



A socially committed literary work: perspectives on Elliot Zondi's *Insumansumane*

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Abstract

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In this article Elliot Zondi's historical drama, "Insumansumane", is discussed as a committed literary work. The main character, Bhambada, urges his contemporaries to challenge the ideological domination of the apartheid system and to fight for their freedom to the last man, if necessary. According to Elliot Zondi, the 1906 Bhambada Rebellion was caused by a lack of consultation and utter disregard for the feelings of the African majority regarding taxation. The rebellion was also caused by the forceful introduction of Western culture and social values. The play in itself is actually a metaphor for the Zulu people living in the 1980s under the iron rule of President P.W. Botha. In this play the Zulu are urged to live up to the freedom ideals for which their forefathers had been ready to fight and to die. The development of the plot in the play emphasises that the "winds of change" at that time were becoming stronger, causing the undercurrent that was to bring about liberation in 1992 and in 1994.

Opsomming

'n Sosiaal-betrokke literêre werk: perspektiewe op Elliot Zondi se *Insumansumane*

In hierdie artikel word Elliot Zondi se historiese drama, "Insumansumane" (1986), bespreek as 'n sosiaal-betrokke literêre werk omdat die hoofkarakter, Bhambada sy tydgenote

aanmoedig om die ideologiese dominasie van die apartheid-sisteem uit te daag en om vir hulle vryheid te veg, selfs tot die bittere einde indien nodig. Volgens Elliot Zondi het die 1906 Bhambada-rebellie onder die Zoeloes ontstaan weens 'n gebrek aan onderhandeling en op grond van 'n algehele miskenning van die gevoelens van die swart meerderheid aangaande belasting. Die rebellie is ook veroorsaak deur die gedwonge invoering van Westerse kulturele en sosiale waardes. Die toneelstuk self is inderwaarheid 'n metafoor vir die Zoeloevolk, wat in die tagtigerjare onder die dwingelandy van president P.W. Botha moes leef. In die drama word die Zoeloes aangemoedig om reg te laat geskied aan die vryheidsideale waarvoor hulle voorvaders bereid was om te veg en te sterf. Die ontwikkelingslyn in die drama beklemtoon dat die "winde van verandering" gedurende daardie tyd sterker geword het en uiteindelik sou lei tot die onderstroming wat die bevryding in 1992 en 1994 bewerkstellig het.

1. Introduction

Usually most attempts at literary analysis dwell more on form or structure than on content and social function. This article will lean on theories that approach literature from the point of view of its relation to the society it is intended for. Marxism and theories advocated by African writers on socio-political commitment will therefore be employed for this purpose. Foregrounding the aspects of social commitment in the assessment of Zondi's literary work, *Insumansumane*, hopefully will be achieved by provoking some discussion revolving around the social action derived on the foundations of social commitment.

Regarding social commitment, Ngara (1985:vii) asserts:

Committed writers are extremely sensitive to the social problems of their day and are constantly coming to grips with them, hoping to play their part in changing society for the better. They are therefore constantly defining the role of art in society and endeavouring to develop literary forms that match their social vision.

To achieve the above aim, targetting is necessary, because if too many ills present in society are presented, the impact of the argument is affected. The next step should be the creation of a metaphoric image, consisting of fictional characters and events, that represent and reflect the social ills that are highlighted. Through fictional characters and events the manifestations of injustice can be portrayed, with one or more workable solutions suggested. For

instance, a socially committed work could challenge society to alter itself and its circumstances through a catharsis – if the work is dramatic in nature; through laughter at itself, if the work is comic in nature.

According to Marx literary works are forms of perception:

Literary works are not mysteriously inspired or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world which is the social mentality or ideology of an age (quoted by Eagleton, 1976:6).

Craig (1975:445) supports the Marxist view that, for a work of art to be successful as a reflection of a social process, the author should "provide society in general (or the reading public of the time) with a true mirror of itself, of its conflicts and problems".

The struggle between the aristocracy and the working classes is the soul of Marxist theories. Marxist criticism is *inter alia* grounded on the claims that

[h]istorical changes in the fundamental mode of production effect changes in the social class structure, establishing in each era dominant and subordinate classes that engage in a struggle for economic, political, and social advantage (Abrams, 1992:241).

Ngugi wa' Thiongo transposes Marxist theory to the colonial and post-colonial situation in Africa. Ngugi insists on an anti-imperialist struggle and displays an intense sense of progressive socio-political commitment. His socio-political thought is part of the dialectical theory that has society as the starting point, and then spreads to relevant political consequences of societal circumstances. He aligns himself with the broad masses. According to Ngugi commitment in Africa means moving away from literature which is "deeply rooted in the liberal bourgeois tradition, with its emphasis on value-free culture and art for art's sake", to making literature socially relevant through making it "an object of intellectual dispute" (quoted in Amuta, 1989:96). While it is generally accepted that literature is inspired by social conflicts and needs, literature gives expression to such conflicts, and offers solutions to them, thus ideally leading society out of its ills. One should, however, guard against limiting and enslaving the nature and scope of art to social problems (especially great sufferings) only, as art and literature can also be inspired by deep grief, great joys, discoveries, etcetera.

Amuta (1989:115) aptly summarises this interdependence of artistic composition and commitment in the following words:

Commitment in literature is essentially artistic; the commitment in a literary work of art strikes us through the laws of artistic composition. When artistic commitment appeals according to the laws of mundane social rhetoric, art yields to propaganda.

