

Cultural Devotion as Depicted in J.C. Buthelezi's *Kushaywa Edonsayo*



By Zilibele Mtumane and Nkafotseng Laurencia Motlounq | Peer Reviewed

Abstract

This article seeks to analyse cultural devotion as it is portrayed in J.C. Buthelezi's novel, *Kushaywa Edonsayo*. It intends to pull together some examples of how cultural devotion is portrayed in this isiZulu novel. It will firstly evaluate cultural conflicts that are demonstrated by characters. It will further explore cultural commitments among individuals in the society created by the novelist, and as applicable to real life society. The main subheadings in this discourse are: culture conflict and cultural commitment. The concept of culture will be defined

as part of the introductory section of the article. Again, a concluding section will be included towards the end of the discourse, where the summary, observations and recommendations are provided. The reason this study is conducted is the intensive illustration of cultural devotion in the novel under consideration. It is also the fact that not much has been done on this topic on the isiZulu novel, in particular, and isiZulu literature in general. The revelation of how Buthelezi handles this aspect will add value to the study of isiZulu and, even, African literature.

Introduction

J.C. Buthelezi depicts cultural devotion in his novel titled *Kushaywa Edonsayo* (1993). However, so far, very little research has been conducted analysing this aspect of the novel. Motloung (2020), on whose Masters' dissertation this article is based, is probably the only one who has done so, by including a chapter on it in her study. The objective of this paper, then, is to analyse and reveal cultural devotion as it is illustrated in Buthelezi's novel.

Culture generally refers to attitudes and behaviours that characterise a particular social group. Grayman-Shimpson (2017: 2) maintains that culture is a joint meaning-making structure which is a group of history that is conveyed through generations. Holding a similar view is Spencer-Oaley (2012: 1), who states that culture refers to merits possessed by people of the same social group. Deducing from these scholars, culture is shared, learned and transmitted through generations. It is a socially shared concept.

Culture conflict

As maintained by Jaja (2012: 84), there is a predicament developing among Africans, between maintaining their culture and adapting to universal cultures. Africans are at the heart of globalisation, mainly because they are a legacy of colonisation. African societies, at large, are faced with culture conflict due to the adaptation of Western values. Within this context, conflict refers to an opposition between two groups: traditional conservative Africans and modern Africans.

In the novel *Kushaywa Edonsayo*, J.C. Buthelezi explores the intoxication of urban life and the perceived stagnation of rural existence. The main character, Bhekani Mchunu, is faced with a dilemma of being more Western, yet his life circumstances require him to preserve his traditional role of maintaining his father's home in the rural areas. According to Diop (2012: 223), there is pressure escalating in Africa with diverse elements that contaminate the African version of life. In this case, Bhekani's pressure is a result of his act of abandoning his rural home, to dwell in the alluring city. As a result of abandoning his responsibility to the family and

the farm, misfortunes beset him. This is in line with the general belief, among Africans, that misfortunes do not just befall one but are instigated by a certain cause. Bhekani faces the tragedy of losing his mother, years after his father's passing away. After a few years of living in the city (eThekweni), he reflects on his mother's wishes that he is assumed to fulfil. Before passing away, his mother utters to Bhekani: *Uze ungalilahli futhi ungalifulatheli ikhaya* (Do not abandon nor turn your back towards your home) (Buthelezi, 1993: 14). These words imply that Bhekani has to leave the urban eThekweni and everything that he has worked hard for and go back to rural Jonono to take care of his home. As he is not content with his mother's wishes, these words continue to torment him. After the funeral, on Bhekani's way back to eThekweni, Buthelezi narrates a conversation between Bhekani and Samvu (Bhekani's wife):

Bhekani:

Umama wathi ngize ngingalilahli futhi ngingalifulatheli ikhaya.

(Mother said I must neither abandon nor turn my back on my home.)

Samvu:

Pho ukhathazwa yini kula mazwi Bheki-Bheki? ... Wayeqinisile umama, akufanele, akulungile ukufulathela ikhaya. Ikhaya likhaya Bhekani...

(So, what is bothering you with that instruction Bheki-Bheki?... Mother was telling the truth; it is neither right nor acceptable to abandon home. Home is home Bhekani...)

