the community. It concentrates on human independence and

freedom, is more autonomous and rational, and is concerned with immediate members of family or close friends. Yoon (2014: 52) states that individualistic culture is equivalent to the western culture.

Furthermore, individualistic culture is characterized by prioritizing or embracing oneself over group solidarity. In this case, individualists cannot easily sacrifice their benefits for the sake of the whole society's progress and are likely to be more authoritative; they are about promoting independence, self-reliance, exploration of the environment, and put less emphasis on obedience and sociability (Harwood et al., *Op cit.*). Individualists are authoritarians and consist of high control with less warmth and acceptance.

### Synopsis of the Selected Poem: 'Not Yet Uhuru'

Duma's poem, 'Not Yet Uhuru,' is found on YouTube. This poem is about the failed leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) government. The poet reveals all the scandals surrounding the leadership of the ANC. From the poem's beginning to the end, Duma says that the ANC has been cursed, and its leaders must admit that leadership is defeating them, and they must hand over the country to the kings to be ruled by them again. The poet points out that the kings may manage better than the ANC leaders and consider the people they lead.

The following discussion explores corruption, unemployment and nepotism, and poor service delivery features of individualistic culture as expressed in the isiZulu performance poem, 'Not Yet Uhuru' by Nqobile Musawenkosi Duma, known as (INqanawe Yangempela). The individualistic culture "produces the most powerful effects upon the life and action of others, really constitutes the best practical education" (Khan, 1987: 129). From this assertion, individualistic culture belongs to the sphere of 'I,' not of 'we,' as it provides powerful influences on individuals.

### Corruption

Myint (2000: 35) states that corruption uses official position, status, hierarchy, or private office for personal or private gain. Amundsen (2000: 1) argues that corruption is the act of paying bribes to civil or public servants. To enrich themselves, it is a simple theft of state property by business people, bureaucrats, and politicians. Similarly, Warren (2004: 332) provides that "corruption involves duplicitous violations of the democratic norm of inclusion." Hence, it is an act of deceitfulness by civil servants for individual benefit.

Furthermore, corruption is considered a modern conception, as it is state-centered and intertwined with individualistic, with an understanding of individual corruption (Johnston, 1996: 13). Therefore, it focuses on personal behavior. Forms of corruption are observed in the selected poem. The first form of corruption that will be discussed is embezzlement. Amundsen (2001: 2) defines this form as "theft of public resources by public servants, another form of misappropriation of public funds." Embezzlement as a form of corruption is expressed on the following lines:

*Uboleka izigidi, ekugcineni*

*Leyomali uyena oyidlayo,*

*Okhwabanisayo, iyafika yini ebantwini*

*noma iphelela emaphaketheni kunina?*

You borrow millions, at the end,

You are the one who spends that money,

The one who steals, does it get to people,

Or does it end up in your pocket?

In the above stanza, the poet asks about the R500 billion the South African president announced during the COVID-19 national State of Address as a stimulus package under the government's control, where it disappeared. The South African president borrowed the money from some of the International Financial Institutions, such as the World Bank, some from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The intention was to distribute the money evenly across various industries as relief funds. However, according to the poet, the funds disappeared mysteriously, and the only people who seem to have benefited from the funds are the ANC comrades. In the last line, the poet uses a rhetorical question to make it evident that ANC leaders stole that money.

The Embezzlement done by the ANC cabinet is also expressed in the lines quoted:

*Kufa odokotela kufa onesi,*

*Iliwe imali yokuthenga izinto zokuzivikela,*

*Ukube kuya ngami bengizothi leyomiholo yenu ayithi ukwehliselwa,*

*Nivula ikhomishini nidla imali yabakhokhi bentela,*

*Noma senibatholile akekho lelocala ozolijezela.*

Doctors die, nurses die,

The money to buy protective equipment was stolen,

If it were up to me, I would say that your salaries should be reduced,

You open a commission and spend taxpayers' money,

No one will be punished for this crime, even if they are found.