Oral traditional literature during the pre-colonial period was socially committed, more specifically to aspects of education, and to a reflection of the ills that beset the social fabric. The colonial system and its most devastating offspring, apartheid, tried to silence all possible opposition by destroying cultural, national and individual pride and self-esteem in the colonised races. Some voices of reflection and revolt were, however, still heard, as this trend of commitment was pursued by some black authors – also during the apartheid period. During the apartheid period life for the black communities was characterised by oppression, conflict, injustice and contradiction. These communities chose to serve the interests of the oppressed although others imposed self-restrictions on their own inspiration for fear of reprisals and the machinery of censorship. Vladimir *et al.* (1976:237) gives a description of this situation:

Recognising the strictness of the South African racial laws the younger Zulu writers try to say everything in parables. They choose inconspicuous, often escapist subject matter and develop it in such a way that the censorship cannot interfere, but the reader can understand the author's slight allusions. It is not an easy way but it is necessary ...

Historical drama is like a parable: it revives the past in order to reflect on the present. Zondi, a playwright and researcher, uses historical events as political parables of the time of writing to escape the apartheid censorship. Zondi's drama, *Insumansumane*, engages with the present through a covertly grasped past, accounting for the causes of the black man's tragedy in South Africa. The drama pulls us into the world of imperialism, and the forces that destroyed Africans are clearly exposed. Zondi uses the past to reflect or throw light on the present and this re-awakening of the past national greatness gives strength to hopes of national rebirth. In this regard Lindenberger (1975:31) contends: "Most of the greatest historical dramas are certainly concerned with transfer of power from one force to another."

This observation is true of the historical play analysed in this article. Zondi is deeply concerned that Zulu people seem to have lost sight

of their glorious past and appear unable to fight for their national identity. His play is not a simple representation of national events but a wake-up call to the Zulus to reflect on who they truly are, and to live a life worthy of their heritage. Amuta (1989:56) states that “the emergence of ideology, in a serious aligned sense” necessitates “a mass mobilization of culture and literature in the service of the struggle for freedom”.

According to Amuta (1989:58) ideologically committed tradition is a representation of “the conscience of patriotic and progressive forces in the country, sharply focusing on anti-apartheid and imperial struggle in South Africa”. Such a tradition demands of literature that it should be “ideologically partisan in a progressive revolutionary sense” (Amuta, 1989:58). Zondi’s drama testifies to this urge. He has moved further than his Zulu counterparts in this direction of evolving a true people’s literature. In his drama Zondi has illustrated liberation politics aimed at delivering people from bondage.

2. *Insumansumane* (An unbelievable story) – the story line

Elliot Zondi shrewdly supplied this powerful historical drama with the title *Insumansumane* (a strange, or unbelievable, or mysterious sequence of events), because he wanted to highlight the abyss of misunderstanding between the Natal colonial government (represented by the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Ndabazabantu) and the African population (represented by chief Bhambada Zondi from the Greytown area) that led to the insane armed rebellion of 1906. The growing rift concerned two main aspects: the imposition of heavier and heavier taxation, a heavy burden for which the Zulus had no sympathy and no understanding, and the steady and arrogant intrusion of Western culture that threatened the very survival of the Zulu sense of identity. Social mores, customs, traditions, language, sense of respect, ability to consult, following traditional procedures, and a host of other possible complaints piled up on both sides, until the irrevocable happened: the colonial army attacked and destroyed Zulu villages, households and crops, and Bhambada felt forced to proclaim a rebellion and attack the British army.

The major characters in the play are Bhambada, the chief of the Zondi people; Nhlonhlo, the chief’s uncle; Ndabazabantu, the magistrate of Greytown; Magwababa, the chief’s uncle, and MaMchunu, the chief’s mother. Bhambada and Nhlonhlo represent the dissenting powers; Ndabazabantu, the colonial powers;

Magwababa, the puppets, and MaMchunu, a shrewd character, acts in an advisory capacity.

In *Insumansumane* disrespect of people and culture and lack of consultation are some of the major issues. Ndabazabantu (Bantu Affairs Commissioner) bursts into Bhambada's homestead and does not greet the chief nor is he prepared to sit down to be given a hearing by him. He accuses Bhambada of having undisciplined subjects who flog his horses. Bhambada reciprocates by not greeting, and Ndabazabantu responds with contempt, "*Uthi uyinkosi ...*" (You think you are a chief) (Zondi, 1986:1). Bhambada does not show any sympathy. He instead calls him *umnqolo* (a boy tied to his mother's apron strings). Ndabazabantu reports the matter to Magwababa and instructs him to bring the chief to him at Greytown.

Mutual respect is highly valued in African culture as one of the tenets of *ubuntu*. Ndabazabantu's attitude is superior, arrogant and negative. If chiefs are not respected as a matter of course, they in turn cannot expect to be respected by their subjects, and their advice will not be taken seriously. Bhambada refuses to play the inferior as expected, as reflected in the words *lo mlungwana ufike ...* (p. 6)¹ (This little whitey comes ...) and *akakhohlwa singabafana* (p. 10) (He is convinced he is dealing with boys). Ndabazabantu's attitude has caused subtle scorn and should thus be reciprocated.

