

Poetic Bodies: Weavings of Bodies, Languages and Environments in War Poetry by S.E.K. Mqhayi

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Abstract

The creation of “poetic bodies” refers to the embodiment of poetic experience through an eclectic theoretical and methodological conceptualisation. This poetic embodiment allows for the *re-membering* and *experiencing* of poetic texts in general, and specifically, indigenous South African poetry in the classroom. At its core is the *haunting* of memory in poetic texts: the inter-generational experiencing of poetry is embodied in the students’ responses to literature. Conjuring these poetic bodies comprises three acts of meaning-making that are woven together to create a unique experience and understanding of poetry: the *Bodily*, which refers to the figurative devices and images in poetry; the *Inner Bodily*, which relates to intergenerational memory construction; and the *Outer Bodily*, which encompasses social, cultural and historical contexts. In South Africa, the process of poetic embodiment is characterised by a strong sense of loss due to the country’s colonial and apartheid past. The weaving of the different levels of *re-membering* and *experiencing* in indigenous South African poetry is illustrated in the war poetry of S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875–1945). His poems are used as a case study to illustrate how poetic bodies may be re-membered or reconstructed as a literary-theoretical approach to facilitate understanding and experiencing poetry with marked traces of loss.

Keywords: poetic bodies; embodiment; re-membering; intergenerational trauma; war poetry; indigenous poetry; S.E.K. Mqhayi

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Introduction: Poetic Bodies as Embodiments of Re-membering

The concept of “poetic bodies” is a literary-theoretical concept by the author (Genis 2018; 2019) that may be used to analyse poetic texts and indigenous poetry in school and university classrooms. “Poetic bodies” is a three-tiered approach to conjuring poetic texts through language, memory and performance. These three acts of constructing meaning include the *Bodily* or language usage, which comprises the metaphors and metonyms of loss and gain; the *Inner Bodily* or memory construction; and the *Outer Bodily* or contextualisation. The *Bodily* encapsulates the use of verbal and nonverbal poetic language to situate the self in the world; the *Inner Bodily* encompasses intergenerational memory construction through poetic devices; and the *Outer Bodily* refers to the socio-cultural and historical context in which poetic re-membering and performance take place (Genis 2019, 60–87). These three acts of re-membering are interwoven. Crucially, the *Inner Bodily* saturates both the *Bodily*—how and why language is used—and the *Outer Bodily*: the context in which meaning is constructed.

Understanding and experiencing poetry are closely linked with the concept of analysing it. Poetry that is prescribed in South African school curricula is considered by many learners and students, and even teachers, as too far removed from the learners’ literacy registers and young lifeworlds, as well as being too difficult (Mavhiza 2019; Newfield and D’Abdon 2015, 511–13). This then leads to a mechanistic teaching and learning of poetry as a dead text on a blank piece of paper, accompanied by an array of technical questions on the poem (Kearney 2008; Mavhiza 2019, 86–88). Research has indicated that the multimodal embodiment or re-membering of poetry leads to greater learner interest and engagement with the genre, especially when spoken word poetry by young poets and indigenous poetry are included in the South African classroom (Mavhiza 2019; Newfield and D’Abdon 2015; Newfield and Maungedzo 2006). The concept of *poetic bodies* takes cognisance of this research and creates a schema through which poetry may be multimodally embodied, re-membered and experienced by the learner and teacher/lecturer alike.

The poetic body of the South African poet S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875–1945) is conjured as it is re-membered or embodied in his *izibongo* or praise poetry on the sinking of the troop transport, the *SS Mendi* (1917) in the English Channel during the First World War (Genis 2018, 154–65). War *izibongo* are cultural markers of trauma: conflict and war may be compared to a human disease emanating from the Freudian death instinct or *Thanatos* (Appignanesi and Zarate 2000, 150–51), which leaves post-traumatic scars in its wake. Mqhayi’s *izibongo* contain examples of these psychological traces, which reveal or re-member much African post-traumatic trauma during the war and inter-war years.

The embodiment of these poetic bodies may contribute to indigenising the South African curriculum and to giving voice to creative traditions that are not included in the literary canon at school and at university. This act of re-membering refers to the multimodal experiencing of poetry through analysing its semiotic shapes; the poem as

a body of text is not only a linguistic representation, but also a visual, tactile, gestural and spatial re-membering of the past in the present. Constructing these poetic bodies allows for a holistic analysis of the sensory manifestations of the poetry. Importantly, re-membering refers to the poetic act of constructing the poem, to the act of analysing the poem through multimodal/bodily experiencing, and to its subsequent understanding by the reader.

For the purposes of this article, indigenous poetry¹ refers to poetry written in the nine African languages² that evolved from the soil of South Africa. These languages were and are still used to embody narratives that are deeply embedded in the social, cultural and historical memory of South Africa. The ancient tradition of storytelling and poetry in all these languages is part of South Africa's literary fibre (Genis 2019).