Bhekani:

Ngingeke ngakuphikisa ukuthi ikhaya likhaya ngisho abazali sebashona, kodwa wena awulazi lelikhaya engikhulumangalo. Awuyazi imimango nemiqansa engibhekane nayo ngaleliya khaya ... Ngangibahlonipha abazali bami besaphila. Ngibahlonipha kakhulu manje uma sebengekho, kodwa la mazwi kamama ayengithusa. Kungathi kuzobanzinyana, ngizohluleka ukuwagcina nokuwahlonipha...

(I will never deny that home is home even when parents are no more, but you do not know the home I am talking about. You do not know the quarrels and hardships that I am faced with about that home... I respected my parents while they were still alive. I respect them more now that they have passed away, but my mother's words are scarring me. It seems it will be difficult; I will not be able to fulfil and respect them.) (Buthelezi, 1993: 14)

In the extract above, Bhekani is in denial of fulfilling his deceased mother's command. Instead of following his mother's wishes, he explicitly states that, even though he respects his parents, it seems that it will be difficult to fulfil their wishes, although he is certain of what his parents wanted. He finds it easy to abandon his responsibility for the family that is composed of his siblings as well, and the farm. Justifying his decisions, he states that he will not be able to deal with the quarrels and the hardships that come with Jonono.

According to Brown (1999: 227), South Africa is a microcosm of the basic cultural conflict because it faces the battle between protecting the interests of culture or central rights of the individual. It is within his rights for Bhekani to choose the life that he wants for himself as an individual. However, his rights are in quarrel with his culture. In the above quotation, Bhekani states that he respects his parents more now that they have passed on. From these words, it can be concluded that he respects and acknowledges ancestors. Therefore, it is anticipated that he follows their instructions. Instead, Bhekani maintains:

Mina Samvu ngizohluleka ukushiya uMdubane nobucwecwebe bawo, ngishiye uSamvu wami, ngiyobutha inhlakanhlaka, ngiwole imvithimvithi, ngikhongozele, ngibuthezele, ngilungisa izigwegwe ezikade zagoba emzini kababa.

(Samvu, I will not be able to leave Durban and its luxury, leave my Samvu, to go pick up the pieces and fix the wrongs that were long there in my father's home.) (Buthelezi, 1993: 15)

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world-wide, in favour of Western culture. The main concern raised by Bhekani, which prevents him from going back to Jonono, is the luxurious life that he has in Durban. Currency is another major influence on cultural change, even though currency is not necessarily part of African culture. At the heart of the life of luxury is money. Bhekani is now prioritising currency and luxury. Moreover, his reasons are influenced by the Western culture that he has adapted to. This attests to Sibani's (*Op cit.*) view that there are changes within African cultures that are influenced by the socio-cultural evolution. Bhekani no longer sees his home as his responsibility. The author further outlines his thoughts:

Uyise wayethe ikhaya lakwabo ngaleli gama leJourney's End ngoba kunguyena uyise owayezophelela kuleli khaya. Wayengaziboni-ke uBhekani izindlela zakhe ziphelela kuleli khaya eJonono, emaphandleni kwantuthu ...

(His father had named his home Journey's End because it was him (his father) whose life was to end there. Bhekani then never imagined himself ending up in Jonono, at the rural areas, where there is smoke...) (Buthelezi, 1993: 22)

Bhekani has been consumed by Western culture. As a result, he no longer sees himself as part of rural and traditional areas. Notwithstanding that he grew up in Jonono, he stresses that his father had decisively named Jonono Journey's End because he

(his father) wished his children not to grow old there. To him, going back to rural Jonono, where there are no modern developments, is not an option. However, being in denial of his parents' commands brings him bad dreams. Ever since his mother's burial, Bhekani has never slept peacefully. Sibani (2018) maintains that cultural adaptation results in great negative impacts on African tradition. It is African culture to fulfil ancestral commands. However, due to cultural evolution, Bhekani does not realise the significance of fulfilling his ancestor's wishes. Consequently, misfortunes torment him. He is continuously involved in car accidents and he loses his job.

Parkash (1993: 2) claims that the traditional African and modern (Western) cultures, that came into contact through colonisation, differ in philosophy and social structure. How Africans embrace life is different from how Westerners embrace it. Yet, due to systems such as colonisation, the African way of life has been contaminated. Buthelezi narrates Bhekani's concerns:

UBhekani wayezibuza eziphendula ukuthi kodwa unina uMaMkhize wayemsukele ngani emfumbathisa lesiqalekiso sokuba abheke ikhaya.