Resistance among the Zulu people develops when Uys (a white farmer) barges into the chief's homestead to remove his employee, a boy who has escaped from the farm. This act illustrates an utter lack of respect for the chief, as well as arrogance on the part of white people. The farmer starts beating the boy in the chief's presence, but in return he gets severely sjambokked for disrespecting the chief. The nature of the farmer's act of revenge should rather have been a clear and stern warning. In addition the farmer, ignorant of Zulu tradition, commits another serious offence by calling the chief's mother, MaMchunu, *mfazi* (traditionally a married woman is addressed thus). The farmer therefore again gets punished.

When Ndabazabantu comes to Bhambada's house for the second time, he warns Bhambada to perform the duties for which he was

1 Page numbers refer to Zondi, E. 1986. *Insumansumane*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

appointed: to collect taxes from his subjects, to supply labour, to respect the government's messengers (Ndabazabantu and others). According to Ndabazabantu, it is not part of the chiefs' duty to provide answers to the questions asked by the people: instead they should go to him (Ndabazabantu) in Pietermaritzburg.

Bhambada, still dissatisfied with the government's deposing of chiefs as it pleases, considers contacting all the deposed chiefs to organise an armed resistance. When Ndabazabantu again comes to Bhambada's house, he accuses Bhambada of thrashing a white farmer and reminds him that he rules over blacks, not over the white people; therefore he has no right to punish whites. This time Ndabazabantu tells Bhambada about the government's poll tax for all adult males, besides the tax for married men. Tension builds up when the colonial government pronounces that no discussion and excuses will be tolerated as the decision has already been taken. Ndabazabantu instructs the chief to bring all the Zondi adult males to Greytown to pay tax and to have their questions answered.

The crisis develops further as Bhambada is prevented from going to Greytown by Nhlonhlo's group, who do not see the reason for paying the poll tax. Bhambada hopes to get to Greytown the following morning to explain his case, but the Bantu Affairs Commissioner has already concluded that Bhambada's reaction is a form of insubordination and resistance. Hence he is deposed from the chieftainship in favour of Magwababa, Bhambada's uncle. In the final, explosive episode, the chief reacts by kidnapping Magwababa, and Nhlonhlo organises regiments for an armed revolt.

3. Social concerns in *Insumansumane*

In the introduction to the play Zondi states that his aim is not simply to re-tell (*landa*) the story, but to revisit it (*bukeza*) in order to interpret the events which were possibly misinterpreted by historians. Zondi uses a series of baffling events as a literary technique in order to revisit the incident with the aim of correcting the distortions of the past and to let Africans rediscover their identity. Past injustices include the land possession issue; having to work for whites to earn money to pay the government to stay on land that used to belong to blacks; tax on houses, on dogs, and even on one's head (poll tax). Zondi hopes that by putting events in an African perspective, he may win back some colonised minds. He presents a long list of grievances, expressed through Bhambada, to show that the situation in the 1980s was intolerable.

The social problems facing Bhambada's society include the following: the ideological dominance of "conquered" blacks by the colonial government; land ownership; Africans' perception of taxation, and language and cultural differences. In the eyes of Africans these issues are used by the colonial government to make cheap labour readily available, and in turn reduce polygamy. The latter definitely adds salt to the wound. The mentioned issues are viewed as metaphors for the problems faced by the black society under the apartheid regime in the 1980s. The armed revolt of 1906 considered by Bhambada as the only solution is also suggested by Zondi as a last resort in the 1980s to make the apartheid regime listen.

When the political violence reached high levels in the 1980s, a transformation process needed to be urgently effected. The apartheid regime, like the colonial administration, used bullets to obtain its ends, but took extreme measures when Africans possessed firearms. The apartheid regime intended to keep Africans enslaved through its firepower. Africans suffered in various ways: the yoke of injustice in education, injustice in politics, restrictions on job opportunities, and unjust measures in the work place in general. Furthermore they suffered from ignorance and did not understand the nature of the laws imposed on them (as these laws were not clearly explained to them). Family separation as a result of migratory labour also added to the burdens of the black people. Government collaborators were getting fat on the blood of their own kin. Ignorance of the black man's needs and traditions was still prevalent, as whites acted with arrogance and prejudice, and displayed disrespect of everything that was dear and sacred to the Africans. The authoritarian apartheid government had to be forced into a system of consultation. At the time of writing (1986) such conditions were still prevalent. The paradoxes are in fact hinted at by the strong ideological statements that spice the text. Shortage of land meant no own crops or food; consequently black people were dependent on shops to obtain food. This situation, together with the burden of taxes imposed on them, meant they had no rights at all. Politically all tax payers should share equal rights, but at this stage no rights of African people were respected. The legislation by which taxes were imposed was therefore oppressive and it resulted in Africans eventually suffering extreme poverty. *Insumansumane* therefore came at the right time, suggesting a rebellion similar to Bhambada's if the demands for reform continued unheeded.

3.1 The issue of land ownership

All the land had originally belonged to Africans. White colonists, however, acquired land through the historically dubious Cession Act of Dingane, without either paying for or conquering it. When the inhabitants of the land obtained thus became a problem for the successive provincial governments, they devised a reserve system in order to set aside areas of land for farming and then to enjoy the service of Africans as labourers.

The play frequently refers to the land issue, which is perceived by blacks as making life in the reserves impossible. Land dispossession was caused by the delimitation of the Reserve Act of 1902-1904. Land was sold to whites and Indians while blacks were settled on overpopulated and overworked land. This situation made life difficult for Africans since they depended on subsistence farming for survival. On the other hand, farm owners soon complained about the shortage of labour, because blacks were not prepared to provide labour.