Poetic Bodies: Weavings of Bodies, Languages and Environments

The United Nations declared 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages. The purpose of the resolution was to promote indigenous languages and to stem the tide of many of these languages' demise (UN 2016, 5). Against this background, I want to sketch the dynamic interplay of language, the psychological and physical body and the environment in the indigenous war poetry of S.E.K. Mqhayi, and how this multimodal embodiment of experience may be used to analyse indigenous poetry in the classroom. The concept of poetic bodies aligns closely with research on biocultural studies, Jungian psychoanalysis and indigenous war poetry (Bloomfield and Hanson 2015a; Genis 2018; 2019; Jung 2003).

Various researchers have highlighted the close link between literary embodiment and the experiencing of texts in all their sensory and bodily manifestations. Mandy Bloomfield and Clare Hanson (2015a, 407) refer to this as “biosocial and biocultural studies”. Their research reveals that the study of “race”, gender and identity within social, cultural and literary texts and contexts may be enriched by taking cognisance of the psycho-social and psycho-biological functioning of intergenerational experience.³ The human body and its social and cultural experiences are inextricably linked to specific environments. These studies resonate with research that has drawn a correlation between trauma as expressed in South African war poetry (Genis 2018) and Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes within a collective unconscious (Jung 2003, 93). These primordial images—monsters, people or processes—do not stay fixed, but mutate in the minds and bodies of the poet and readers (Genis 2018, 25). Re-membering poetic bodies reveals the communal Jungian archetypes or primordial images that find expression in literature in the form of a collective “daemon, ... human being, or ... process” (Jung 2003, 94).

¹ The poems that are quoted in this article were translated from the original IsiXhosa. The translators include Jack Cope, C.M. Mcanyangwa, Jeff Opland and Abner Nyamende. For a discussion of the effect of translations on literary and historical interpretation, see Genis (2018, 154–55).

² Sesotho, Sepedi, Setswana, IsiNdebele, SiSwati, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, Xitsonga and Tshivenda.

³ See the special issue of *Textual Practice* “Beyond the Gene: Epigenetic Science in 21st Century Culture”, edited by Mandy Bloomfield and Clare Hanson (2015b).

This re-membering or experiencing of the poetry also leads to intergenerational performativity, which is a response to the past in the present. Subsequently, the indigenous poet adds to the archetypes over time, where new heroes are created in response to changing socio-historical circumstances (Genis 2018, 157–60).

The South African war *izimbongi* or indigenous praise poets built on a tradition of communal hero/warrior veneration and used natural and cultural metaphors and images that were part of their collective heritage (Genis 2018, 131–85). Jung (2003) also indicates that these primordial images, which he calls archetypes, are reflected in literature. Although Jung arguably overemphasises the force of nature as an “autonomous complex” in generating the creative spark of the artist or writer (Jung 2003, 87, 93, 94), his idea does add to the nature/nurture debate and highlights the significance of cultural and natural metaphors and metonyms in literature. These archetypes may be read as poetic marks or traces in the collective literary unconscious of a people.

South African oral praise poetry or *izibongo* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is laced with references to the traces of the black body (as objectified by the colonial gaze), blackness, identity, masculinity, history, culture and colonial oppression. The body as signifier of meaning is crucial in the *izibongo*. Indigenous South African oral poems and songs are sites, according to Liz Gunner (2008, 28), where the sonic and somatic meet each other and both meet the word. The body plays a signifying role that is as important as the words spoken in the performance of *izibongo*: bodily enactment resonates with the words of oral poetry and may vary depending on the socio-historical context and the idiosyncrasies of the performer. The structure of the poem can be changed as the subject of the poem—a king, chief, warrior, commoner, animal or object—and its adjectival praise-attachments constantly shift within the assemblage of the poem depending on the purpose of the performance (to praise or blame) and the performer’s unique rendition (Opland 1992; 2009, 7–8).

The phrases and words employed in the war *izibongo* are language traces of trauma that the physical and psychological body has suffered due to certain environmental circumstances: the battlefield, civil war and colonial oppression. The *izibongo* reflect experience, and, in the case of war poems, the experience of trauma is influenced by environmental circumstances: post-traumatic stress on the colonial battlefield (Genis 2018, 131–85). Liz Gunner (1995, 50) indicates that indigenous African oral poetry carries this remembrance: it is a “poetry of remembering” (Gunner 1995, 51). The past as word traces in these poems is “reactivated” or regenerated in intergenerational oral poems (Gunner 1995, 53–54).

Poetic language assists in giving order to chaos and loss (Gunner 1995, 54). Taban Lo Liyong (2018) argues that African literary forms are animistic traces that should be used to reanimate or re-instil the soul into African literary heritage. This would lead to the self-affirmation of African culture and literature *vis-à-vis* colonial literary imperialism

(Liyong 2018, 17–28). This may be compared with Anna Neill’s (2017, 1082) “soul-making” or the formation of a unique character in literature through the interplay of “body, environment, and character”. These three aspects are constantly interacting and re-enacted through the *izibongo*’s performativity. The concept of poetic bodies draws together or weaves language, body and the environment in re-animating the poetic body that is laced with intergenerational traces of loss.