In the above lines, the poet is concerned about the rapid deaths of medical doctors and nurses during COVID-19. Political officials embezzled money that was supposed to capacitate health institutions during the pandemic. These institutions were overwhelmed due to enormous COVID-19 casualties and other related factors. People were admitted in numbers timeously. Therefore, medical staff members were working tirelessly, compromising their safety, and this led to the deaths of doctors and nurses on duty during those times. Hospitals and ventilated spaces were insufficient, and in South Africa, the approved vaccine was introduced in the later stage after many consistent deaths of people.

Power holders systemically use their political power to commit criminal offenses to secure and expand their individualistic interests. The funds allocated to equip health institutions should have been correctly utilized. Although medical institutions such as clinics, organizations, and hospitals were well equipped with posters to mitigate the risks of infection, the latter could not do enough as people were losing their lives in the same areas with those posters. For example, former Health Minister Dr. Mkhize was fired for his involvement in the disbursement of millions of rands. The people of South Africa have trusted Dr. Mkhize to fight this virus and supported him. The Special Investigating Unit's report, delivered to South Africa's President, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, on June 30, 2021, clearly demonstrates that Doctor Zweli Mkhize is stealing COVID-19 funds. This investigation indicates the involvement of his son as well. Although he disputes all the allegations in this report, the evidence points to him. These claims demonstrate that politics is a crime game. The surfacing of financial troubles surrounding Mkhize's

son indicates that these politicians are solely concerned with themselves and their families, not the people they should serve.

In the following lines, the poet continues to show disappointment in the ANC leaders:

*Ngididwa ukuntshontsha kwenu,*

*Akekho umuntu owake wantshontsha into kungeyakhe.*

I am confused by your stealing,

No one ever stole something that belonged to him.

The poet points out how ANC leaders steal, and he put out that they even steal for themselves because they are also South Africans, which means they are also stealing from themselves. This kind of stealing goes beyond just stealing; it points out the level of individualistic mindset these people possess. The poem suggests that these officials took money entrusted to them and used it for purposes different from what was intended. Where stealing is involved, one steals money designed for something and uses it for a different purpose to fulfill one's interests. Another form of corruption expressed in this poem is unemployment and nepotism.

### **Unemployment & Nepotism**

Nepotism is a unique form of favoritism in which a ruler or leader prefers to employ or give employment opportunities to the persons closer to them, such as kinfolk or immediate family members (Amundsen, 2000: 5). In addition, nepotism is a personal relationship between two or more parties, mediating between who helps another person bypass an obstacle by a legal or illegal manner (Wasta, 2014: 563). Thus, nepotism results in public unemployment. Unemployment can be defined as 'joblessness or the state of not having a job (Jones, 2000: 43). Unemployment is a tremendously pressing issue worldwide, and to some extent, nepotism contributes immensely. Therefore, the higher the nepotism, the fewer available employment opportunities.

An example of the two issues is expressed in the following lines:

*Ziyehla izinyembezi uma ngizibuza ukuthi ngiphilelani*

*Ngenza i-marketing esikoleni, kusho ukuthi ngangizomakhetha,*

*ukuthi ukuhlupheka into enjani,*

*Angisebenzi, ingane yekhansela eyahlulwa isikole inesikhundla*

*Kumkhandlu, nami angazi kanjani,*

*Nithi nalwela inkululeko kodwa nanamuhla,*

*ngisadideka ukuthi inkululeko itholwa abanjani.*

Tears fall when I ask myself what I am living for.

I did marketing in school, so I was going to market; what is suffering like?

I am unemployed, the councilor's child who did not finish school has a position,

In the council, I do not know how,

You say you fought for freedom, but even today,

I am still trying to understand who receives the liberty.