Most of the arable land was occupied by a handful of whites who regarded the Africans living on “their” farms as labourers. In the reserves people could no longer rear as many cattle as they wanted, or grow enough corn and mealies. They therefore were compelled to seek employment in order to survive.

In the play Ndabazabantu keeps reminding the Zondis that they are tenants, which may be why the taxes are levied for their using the land they no longer own.

3.2 Africans’ perceptions of taxation

To add insult to injury, the colonial government expected Africans to pay taxes to feed the people who had been unjustly arrested. The collection of tax was done indiscriminately as King Dinuzulu was also expected to collect tax from his people. These differences of opinion culminated in serious clashes. Culturally it meant that one section of the population had to accept the system of the other.

The taxes (dog, hut and poll taxes) demanded from Africans were more than what their piece of land could produce. The white man’s currency was regarded as the only way to pay taxes; Africans were thus compelled to take money-earning jobs. Since taxation had been devised as a way of bringing about a better labour supply to white farmers, the government created a mechanism to discourage people

from moving to towns for better wages. One even had to get a special permit to work in town.

Kanti uyaya yini umuntu eGoli imvume ingekho ... Uma ethi uyathubeleza le eGoli uzingelwa njengenyamazane kunjalo nje akukho mpatho, umuntu uphathiswa okomgodoyi (p. 22).

(Can a person go to Johannesburg without a permit ...? If you try to dodge, you are hunted down like a buck. On top of that ill-treatment prevails, a person is treated like a stray dog.)

The issue of power briefly concerns the question: who is in control? Actually the taxes imposed on dogs and on huts cannot be justified. The lack of understanding these taxes is reflected in the following words:

Lezi zindlu zethu, sizithelelani ngoba asihlangene ngalutho kuzo noHulumeni. Sizakhela ngaphandle kosizo lwalo Hulumeni (p. 29).

(Why do we have to pay taxes for our huts, since the government has nothing to do with them; we build them ourselves without the help of this government.)

Marks (1970:132) suggests that imposing additional taxation on Africans was aimed at forcing Africans to work on white farmers' terms. He writes that a "better state of labour had been the focus", and subsequent to that "poll tax was passed into law in August 1905" (Marks, 1970:140).

After various taxes (hut tax, dog tax) had been imposed upon the Africans, the poll tax made the situation even more intolerable. The government is seen by Bhambada as wanting to suck the people's blood in this way. This makes Bhambada undertake a journey of the mind back to 1879 (Cetshwayo's era) to find the reasons why the Natal government pretended to prevent the Zulus from shedding one another's blood. He sarcastically comes to the conclusion that, by preventing faction fights, the government wants to save the African's blood for its own benefit:

Yiqiniso ukuthi uHulumeni yimbungulu, usiyekisa ukuchitha igazi ukuze yena alincele (p. 64).

(It's true that the government is a bug, he stops us from spilling blood so that he can suck it himself.)

Bhambada has realised that the government's primary aim in forcing blacks to work, is to solve the labour shortage on farms.

Lo Hulumeni akasho ukuthi asiyosebenza ukuze sinothe, uthi asiyosebenza ukuze sikwazi ukukhokha intela (p. 7).

(This government does not say that we should work in order to become rich, it says we should work in order to manage paying tax.)

The poll tax translated as “head tax” (*intelo yekhanda*) created confusion. The reasons for imposing this tax were not fully explained so as to remove all possible doubts about its necessity. In the African culture the only thing that one owes to a person is *ilobolo*, and thus Ndabazabantu in effect acted as another “father-in-law”. The general opinion was that the white administration had to take the blame for sowing the seeds of discord and open conflict because of its poor communication efforts. The whole tribe was complaining, because it was not comfortable about *ukhandampondwe* (p. 63 – a pound for a head).

Marks (1970:140) states that “the translation of Poll Tax into Zulu as a ‘head tax’ was rather unfortunate and led to wry remarks that a legs and arms tax would soon follow”. This misconception resulted from a lack of understanding of one another’s language. The language used did not express the intended meaning, that is, a pound per head/per person. It seemed as though blacks were to pay tax for their heads. Why this had to happen could not be explained. It remained a mystery, as the title of the drama indicates.

The shortage of land and the introduction of numerous taxes would definitely destroy the Zulu social order and cultural life. The oppressed Africans drew their own logical conclusions from these measures. The “hut tax” was seen as an effort to reduce polygamy, and this would interfere with the right of parents to have many children, and with the function of the ancestors, who are considered to be the sole givers of life.

Uyabona-ke le ntela yezindlu izolwa nelungelo lethu lokwandisa imizi yethu ngokuthatha abafazi (p.37).

(You see the hut tax has come to fight against our right to increase our families by taking many wives.)

It was believed that this act would impact negatively on Zulu cultural life. In the play white government officials are seen as witches who are against the right of people to multiply – *Ukwanda kwaliwa ngumthakathi* (growth is obstructed by the witches). Men are forced to seek money-paying employment to be able to pay taxes. They

even go to work in white people's houses as *ondishana*, jobs reserved for women. What *undishana* (dish-boy) actually does in the morning is to take out the madam's chamber pot (Zondi, 1986:21; Canonici, 1998:41).

3.3 Ideological domination

According to Abrams (1992:241) an ideology implies the following:

In [a] complex way, the product of the position and interests of a particular class. In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, and serves to legitimise and perpetuate the interests of the dominant economic and social class.