Entry Points into Studying and Teaching Poetry about Loss

The weaving of language, memory and context creates an epistemological schema for the poetic embodiment of loss. Researchers have indicated a possible connection between the re-remembering of conflict and “transgenerational epigenetic inheritance” (Bloomfield and Hanson 2015a, 406). Researchers such as Natan Kellermann (2013, 33–37) and Angela Connolly (2011, 607–26) have studied the transmission of trans- and intergenerational trauma in the successors of victims of intense psychological and physical upheavals: the Holocaust and Stalin’s gulags. Connolly (2011, 614) and Paul S. Saks (2008) concur that symbolising is a prerequisite for effectively dealing with trauma. Saks uses the Great War⁴ poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon as case studies, making his observations directly relevant to the context of Mqhayi’s poetry. He indicates that war trauma is so concrete that initially it cannot be processed through symbolic language. Only when Owen and Sassoon could express their trauma symbolically through poetry could their psychological healing take place (Saks 2008, iii, 164–65). This illustrates the interconnectivity of the three-tiered process of embodiment: language (the *Bodily*) is used to give symbolic meaning to trauma (the *Inner Bodily*), within a specific historical war milieu (the *Outer Bodily*). Without language, the traumatic experience cannot be metaphorically processed and the individual’s ontology is fractured.

In war poetry of the Great War, including Mqhayi’s, the inside is turned outside; the soldier-poet wears his trauma on his shoulder: he suffers from shell-shock (as Owen, Robert Graves and Sassoon did) that is revealed as “cowardice”; his body is blown to bits and the inner organs are exposed (Genis 2018). Furthermore, war may be represented as a collective disease brought about by the Freudian death instinct or *Thanatos* drive (Appignanesi and Zarate 2000, 150–52). Its psychoanalytical traces are expressed through metaphors (condensing of meaning) and metonyms (displacing of meaning) in literature (Eagleton 1985, 157, 180). Rolf Lessenich (1999) goes as far as to state that Owen, Rosenberg and Sassoon were driven by this death instinct as they volunteered instinctively for active service. Importantly, their poetry grapples with the experience of death and maiming. These war poets used metaphors to express the concrete experience of war through “a dream-text of the visionary” (Campbell 1999,

⁴ Although the War of 1914–1918 came to be known after 1945 as “the First World War”, it was known to those who experienced it, more simply, as “the Great War”, being the greatest war that had been experienced up to then.

211). Their poems deal with trauma through symbolic language, which gives the nightmare a metaphysical meaning or meta-meaning.

There is undoubtedly a close link between psychological healing and the act of making art, or the re-membling of the poetic body. David Lewis-Williams (2004) links the art of creation and the dream imaginings of the artist to neuroscience. He postulates that “boiling” or “making” poetry or art rewires the nervous system in altered states of consciousness that allow for the creation of visions or dreams. This illustrates the close bond between the construction of poetic language—the *Bodily*—through dreams and deep imaginings or meditations: the *Inner Bodily*. Carl Gustav Jung (2003, 87, 93) refers to this creative act in terms of an autonomous force in the mind:

The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man [sic] who is its vehicle ... think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche ... an autonomous complex ... the collective unconscious.

This creative spark or the making of meaning through language, body and environment in creating poetic bodies may be likened to an ever-expanding circle or cycle of diffraction (Holbrook and Cannon 2018, 21–36; Murriss and Haynes 2018, 71), which aligns with indigenous South African views of time, space and action, where the ancestral world (past) is intertwined with that of the living in the present and future (Mda 2000). This cyclical nature of existence, which incorporates the world of the ancestors, can also be found in the indigenous *izibongo*. Denise Newfield and Vivienne Bozalek (2019, 37) draw on Jacques Derrida and Karen Barad’s concepts of the past as inhabiting present and future to describe “hauntology” in a South African context: “‘hauntings’ are traces of the past in the present and future” that exist in current or future spaces. It is “‘Thebuwa’ that means ‘to speak’” (Newfield and Bozalek 2019, 38), which is an act of creating indigenous poetry through writing and performing: “Writing is ... a bodily and a spiritual action” (Newfield and Bozalek 2019, 50). They add:

The diffractive tale of Thebuwa [an indigenous multimodal classroom poetry project] has told of a journey across many borders—human and non-human—a journey of returning and re-turning, remembering and re-membling. (Newfield and Bozalek 2019, 52)

War and traumatic experience also involve crossing multiple borders, and war poetry represents a remembering and “re-membling of body parts” (Christie 2007, 237) as the poet returns to her or someone else’s traumatic experiences through poetic language. Indigenous *izibongo*, therefore, represent a returning to, and a re-membling or embodiment of the archetypal African warrior and the ancestral world.