The poet expresses his sorrowfulness because of being unemployed despite being educated and having a degree. In the above lines, he uses a sarcastic expression when he states that he did a marketing qualification for him to market, what kind of suffering is this. Words like these come after feeling pain and worry because he is starving. What the poet expresses here is a problem faced by many young people in South Africa who are unemployed. The poet continues to narrate the corruption committed by politicians by pointing out that when they are still looking for votes, they promise the communities heaven and earth. Once they are in the office, they shift their focus and look after their relatives only.

Nepotism is very rampant in the ANC political party, as the poet reveals in the above lines that the child of the councilor has a position in the council. Still, they are uneducated, which explains that he got a position because they are related to the councilor. They no longer care for the whole community as promised, but themselves. The act done by the councilors, which the poet expresses, indicates that those who claim they care only think about themselves. This happens at all levels in the organization, from the top to the bottom, proving that what they are doing has become part of the culture of the ANC's leaders.

For example, the former ANC President, Mr. Jacob Zuma, was accused of Nepotism. A report by South Africa's Mail & Guardian newspaper (24 November 2014) discloses that years ago former President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma was once accused of placing his 25-year-old daughter Thuthukile Zuma in a senior position in the communications department where she earned a million rands a year. According to this newspaper's report, it is suspected that this position should have been advertised. This report clearly states that corruption goes a long way in this country because the job allegedly given to the daughter of the former President was not advertised. It certifies the individualistic mindset of the ANC members, from the president to the councilors. Therefore, corruption is the major cause of South Africa's failure, the country would not move forward if these kinds of corruption persist.

### Public Service Delivery

According to Kolanda and Govender (2021: 5), service delivery is performing mandatory duties to local communities. Its purpose is to render essential services to the public communities by local authorities. Similarly, service delivery is an efficient and effective act imperative for local communities due to the high poverty and lack of job opportunities (Thusi and Selepe, 2023: 688). Service delivery is crucial to any local community as it drives how communities must actively function, and failure to implement good practices of service delivery results in communal riots.

The following examples are about service delivery:

*Hector Pieterse umlando uyaziphinda izinhlamvu zenjoloba.*

*Kujahwa izingane zakwethu mazilwela imfundo yamahhala.*

*Uhulumeni wethu ufana nedlozi kuze ezwe,*

*kufanele kube khona okushayo.*

Hector Peterson's history repeats itself with rubber bullets.

Our children are being chased. Let them fight for free education.

Our government is like an ancestor. For him to listen,

there must be something burning.

In the preceding lines, the poet discusses the community's obstacles when trying to find service delivery. This issue is compared to the hardships of apartheid, as the poet states that "*Umlando uyaziphinda*" (repetition of history), in which young South Africans were slaughtered by the Boers in 1976 for fighting for their educational rights. The poet compares this to the #FeesMustFall movement, in which higher education institutions' students protested against reduction of higher education fees and decolonized education. The police chased them with rubber bullets, and others were arrested. Sobuwa (2018) from the Sowetan Live reported that some of the leaders of the #FeesMustFall movement were academically suspended, and others like Mcebo Dlamini were still attending the case, which was very disturbing as he was supposed to juggle between his studies and court trials.

Even if the community does not begin by marching in the streets and going on strike, their attempts to connect with the government amicably are usually futile. This leads to strikes, which is why the poet compares the government with the ancestors in the metaphorical manner, "*Uhulumeni wethu ufana nedlozi*" (Our government is like ancestors). When the poet examines the government and how it has acted, he compares it to an ancestor. The poet's words suggest a comparison between the government and ancestors. The government, like ancestors, is seen as something that cannot be addressed without a certain level of respect and formality, much like burning incense in a mosque. It is implied that to communicate with the government, people must protest, burn things, and make sacrifices to be heard and listened to.

The current situation in South Africa is concerning. It seems that the government only pays attention to the people when they resort to rioting and violence, which is not the right approach. Resorting to violence only harms society and sets the country back. The authorities should be more responsive to the people's concerns, even when expressed peacefully. The poet effectively used this analogy to highlight the striking resemblance between the behaviors of the current government and those of its predecessor.