Zondi wants to communicate "certain facts doled out by history" (Mbhele, 1990:184). The government "never discussed issues or bills with black people before their promulgation" into laws. Bhambada wants to be given a chance to say what his aspirations are rather than to be dictated to all the time. He demands a two-way communication as opposed to only getting orders from Ndabazabantu.

To show that the government desires to maintain the status of arrogant power, Ndabazabantu retorts: *Akuwena ozotshela uHulumeni* (p. 34 – You are not going to tell the government what to do).

This outcry is tantamount to saying "you have no say in the running of your country". Bhambada insists that his people need to be treated like human beings, shown respect as intelligent people capable of understanding. Nobody, however, listens to him. He wants to be given the opportunity to use his intelligence, a right which is in accordance with the accepted rules of human rights. The Commissioner's arrogant and uncompromising attitude, as demonstrated by his unwillingness to allow any discussion or objection, leads to Bhambada's refusing to obey. Bhambada is sincere and outspoken and his behaviour conflicts with that of Ndabazabantu: *Angizukotizela muntu* (p. 36 – I'm not going to show respect to anybody).

Ndabazabantu states that he is the only person qualified to answer people's questions: *Onale mbuzo makathunyelwe kimi* (p. 64 – He who has such questions must be sent to me). People, however, know that an answer like this represents one-way communication. By asking questions they cannot hope to change the government's mind, as the government's officials emphasise that the government

has already done all the thinking for the people, and their duty is to obey.

Bhambada is unhappy about the lack of consultation with regard to the economic exploitation introduced by legislation. He is against the oppressive economic levies imposed on Africans. He moans about the labour system. Children do not see why they have to work or to pay tax. The Zondi people suffer hardships, over-crowding, poverty, etcetera, as a result of the new demands of the political authority. This is a protest against the whites who are insensitive to the pains tolerated by black workers. Blacks are neither involved in decision-making, nor consulted when resolutions are taken. They are treated as though they have no minds or opinions, as is observed in the following words:

Musa ukuzikhathaza ngokucabanga uHulumeni usekwenzele lowo msebenzi wena yenza okuthiwa kwenze (p. 65).

(Do not worry yourself by trying to think: the government has already done that work for you and yours is just to do as instructed.)

The play demonstrates the arrogant culture of dominance upheld by the colonial government. Bhambada does not want to be associated with Ndabazabantu, because he is a nobody, uneducated, incapable of showing respect for black adults. The chief's role as a decision-maker is transformed into that of a messenger. Chiefs are expected to carry out the government's ordinances, without any objection or possibility to discuss them with their councillors. This situation amounts to the destruction of the Zulu social democratic system. Although Bhambada feels that he owes no allegiance to the white government as his position is hereditary, yet he, like many other chiefs, got the position after Cetshwayo's fall, and with the white government's approval. Since the annexation of Zululand as a vassal state, many laws were enacted without consulting the Zulu. The white administration is still continuing with its culture of non-consultation, that in Zulu tradition implies lack of respect for the other party. If a chief does not obey, he is deposed. The deposition of chiefs means that they are only expected to be puppets, not to listen to their own people, but to serve the government to convey its orders. The deprivation of the opportunity to air his views strengthens Bhambada's perception that the government does not expect chiefs to care for their subjects as they traditionally did. These perceptions against the background, and within the context of the apartheid era, imply that the government wants people who work

for the benefit of the apartheid regime and not for the oppressed community: *Bona bafuna izincelebana* (p.17 – They want puppets).

The significance of the text is that it displays the extent of damage caused by the transfer of power and authority from black leaders to white leaders. King Dinuzulu and Bhambada had no direct power over their subjects. Traditional tribal life was thus destroyed. Another problem facing African chiefs concerned dwindling morals, as parents had to work instead of looking after their children. Furthermore, they felt that the levying of taxes was aimed at indirectly forcing Africans to reduce their birth rate. This was viewed as another violation of their human rights. Hence Nhlonhlo, supporting Bhambada, says:

Okubi kakhulu ukuthi ukulahleka kwelungelo elilodwa
kuzolandelwa ukulahleka kwamanye amalungelo (p. 37).

(What is really bad is that the loss of one legal right foreshadows the loss of other rights.)

Nhlonhlo describes the poor relationship between the black people and the government thus:

Kukhona igoda elingabonakali, elifana nelomshado; umehluko wukuthi ingani elomshado lisho ukuzwana nokuvumelana, leli eliphakathi kwenkosi no Hulumeni luwukhonono, akekho othemba omunye (p. 75).

(There is an unseen bond, like the one of marriage; the difference is that the one in marriage is based on mutual understanding and agreement, but this one between the chief and the government is one of dissatisfaction, one does not trust the other.)

If MaMchunu had seen the relationship this way, she would not have said to Bhambada that he was the government's bride. According to the play the colonial government treats black people more harshly than black men treat their wives. Nhlonhlo is also far shrewder than MaMchunu, an ineffective peacemaker who tries in vain to persuade her son to calm down. The author does not shy away from pointing out what he does not like in his characters.

The colonial system ignored the black man's needs and traditions. As a consequence Africans had become strangers to themselves, their own traditions and religion. Through British hegemony most Africans lost their identity, because they had been placed within a foreign tradition. Msimang (1976) had already made it clear that the

Anglo-Zulu war of 1879 was to defend Zulu territory and to maintain the soul of the nation by preserving its traditions. It is against this background that the Bhambada rebellion must be seen. In the play Bhambada resists all attempts at colonising the African mind. To acquiesce in the laws of the colonial government would imply that Africans would begin to salute Ndabazabantu as *Bayede* (Hail your Majesty), or to recognise him as a legitimate king. This attitude would mean renouncing any claim at political and cultural independence. Bhambada recognises only one legitimate authority over himself and his people: that of Dinuzulu: *UBayede kimi UDinuzulu kuphela* (p. 93 – His Majesty to me is my king Dinuzulu only).