This re-membling also represents a loud battle cry. Liz Gunner (2002, 213) observes that “a poem [*izibongo*] [is ...] a verbal artefact of both defence and attack”.

Additionally, Gunner (2004, 2) asserts that “[o]rality ... in the African context [is...] the means by which societies of varying complexity regulated themselves, organized their present and their pasts”. It also represents how these societies “constantly refashioned” themselves and their psychological and physical spaces (2004, 2). It is a repository of memory that provides a link between the living and the ancestors (2004, 5–6). Therefore, the oral poetry provided the oppressed with an outlet for catharsis and renewal.

The findings of these scholars have created epistemological entry points into studying and teaching poetry that is characterised by metaphors and metonyms of loss and the powerful outpouring of emotions. Indigenous poetry or *izibongo* lends itself to this diffraction of meaning as text is not only writing and voice, but also the act of bodily performance. The nonverbal performance quality (body language, setting and atmosphere) of these poems is as important as the words that are spoken and written (Opland 1992; 2009). The *Bodily* in the indigenous context encompasses both the verbal and nonverbal expression of meaning. Furthermore, the indigenous knowledge systems, of which the *izibongo* form part, also include the diffraction and intertwining of knowledges or theories and ways of knowing. This weaving of various knowledges creates a methodological framework with which to analyse, experience and re-embodiment poetry, especially when it exhibits marked traces of loss.

Mqhayi’s *Mendi*: Monsters and Heroes

Mqhayi’s 1917 *izibongo* on the *Mendi* is an embodied and haunted space where the ancestors are called upon to help combat racial oppression and the German enemy. His *izibongo* manifest traces of anti-colonial and Fanonian “muscular demonstrations” (Fanon 2001, 44), which refer to the act of war and reaction to colonial oppression:

And as our bride down her last flood
The Mendi takes the service of our blood. (i, 7–8)

Say it was not for just a bribe
Or for meat you left the hunger of your tribe;
Not in the hope of piling up rewards
Or for wealth counted by the stars.
To you who died for Africa, who sailed down
Over the sea to meet the German, we make it known:
It was not for the King by any loyal tie,
It was not for Britain you went to die. (ii)

Black men of our blood, we said this thing—
“On that far-off field you are our offering.” (iii, 23–24)

With what victim do we make atonement?
For home and family what offering is sent?
Do we not sacrifice the bull-calves of the kraal,

Single out those most loved of all?
 [...]

Was not Abel's death the whole world's price?
 Was not the Saviour heaven's sacrifice? (iv, 25–28, 31–32)

Then be comforted, orphans of our nation—
 From one death rises new creation;
 One man must serve that others may live on. (v, 33–35)

Ah, those dead stood in the foremost rank
 Of Africa—great the ship's burden when she sank.
 Brave of the brave they were, men who bring
 With their blood greetings to the King of Kings.
 Death has its wage—to live again.
 Gladly I would stand with them, new-risen men,
 And shine like one whose work is well done
 In the great brightness of that Day's dawn.
 So then, let it be. (vi)
 (Mqhayi, "The Sinking of the Mendi", 1917 in Cope and Krige 1968, 278–280)

Mqhayi's monsters and heroes are re-remembered within a specific historical or *Outer Bodily* context. The *SS Mendi* was transporting members of the South African Native Labour Contingent (SANLC) from England to Europe when it was rammed by the transport ship, the *SS Darro*, near the Isle of Wight on 21 February 1917. It quickly sank and hundreds of African soldiers drowned. Many of the African elite were hopeful that loyal service in the war would lead to more political rights for blacks in the "white" Union of South Africa. When the Union was established in 1910, which was the result of the amalgamation of two British colonies and two Boer/Afrikaner republics, the blacks of South Africa were excluded from all political processes. Subsequently, the *Mendi* tragedy has become a potent symbol for South African poets, writers and politicians alike (Grundlingh 2011, 20–37). Subsequently, the embodiment of the *Mendi* has cascaded across different historical epochs or *Outer Bodily* contexts. The historical and literary memory of the *Mendi* has been ensconced within the *Inner Bodily* of South African collective consciousness of this event through poetry that spans the period 1917 to the present (Genis 2018, 165–84). Consequently, the *Bodily* has served as a conduit for the *Inner Bodily* through various historical contexts.