The following lines also reveal the individualistic nature through service delivery.

*Sibanga igceke nomakhelwane asisabingelelani*

*Ukuba nisibuyisela inhlabathi kubelungu ngabe sesiyangelana.*

We fight over the yard with neighbors and no longer greet each other.

If you were to return the land from the white people, you would be getting along.

The fights among Black people due to a shortage of living space are discussed in the sentence above. This demonstrates the lack of space in the neighborhoods where Black people reside. Nonetheless, it is common for Black individuals to be homeless. A large portion of South Africans live in rental properties. This is the reason the poet says in the second line that it would be preferable if the government returned the land to them. One of the things politicians campaign on if they wish to be re-elected, is lying to the public and promising to build houses in the poor communities. No new homes were being built after the election, and the government remained silent. Fengu (2023) in the City Press newspaper writes that:



In a recorded address to Alexandra residents during the 2019 unrest, Ramaphosa indicated that the government had a programme to build 1 million houses and that the residents were set to benefit from the programme.

The quotation above is from President Cyril Ramaphosa's speech to the Alexander community during his 2019 campaign to win votes. South Africa suffers greatly when the government is required to keep its commitments. The people of Alexander do not have places in good condition to live in, and this issue affects the entire nation. If the government builds houses, it will be in a modest, impoverished area where residents would not feel at ease. For instance, a lot of the houses in Soweto are neglected, and it has been observed that the residents share a yard rather than having their own space. Zunguzane et al. (2012: 36) provide evidence for this, stating that their study revealed that:

There are significant problems in all aspects related to providing low-income houses. Starting at governmental departments, such as municipalities that award and oversee low-income housing projects, to the contractors who build the houses, problems abound.

The issues alluded to in the above quotation are also confirmed by Khumalo (2010: 2) asserting that, one of the reasons for violent protests and riots in South Africa is the lack of housing and the fact that available housing is likely to be poorly constructed low-income houses with cracks. This is a problem that affects most provinces in South Africa. Kota (2010: 26) also observed that government-subsidized houses in Vukani in Grahamstown fell because of poor and lower quality. Weak bricks and leaking water pipes, roofs, drains, and toilets were problems encountered in the houses.

Residents claim that the municipality has given them black plastic to cover the leaking areas when they complained about the leakages in the houses and that government-subsidized housing in that area is characterized by fraud, mismanagement, and corruption. This is an undeniable fact that the government always fails when it comes to service delivery because of the individualistic mindset and using low income to save money for personal gain. The ANC government's main focus is to enrich themselves and ensuring the South Africans' safety is at the least.

## ***Conclusion***

This article analyzes Duma's poem, 'Not Yet Uhuru,' which was discovered on YouTube in 2021. The poem delves into themes of corruption, unemployment and nepotism, and public service delivery. The study highlights the individualistic tendencies of the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) political party. The poem portrays the leaders of the ANC as self-centered, greedy, and resentful. However, the poet advocates for a more collective approach to improve the South African nation.

Additionally, the individualistic nature of this organization's leadership leads the poet to consider collectivist culture as a liberating way of life, particularly in South Africa. The idea of collectivism provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how colonialism has generated discourses that are either overtly chauvinistic or fundamentally flawed through various mechanisms. Prior to European colonialism, South Africans lived in peace and worked collectively. Similarly, before the emergence of political parties, South African communities heavily relied on traditional politics such as kingship and chieftaincy, and everyone was treated with respect, living according to shared standards to restore and maintain peace. In contrast to recent times, individuals prioritized self-interest and the well-being of their immediate families. When individuals ascend to higher positions, their focus often shifts from fulfilling work obligations to prioritizing their interests over those of others. The widespread corruption within the ANC significantly contributes to the country's current challenges. The ANC must undergo a rejuvenation, prioritize transparency, and implement improved policies to fulfill its promise of a better future for its

constituents. These changes are necessary for even a victory in the current election to improve conditions for those who have placed their trust in the party.

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