The character of Bhambada can be seen as a representation of the trouble that Africans had to tolerate for their own freedom. The solution suggested is to be open and sincere in dealing with white persons, rather than hiding one's true feelings:

Ubona bengasazi nje laba belungwana, yingoba siyabafihlela
izinzwa zethu kangangoba baze balibale ukuthi sinazo (p. 19).

(The reason why these whites do not know us, is that we hide our true feelings from them to such an extent so that they forget we even have them.)

The play presents a scenario of conflicting cultures and culminates in a scenario of racial domination and oppression. Equality of rights and power is played down by Ndabazabantu as whites are regarded as superior to blacks.

Akuyena umuntu lo omshayile, ngumlungu, awuyona inkosi
kuyena wena uphetha abantu (p. 61).

(It is not a black person that you have beaten, it's a white man, you are not his king, you rule over blacks.)

Bhambada is not allowed to whip the white farmer since he is only the chief of the Zondi people and not the king of whites. This perception causes the existing conflict to become a racial issue, as it makes law enforcement dependent on skin colour.

Canonici (1998:63) explains Zondi's insistence on mutual respect as a reflection of the historical situation at the time of writing. During President P.W. Botha's rule in the 1980s, Botha, like the old Natal colonial government, "was convinced that reforms could only be introduced from above by a benevolent government who knew

better than the people for whom the laws were made". Botha wanted to introduce political reforms based on separate development, and on what he maintained was "partnership among equals" (as reflected in the general idea of the Tricameral Parliament). Naturally, separation meant domination by one leading group and consequently, servitude by the others. Botha's idealism was based on the old colonial idea of "benevolent Christian stewardship", by which all the relevant decisions were made by the leading group for the benefit of the other groups. The play clearly takes issue with these ideas, and eventually rejects them. The drama, in this way, is "a call for consultation and the introduction of democratic processes". It justifies "the readiness of many people to fight for what is their birthright, in their land of birth" (Canonici, 1998:63).

Nhlonhlo, a young man with little to lose should a fight ensue, represents the young people of the 1980s who risked life and limb in their fight for freedom. Zondi seems to be concerned with the concept of national liberation and what it can bring to the South African audience. Groenewald (1989:7) states that Zondi, for the first time in Zulu drama, has taken a committed stand in that he is critical about the prevailing hegemony and suggests a way to deal with it. The text is thus overtly activist.

In Zulu tradition only an *imbongi* has the privilege to criticise the authorities without fear of reprisal. Zondi employed the technique to covertly criticise the apartheid regime. This criticism implies a call to fight for national solidarity, and Zondi's presentation of the dialogue provides overwhelming evidence for the following words in the preface: *Kuyoqinisa ubuzwe bethu* (it will contribute to our national strength). Nhlonhlo's claim for extended freedom and recognition points to a contemporary die-hard stand.

Singangena emlandweni wokulwela inkululeko hhayi
yamaZondi kuphela nje, kaZulu wonke (p. 56).

(We can make history by fighting for freedom, not only for the
Zondis, but for the whole Zulu nation.)

Zondi has deliberately depicted Bhambada as a radical chief so as to demand respect and equal treatment for his people. Bhambada is branded a terrorist by the government because he and some of his subjects are not prepared to accept any kind of treatment from the colonists.

Insumansumane presents a global picture reflecting the culture of haves and have-nots. This view clearly shows that Africans cannot

be liberated from their condition caused by ideas responsible for their being underdeveloped. The understanding of reality should be accompanied by a view to changing it. Either one legitimises, upholds and advances the cause of the *status quo*, or one challenges the ruling class and thus champions the cause of the oppressed (Amuta, 1989:177). In this sense replacing neutral texts with generally committed ones should be urgently called for. Groenewald (1989:6-13) therefore rightly argues:

The dramatist (Zondi) takes a committed stand and uses historical material to suggest that rebellion seems to be a way of dealing with a hegemonic situation; but with national autonomy as the ultimate goal.

This point of view was a requirement in the struggle against apartheid that seemed to have evoked a wave of national feeling, national resistance to its laws, and an experience of enthusiasm for national independence. By getting the hidden spirit to keep knocking at the door to force the old and unwanted spirit to break out and disintegrate, Africans could become themselves. The idealisation of historical events creates heroes with whom we can identify at any time. Lukács (1981:44) in this regard states: "The strange whim of the people is that they demand their history from the hand of the poet and not from the hand of the historian."

Readers find it convincing to interpret historical facts in dramatised or poetic form. These facts and information about historical characters should, however, be portrayed without distorting the historical facts and should be in line with the impressions and perceptions formed by (the Zulu) people. Zondi aptly blends political ideology with history. His characters debate their historical circumstances while commenting on the state of affairs at the time of writing. That is why Groenewald (1989:70) states: "Zondi wrote this play on the Bhambada rebellion as to assert his perception of some present day issues, (as well as) to strengthen Zulu nationality."