In terms of the *Inner Bodily*, the African warriors in this poem are new creations who have been fashioned through mixing the archetypal heroic warrior's blood with that of the "flood" of the *Mendi* "bride": "The Mendi takes the service of our blood ... / Black men of our blood, we said this thing— / "On that far-off field you are our offering"... / Do we not sacrifice the bull-calves of the kraal ... / Death has its wage—to live again. / ... new-risen me". The soldiers metamorphose into bull calves who are sacrificed to regain black self-affirmation and more political rights in the country of their birth. The metaphors of the divinely conceived and sacrificed bull calves (the *Bodily*) embody or re-member the heroic tradition of warriors in the collective consciousness (the *Inner*

Bodily) within a specific historical context (the *Outer Bodily*). Cattle played and still play a crucial role in the lives of indigenous South Africans. Their importance weaves together the economic (food and clothes), the religious (as sacrifices to placate the ancestors), the political (wealth and status) and the social (marriage gifts). Additionally, in the poem, these warriors become bleeding Christs on the cross of sacrifice. Many early twentieth-century black South African poets, including Mqhayi, were products of mission schools and they were subsequently also influenced by Christian symbolism (Opland 2004). The soldier as a suffering Christ on the cross is a common theme in Great War poetry (Winter 2000, 217).

Mqhayi's bull calves become re-embodied as "new-risen men" or sanctified ancestors who will continue their just battle against the German and colonial oppressor in the mirror-reality that is the ancestral world. The reference to horned bull calves in Mqhayi's war *izibongo*, including "The Black Army: A Call to Arms" (1916), is a metaphor for the heroic *impi* who fights in the tradition of the warrior-king Shaka Zulu, whose horned bull's head battlefield-encircling strategy was devastatingly successful during the first half of the nineteenth century and helped establish the Zulu kingdom (Allen 2014, 16–18). Significantly, these bull calves fight for Africa in order to show their heroism to the oppressive colonisers and convince them that they are worthy to be accepted as the equals of white soldiers: "Ah, those dead stood in the foremost rank / Of Africa—great the ship's burden when she sank. / Brave of the brave they were". They fight, notwithstanding the poverty and suffering that were caused by colonial laws such as the devastating 1913 Natives Land Act (Saunders and Southey 2001, 102), which is alluded to in the poem ("the hunger of your tribe").

Mqhayi's poem uses *Bodily* metaphors and metonyms that refer not only to the sanctified *Inner Bodily*, but also to the profanity of re-memorialising. For instance, Mqhayi claims the righteous Abel as a metonym for the bull calves' sacrifice, which is accepted by God. In contrast, Cain's sacrifice is not accepted. Mqhayi appropriates Cain as a metonym for the oppressive white settlers who commit acts of violence against the indigenous black inhabitants. Cain is physically marked by God to roam the earth. In the war *izibongo*, "After the Battle" (ca. 1915), Mqhayi conceives of the monster *Gilikankqo* (Butler and Opland 1989, 50). The monster symbolises the "people who traffic in lightning" (1989, 51), the white "demonic race" (Nyamende 2011, 13). The white devils who emerged from the sea off Table Mountain in 1652 have corrupted chromosomes that are marked by the Beast. Significantly, Edward, Prince of Wales, who visited South Africa in 1925, becomes the "calf of the beast", the monster *Gilikankqo*, in the poem "The Prince of Britain" (Chapman 2002, 65–67). This is a clever reversal by Mqhayi of the imagery of Adamastor, the Titan of the Cape, who was appropriated by white settlers as an image for the barbaric African Caliban who lived as a genetic oddity within a "heart of darkness". This image of Adamastor was a potent metaphor in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry written by white South African poets (Van Wyk Smith 1998).

The almost seditious tone in “The Sinking of the Mendi”, “After the Battle” and “The Prince of Britain” is repeated in “The Black Army” (Cope and Krige 1968, 276–78). Here, Mqhayi mentions sarcastically that the heroes of the black nation managed to defeat the British and Boers in pitched battles during the nineteenth century. Mqhayi even fraternises with the German enemy by inviting them to listen to stories of African military successes against the colonial occupiers: “Let the Kaiser come and talk with us, / We’ll tell him how the Zulus won at Sandlwana, / Of Thaba Ntsu where the Boers were baffled” (“The Black Army”, v, in Cope and Krige 1968, 277). Mqhayi is able to do this since oral poems create a safe and sanctioned space in traditional societies in which to vent frustration (Gunner 1979, 241; 2004, 7–9). Most probably, the colonial authorities would not have been cognisant of this poem as it was originally composed in IsiXhosa, which is one of the indigenous languages of South Africa.

Significantly, Mqhayi’s 1917 “The Sinking of the Mendi” creates an embodied and haunted space in which the heroic bull calves, Christ, and the ancestors are called upon to re-member and remember the black body that is oppressed. The bull calves become divinely sanctioned warriors who are transformed into ancestors when they die. Language is used to affirm the blood bond and sacrifice of black bodies (the *Bodily*) in a war environment (the *Outer Bodily*) and to re-insert the black body into the historical narrative and memory (the *Inner Bodily*).