3.4 Ignorance of appropriate language and culture

In the play Zondi displays some stereotypes of a non-Zulu speaker who claims to know Zulu, but is sorely ignorant of appropriate cultural and ideological attitudes. Ndabazabantu knows neither the *hlonipha* language, nor the social life of black Africans. Hence Bhambada retorts: *Azazi lutho ngathi: amasiko ethu, nemicabango yethu, ...* (p. 11 – They do not know anything about us, our customs, and our way of thinking, ...).

The lack of mutual understanding is rendered worse by the fact that Africans are also ignorant of the white man's culture and way of life. Bhambada's views are a typical example of cultural ignorance: *Bangamanuku abelungu, bafinya qede amanqomfula bawafake esikhwameni, bachama endlini,* (p. 27 – Whites are filthy, they wipe their mucus and keep it in their pockets, they urinate in the house, ...). To the white man it is unhygienic to fling one's mucus on the ground, or to relieve oneself in the open. Whites and blacks follow different customs.

Bhambada does not want to imitate the culture of the white man. He wants to develop his own culture because he likes it (Zondi, 1986:12). It is, however, clear that there is no possibility of working together because the different cultures are always on a collision course. Bhambada's aspiration is to stick to his roots and traditions, his culture which is bound up with national identity. According to Eagleton (1976:215) there is no need to relate culture to political struggle. European imperialism has, however, tried its best to destroy indigenous languages, customs, traditions and dignity by simply ignoring them.

Calling the chief's mother *mfazi* (the traditional form to address a married woman) is an insult to the chief because a royal woman is never called thus. This "subtle scorn" and "coarse behaviour" could hardly go unreciprocated, that is why Bhambada lashes the white farmer for lack of respect for his authority and position (Canonici, 1998:63). Bhambada then makes it clear that he cannot continue to respect the government and its officials if they do not learn to treat the Zondis like human beings. If Africans would stop underestimating themselves, whites would begin to respect them.

Lo Hulumeni akazi ukuthi kuhlonishwana kabili, kuhle simfundise le nqubo enhle kangaka yethu thina maZulu; siyaziqhenya ngobuzwe bethu ngakho-ke masingahlonizi ngalokhu, sidingwa ukuthathwa njengabantu (p. 35).

(This government does not understand that respect is reciprocal, we must teach him this traditional and respected Zulu custom; we are proud of our nationhood; therefore we should not be ashamed of that, we need to be treated as human beings.)

By reminding the Zulu people that they practise something which is valued world-wide, that is, democracy (men sit down and share ideas [Zondi, 1986:31]), Zondi aims to instil pride in the African

people. Pride is an essential thing that the African people have lost, and they need to recover it in order to regain their self-esteem.

Canonici (1998:63) thus summarises Ndabazabantu's attitude:

The arrogant, callous and unintelligent way the Commissioner disregards the customs, the etiquette, the channels of communication, and the sacredness of a person whose chieftainship is his birthright, all show him as a dim-witted *izimu* who prefers the use of brute force rather than reason to satisfy his greed.

3.5 Dissent

While Bhambada demands respect and equal rights, some people support the position of the government out of fear. They do not consider Bhambada as the spokesperson for the people. He swears to deal with such people one day. Magwababa, Bhambada's uncle, epitomises puppets (*izincelebana*), that is, the people who do not challenge the *status quo* but simply give in to the government's demands, like the township councillors who were regarded as stooges for the apartheid regime. These township councillors worked for the benefit of the government of the day. The stooges created by the government made resistance ineffective. Bhambada clearly emphasises the white man's ulterior motives in appointing these councillors.

Bhambada, however, is not going to show fear or respect, because he cannot tolerate nuisance, *umbhedo* (p. 70), and resolves to teach the white administration a lesson. He calls on all traditional leaders to resist the colonial government's imposition and to stand with the people they represent. Implied in this act is a lack of co-operation between the two parties, as it cuts all possible ways of communication.

Bhambada hates people who impose their will on others without any explanation and motivation. He considers such people as *ondabazabo* or *ondabazenu* (p. 8 – commissioner of their/your affairs). He believes that if one claimed to be representing him he would better be prepared to listen to his likes and dislikes. Bhambada hates people who look at things through borrowed eyes as he feels it makes the uniqueness of African culture not seen and appreciated for what it is. He is convinced that his culture has a place on earth. Other cultures have to be viewed through the Zulu cultural prism. Understanding culture implies understanding the language which carries it. If one represents others, he should

understand their language and culture to do his work effectively and efficiently. With Ndabazabantu, still confusing the meaning of *umnqolo* (a boy tied to his mother's apron strings) with *amaqolo* (lower backs), mutual understanding is miles away. Giving one a chance to express his opinion enhances good communication. As long as Ndabazabantu considers Bhambada *lo mfana* (this boy), nothing will be achieved. This kind of attitude disempowers and marginalises Bhambada, while it also shows that Ndabazabantu has no understanding of his own position *vis-a-vis* a hereditary chief.

The government's continual failure to respect land and cultural rights leads to Bhambada's armed stand and insurrection. Bhambada eventually turns to armed struggle because he is not listened to. His fury is symbolised by his spitting at Ndabazabantu. He sees this as the only solution to get Ndabazabantu to respond to his call for a respectful discussion. The result is that violence is reciprocated. The words in the following quotation mark the end of verbal communication and a transition to authoritarian attitudes.

uNd. Uyangifela?

uBhamb. Cha angikufeli, oyokufela ilenkosi osuyibekile (asho shingile ahambe) mina ngizofela amaZondi (p. 94).