In Mqhayi’s *Mendi izibongo*, the subject is the bull calves. The traditional *izibongo* consists of units of meaning that are subjects (royalty, warriors, commoners, objects and/or animals) with concomitant adjectival praise-attachments (Opland 1992; 2009, 7–8). The *izibongo* is a word-helix that wraps itself around the metaphors and metonyms that contain traces of intergenerational trauma and remembrance. Mqhayi consciously built on the tradition of black heroes of the nineteenth century who resisted colonial oppression, including Cetshwayo and Moshesh, in order to reclaim black self-affirmation. Significantly, Mqhayi acts as the *imbongi* for a new Great War hero; Mqhayi re-animates the poetic body of Isaac Williams Wauchope (1852–1917), who is credited for leading a heroic dance of death while the *Mendi* was sinking.

Mqhayi’s Wauchope and the Death Dance

“He was a man of great bearing, and piety; he was also chiefly in bearing, and indeed by birth”: this is how the poet Jacob Bam describes Wauchope (in Nyamende 2011, 14). This sentiment is shared by Abner Nyamende, Wauchope’s modern-day *imbongi*. Wauchope was a noble Ndlambe-born warrior (2011, 6, 8). Significantly, the Ndlambe line of the Rharhabe Xhosa remained defiant against British colonial encroachments during the early nineteenth century. Additionally, Wauchope is also the inheritor of the Christ-like and noble genes of the early nineteenth-century Gcaleka-Xhosa Chief Hintsu, who was “easily the most impressive figure in the whole history” of the Xhosa people, according to Jeffrey Peires (1981, 62). In his praise poem, Hintsu is described as “a better mote [grain or particle] than others” (in Opland 1992, 221). Wauchope’s blood was mixed with that of heroes. The *Inner Body* of the indigenous narrative is re-

affirmed through the *Bodily* re-membering of heroic language within the specific *Outer Bodily* historical context of the early twentieth century.

Wauchope was an interpreter and, according to Mqhayi, a chaplain as well, in the South African Native Labour Contingent (SANLC), who sailed for Europe on the *SS Mendi*. What took place on the ship that bleak winter morning in 1917 is the stuff of legend:

Those who were there say the hero from Ngqika's land descended from heroes was standing aside now as the ship was sinking! As a chaplain he was free to board a boat and save himself, but he didn't! He kept on appealing to the leaderless soldiers urging them to stay calm, and die like heroes on their way to war. We hear that he said:

Now then stay calm my countrymen!

Calmly face your death!

This is what you came to do!

This is why you left your homes!

Peace, our own brave warriors!

Peace, you sons of heroes,

This is your final day today,

Prepare for the ultimate ford!

(Mqhayi, "The Late Rev. Isaac William Wauchope", *The Bantu World*, 19 January 1935, 6; quoted in Opland 2007, 106, tr. Xhosa)

In this 1935 *izibongo*, these "sons of heroes" had to face their archetypal demons on the high seas: "the ultimate ford". The *Mkiza*, the unknown lands that lay beyond the mysterious watery mass, led to superstition among many of the black recruits during the Great War (Willan 1978, 70). The sea was not only the place that brought the white colonisers during the seventeenth century, but it was also a mystical unknown space (Peires 1979, 54, 56; Zarwan 1976, 532). It was an environment of both death (Butler and Opland 1989, 84) and regeneration (Peires 1987, 54–55). Significantly, most volunteers for the SANLC came from the landlocked northern parts of South Africa (Grundlingh 2011, 22). It is very probable that most of them were not proficient swimmers and had never set eyes on the sea before boarding the *Mendi*. Importantly, the bull calves faced and conquered the watery daemon by volunteering to sail across the seas.

Mqhayi is at pains to state in his *izibongo* that Wauchope was "the hero from Ngqika's land" (Opland 2007, 106). Ngqika was the early nineteenth-century Xhosa chief who was allied to the British. Mqhayi is reaffirming that the African can be trusted, as Ngqika could be trusted, to be loyal to Britain. Mqhayi also cleverly indicates that Wauchope has redeemed the treachery of Chief Ngqika, who is also described as a dastardly "scavenger" in the *izibongo* and "a drunken plaything of the whites" by his people (Opland 1992, 217–18). Wauchope's "genetic" pedigree or poetic body was both loyal to just causes and heroic in times of crisis.

In 1936, a little more than a year later, another version of the *Mendi* death-drill was published. Jacob Bam's version illustrates a more inclusive African nationalism, similar to Mqhayi's 1917 *Mendi* poem:

Be quiet and calm my countrymen, for what is taking place now is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die, but that is what you came to do. Brothers we are drilling the drill of death. I, a Xhosa, say you are all my brothers. Zulus, Swazis, Pondos, Basutos,⁵ we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our weapons at our homes, our voices are left with our bodies. (in Nyamende 2011, 14)