(**Nd.** Are you spitting at me?)

Bhamb. No, I'm not dying for you, he who will die for you is the chief you have just appointed (turning his back against him). I'm going to die for the Zondi people.)

Bhambada angrily plays on the dual meaning of the verb *fela* ("to spit at", and "to die for"). Ndabazabantu is indignant that the chief should spit at him (*fela*). Bhambada explains that Magwababa will die on Ndabazabantu's behalf, while Bhambada will lay down his life for the Zondi people. A similar situation had forced Cetshwayo to military measures to reciprocate the violence of the colonial government. It is this attitude of fight or perish that helped the Zulu *impi* rise triumphantly at Sandlwana in 1879, and the same spirit of strong resistance in the 1980s was needed against the apartheid regime.

Since Bhambada has tried in vain to make the government realise its flaws, he sees resorting to armed struggle as the only solution to defending the integrity of the Zulu people. Even if it means going to rot in jail, as the government is known to be good at administering

different kinds of torture to enforce conformity, he is prepared to sacrifice his life for the freedom of the black people.

This attitude of the colonial government, that was continued by the apartheid government, prompted Zondi, through the portrayal of Bhambada and Nhlonhlo, to call for unified objection among black people. He thus highlighted historical events that could be interpreted in this way. Bhambada's preparedness to take action against the government seems to suggest that rebellion might become the only solution in a situation of deaf rule and arrogant hegemony.

4. Concluding remarks

The "decolonisation of the mind" is one of the aims of Zondi's book, *Insumansumane*. Achieving this aim demands use of language that rightly and efficiently portrays historical events – something Zondi is good at. He employs sentences with "ideological content". By means of the play he has resurrected memorable events to honour past heroes. Furthermore he has revisited things that Africans have achieved so that they can acquire an ideal picture of themselves as a people. This technique has resulted in giving expression to a native state of mind by revealing history, while simultaneously trying to interpret contemporary reality. This aim was achieved by inter alia resorting to diplomatic ways of camouflaging the idea of protest while smuggling the message to the readers by formulating the suggestion implicitly.

In *Insumansumane* the oppressed may have to resort to revolt in order to rectify the situation. The message is only conveyed after analysing different nuances of expression in the play. Zondi is not just contented with pointing out an undesirable situation or injustice, but suggests the necessary steps to remedy it as well. His characters challenge the system. Bhambada and Nhlonhlo, for example, demand revolutionary realism while Bhambada alone is trying to destroy hegemony. Bhambada is very meticulous in applying the principles of equal rights. He reflects in-depth on leadership and loyalty. He is a radical leader who reflects Zondi's ideological directives.

Good relations and communication thrive in consultation characterised by sharing ideas, reciprocal help, mutual respect, humility, patience, intelligibility, cross-cultural knowledge, giving one another a hearing. These are Zondi's suggestions on how to govern democratically according to the African tradition. The analysis of

culture and ideology in the play and its political meaning seems to suggest that the play functions in the interest of black people. In this way Zondi seems to have achieved asserting nationalism, correcting the distortions of the past and strengthening nationhood. These characteristics of the play portrays the text as overtly activist. The dialogue used in the text is pregnant with ideological content demanding freedom and recognition of human rights. An awareness of power relations, is for instance, reflected in these words:

Mandla mani inkosi esenawo? Sithelela izindlu, sigqilazwa emapulazini, sivukuza emigodini, semukwa izindawo, kuncishiswa izinkomo konke lokhu inkosi ayikwazanga ukukuvimbela. Yini manje ezokwenza inkosi ibenamandla okugwema le ntela yekhanda ngaphandle kokwala ukuyikhokha kufe gula linamasi lichithwe yilezi zinsizwa (p. 82).

(What powers are still vested in the king? We pay hut tax, we are oppressed on the farms, we dig in the mines, we are deprived of land, there is a cut down on livestock; the king could not prevent all this. What will enable the king to have the power to prevent the payment of poll tax except refusing to pay it? Subsequently the breaking of a calabash with sour milk by these men will take place.

Nhlonhlo and Bhambada have nothing to lose in the ensuing fight against the white man because they have already lost all their basic rights. The drama, in this sense, calls "for consultation and the introduction of democratic processes" (Canonici, 1998:62), and justifies the people's readiness to fight for their rights. Incessant failure to consult or to involve blacks in what is meant to cater for their interests makes every attempt by the government viewed with suspicion.

The committed drama studied in this article has one main concern: if there is no serious effort to communicate and consult, this attitude leads to social and political fighting and strife. This is evidently a reflection of the political situation prevalent at the time of writing, but it is also a theme valid for all times. Man is a social being and therefore a member of a community. The soul of a community can only be reached by communication, part of which is consultation. For effective communication one needs sympathy, knowledge, mutual understanding and mutual respect. These are elements of *ubuntu* that are regarded as bones of contention in the literary work discussed in this article. The racial divide between people takes many forms: arrogance and lack of care and understanding on one part; ignorance of socio-political and religious traditions; ignorance

of customs and language, on the other hand. All these factors form part of the struggle between Africa and the West – the dominant theme of Zulu literature from 1922 to date.

In *Insumansumane* Zondi inspires confidence in his people to challenge and fight ideological domination. Lack of consultation on matters affecting the Zondi people is the bone of contention and it causes the two parties in conflict to go to war. For Zondi, when everything else has failed, the only choice one has is to go to war.

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