As stated earlier, these *izibongo* are mutating traces of memory. Bam has taken stock phrases or *Bodily* markers from Mqhayi's *Mendi* poem and added new ones. For instance, Bam calls on all African communities in South Africa, and not only on the Xhosa (as Mqhayi does), to remember and re-member the triumphant dance that took place while the *Mendi* was sinking; he coins the phrase "the drill of death". Bam also alludes to the fact that black soldiers could not carry arms to protect themselves (Grundlingh 1981, 194–95). These are all new observations that are not included in Mqhayi's 1935 version of Wauchope's heroism. Black Consciousness has developed, in the short span of a year, by inculcating more communalities of Africanness and abuses by white authorities. Bam creates new subjects or traces for praise. "Brothers", "Zulus, Swazis, Pondos, Basothos" are added to Mqhayi's "Xhosa" and "my countrymen"; the inclusive pronouns "we" and "our" (similar to Mqhayi's 1917 *Mendi* poem), and numerous novel adjectival praises are attached to these subjects: "we are drilling the drill of death", "we die like brothers", "We are the sons of Africa". Crucially, Mqhayi and Bam give a voice to the abjected black body during a time when African protest politics in South Africa were disorganised and ineffectual (Saunders and Southey 2001, 2, 195). By stringing together these word traces of heroism, Mqhayi and Bam wanted to re-member black self-worth and dignity.

It is also revealing that this re-affirmation of African dignity in traditional *izibongo* was accompanied by a dance: the death-drill.⁶ Gunner (2004, 1, 7, 10) affirms that dance is part of the performance quality of African oral poetry. The hallucinatory performance of Mqhayi that former South African President Nelson Mandela witnessed during the 1940s is an apt example:

When he spoke this last word [of poetry], he dropped his head to his chest. We rose to our feet, clapping and cheering. I did not want ever to stop applauding. I felt such intense

⁵ Black soldiers on the *Mendi* were drawn from all sections of the African community. However, ironically, the Sotho, Tsonga and Venda contributions from the then Northern Transvaal weighed the heaviest by far, although they are not mentioned in Bam's version (see Grundlingh 1987, 75–79.) Surprisingly, the "warlike" Zulu "formed a distinct minority" in the SANLC (Grundlingh 1987, 65–66).

⁶ For a discussion of the historical veracity of the death-drill, see Genis (2018, 158).

pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa; I felt like one of the chosen people. (Opland 2009, 9)

Language (the *Bodily*), environment (the *Outer Bodily*) and memory (the *Inner Bodily*) all interact to create or re-member a spiritual happening or primordial becoming that is characterised by deep word-meditations: a universal “introcosm” of *re-membering* (Lewis-Williams 2004; Van der Post 1961, 165–66, 227). Crucially, the *izibongo* is a prayer that ensures communion with God and the ancestors, and it engenders the subsequent protection of progeny (Opland 1992, 26–27). Mqhayi was a “boiler” or word-conjurer of note and he offered powerful prayers to the ancestors: “With these words the Nation’s Poet boils our blood and enflames our ears so we cannot hear” (in Opland 2009, 526). Mqhayi continues with his *Bodily* re-animation of Wauchope’s memory:

With the sinking of this ship, the Xhosa people lost their reliable sons; but when the name of this chaplain was mentioned among the dead, the nation was dealt a grievous blow. Clearly Xhosa himself suffered a severe wound, a massive loss, at the setting of this brilliant star of his.

Ow!!!
Nojoli’s cry was heard,
the keening cry of Rharhabe’s wife,
daughter of Nomagwayi of eMbo,
bewailing the beauty swept out to sea,
saying death hadn’t claimed them, they were growing in strength!
Peace, Phalo’s people,
Ngconde’s, Butsolobentonga’s.
At times like these a nation despairs.
Chizama’s star has set,
the Xhosa nation’s back is broken!
The best of stars we took such pride in,
the animal cub died while talking,
died giving heart, securing his testament!
Someone said what an unseemly death,
suddenly coming in alien territory,
in a strait between two bulls ...
(*The Bantu World*, 26 January 1935, 4; in Opland 2007, 107)

This section of Mqhayi’s 1935 poem illustrates the loss or dis-embodiment that the Xhosa experienced, both in 1917 and in 1935. In 1935, the African was still viewed, similar to 1917, as a socio-political miscreant and racial degenerate in the country of his birth. This psychological “wound” is mirrored by a physical one, which was inflicted by the colonial wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century:

Go, prince of Chizama’s place!
You’ll be eating porridge with God.

We Xhosa people never die,
 We're judged when the dead arise,
 death to us is profit and gain,
 for there we get our strength,
 for there we get our speed.
 Go, Chizama, we grant you leave.
 Never forget us there in the highest.
 I'm finished!

I'm finished!!

I'm finished!!!

(*The Bantu World*, 26 January 1935, 4; in Opland 2007, 107)

The line “We're judged when the dead arise” is both pathetic and highly ironic. The Xhosa prophet Nongqawuse's mid-nineteenth-century vision that the dead ancestors would arise to help re-establish Xhosa independence never materialised. The slaughtering of cattle and destruction of crops to appease the ancestors during the Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856–1857 only led to the starvation of tens of thousands of Xhosa and a split in the Xhosa psyche (Mda 2000). Similarly, during the mid-1930s blacks were politically ostracised in South Africa.

In the *izibongo* to Wauchope, Mqhayi endeavours to reclaim the *Inner Bodily* memory and dignity of the black body, which has been objectified and infected with loss, through *Bodily* metaphors of wholeness. Wauchope becomes the archetypal hero, who is resurrected in the *izibongo* to save Africans from suffering and self-doubt. In his *izibongo*, Wauchope and the bull calves are the great hunters whose hearts or souls have turned into stars in the sky, according to traditional spiritual belief (Van der Post 1961): “Chizama's star has set ... / The best of stars we took such pride in, / the animal cub died while talking, / died giving heart, securing his testament!” However, the ghosts or spirits have fallen into the uncanny sea, where “[t]heir souls [or ghosts] are not sitting well in the English Channel” (Kennedy 2007). This is embodied in the *izibongo* as “suddenly [their death is] coming in alien territory”. In the African tradition, the ancestors need to be buried in familial graves, which must be tended by their progeny. The scattering of the bull calves in the cold English Channel represents a double loss: the ancestral spirits and the ostracising of the living black socio-political body.

Perhaps Mqhayi envisaged that the God of the Bible represented a loophole or a portal through which the spirits of the bull calves lost at sea could be returned to the familial world of the ancestors. Like so many Xhosa intellectuals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Mqhayi was influenced by missionary Christianity and he also drew on European literature and the English Bible in his texts (Opland 2009, 14, 15, 22). The triple “mantra” at the end of the 1935 *izibongo* to Wauchope—“I'm finished! / I'm finished!! / I'm finished!!!”—reveals the communal intergenerational psychological loss of the Xhosa and African people of the first half of the twentieth century.

Re-memembering Poetic Bodies in the Classroom

The concept of poetic bodies can also serve as a methodology and pedagogy for teaching and learning indigenous poetry and poetry with marked traces of loss in the school and university classroom. The three-tiered, or rather three-aspect approach of the *Bodily*, *Inner Bodily* and *Outer Bodily* can be consciously applied to assist learners, students, teachers and lecturers to analyse, experience and re-embody poetic texts in the classroom (Genis 2019).

The case study of Mqhayi's poetry indicates how poetic bodies may be analysed through the framework. Closely linked with a *Bodily*, *Inner Bodily* and *Outer Bodily* analysis is the multimodal experience of poetry. Indigenous poems cannot be fully understood and appreciated without incorporating their multimodal and performance qualities in the classroom. For instance, poetic bodies cannot be wholly embodied as linguistic and written semiotic constructs. These poems were created to be performed, and the oral, gestural, visual and spatial modalities become as important as the written in analysing and understanding the poem. Analysis and experience can not be separated (Genis 2019). The *Mendi* death-drill that accompanied Wauchope's *izibongo* is a case in point: the dramatic or theatrical meaning of the poem is lost if it is only read and analysed as a written text. Performing Wauchope's death dance encourages learners to revisit the context of the poem not only intellectually, but also physically and emotionally. Listening, speaking, reading and writing activities are woven together, and this caters for different learning styles. Oral and kinaesthetic learners perform the *izibongo*, and the linguistic and visual learners write or draw/illustrate their understanding of the performance.

Importantly, the *Bodily*, *Inner Bodily* and *Outer Bodily* are pedagogical acts of re-memembering the poetic text as a multimodal genre. The language, emotive responses and contextualisation of the poem become a process of the cyclical and recursive embodiment of analysis and experience, as opposed to a mechanistic lecture or lesson. Traditional poetry lessons usually consist of an introduction to the life of the poet, reading the poem and answering myriad questions on the text: this linear approach fractures the unitary meaning and experience of the poem (Kearney 2008, 266–67).

The poetic bodies approach encourages the re-memembering of the poem as a body of meaning through the weavings of poetic language, memory and emotive experiencing, as well as social and historical contextualisation. This weaving of bodies also refers to connecting the learners' or students' lifeworlds with that of the prescribed text, as propagated by New Literacy Studies (Pahl and Rowsell 2013). Learners can write their own poems on important events in their communities' and families' histories, and share these stories with their peers and teachers. This will encourage a more empathic and communal embodiment of learning.

Conclusion

Mqhayi's poetry on the sinking of the *Mendi* represents a re-membering of the ancestors in an effort to reclaim their sacrifices for African history and pride. This process of conjuring the ancestors through language leads to a re-animation or re-membering of the black physical and psychological body during the performance of the poetry in the present. The *Bodily* (language), *Inner Bodily* (memory) and *Outer Bodily* (context) all work together to bring about a new poetic body. This newly reconstituted body contains the poetic traces or markers of the past in the present: the cultural-specific archetypes, metaphors, metonyms and symbols of loss and regeneration. Realising that poems are living, breathing bodies will encourage teachers and learners to link the analysis and understanding of poetry with the experiences of the poet and the learners' personal lifeworlds.

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