(Bhekani had unanswered questions; asking himself why his mother MaMkhize had given him the curse of watching over the home.) (Buthelezi, 1993: 36)

In African culture, ancestral commands are not regarded as a curse. It is a common belief among Africans to respect ancestors. Though, due to clashes in ideology and social structures between African and modern cultures, Bhekani regards his late mother's wishes as a curse. Evidently, the significant modification of ideology and social structure has intensified some conflicts among African cultures. Lame (2013: 12) is of the view that there is a lifestyle that has infatuated Africans, which is degrading their own way of life.

Sibani (2018: 68–69) also brings another lifestyle that has brought conflict in African societies, which is a liberated sexual activity for young people. Another major concern that influences Bhekani's decision not to want to go back home is the quarrels in his parents' house. The quarrels are caused by

overcrowding in his home. This is because all his sisters have many (out of wedlock) children staying under the same roof. The high number of children is a result of liberated sexual activities.

The conflict between tradition and modern ways of life has become an African central life theme. After the passing away of Bhekani's mother, Gogo Ximba (an old woman in the village) insists on cutting every child's hair as a symbol of respect to Bhekani's mother. Little does she know that Nkintsho (Bhekani's sister) does not believe in this ritual. On realising that her children's hair has been shaved, Nkintsho screams in disbelief:

Awu Gogo Ximba! Kodwa wenzani Gogo-mathetha? Wenzani nje? Ngiyazisa ngezinwele zomntanami! Hi---hi---hi--!

(Oh Gogo Ximba! What are you doing Gogo-mathetha? What are you doing? I am concerned about my child's hair! Hi—hi—hi--!) (Buthelezi, 1993: 6)

Among Africans, there is evidence of Western efforts to transform African culture. In general, among traditional Africans, the shaving of hair is used as a symbol of respect to the deceased. However, due to the influence of Western culture, Nkintsho does not approve of this ritual.

From the foregoing discussion, it is arguable that cultural assimilation does not necessarily and always result in a new culture. Instead, it may also lead to cultural conflicts between two worlds: traditional and modern worlds. As is evident, there is a battle between Bhekani's Western lifestyle and the life that his parents wished him to fulfil. Both these lives – Western and traditional African – vary dramatically in ideology and social structure, thus causing cultural conflict.

Cultural commitment

Cultural devotion is crucial, mainly because of its significance in instilling cultural and identity awareness among Africans. Cultural commitment entails enculturation, which is a process of maintaining norms, heritage and culture by societies. In this regard, commitment refers to the

retrieving of human norms, heritage and culture passed through ancestry. Based on Dei's (2012: 43) views, the retrieving of African culture is imperative to decolonising and recognising the genuineness of the African voice and human experience. J.C. Buthelezi profoundly attempts to enculturate people in his novel *Kushaywa Edonsayo* (1993). His emphasis is the sense of identity and unity amongst his characters.

At the beginning of the novel, Buthelezi recites MaMkhize's (Bhekani's mother) last words to Bhekani before she passes away:

Bhekani mntanami impilo igeleza njengamanzi ebheke olwandle. Uma sengemukile mina mntanami, kuko konke okwenzayo, uze ungalifulatheli leli khaya ...

(Bhekani my child, life flows like water to the ocean. When I am gone my child, in everything that you do, do not turn your back on this home...) (Buthelezi, 1993: 2–3)

According to Arunga (2017:36), longing determination to ensuring cultural commitment among people is essential to recover continuity. The maintenance of cultural continuity will preserve African history and treasures. To MaMkhize, Jonono is a legacy that needs to be treasured. She explicitly instructs her son not to forget home when she is no longer alive. She further states that *Izithukuthuku zethu noyihlo*

ningazibukeli ziphelele emoyeni njengezenja (Do not allow our sweat with your father to fade away into air like that of a dog) (Buthelezi, 1993: 3). Based on this citation, the sense of continuity is significant to MaMkhize; therefore, it is significant to the African society as a whole. In this extract, Buthelezi exposes the rank of cultural continuity and the importance of cultural commitment.

As maintained by Husien and Kebede (2017: 61), among African societies, communal morals such as loyalty, respect, love, *ubuntu*, hospitality and many more, are stressed meticulously. Among these values, African morals emphasise the importance of helping each other, which is practised through *ubuntu*. Giving her last instructions to Bhekani, MaMkhize avers: *Uma ukhuphuka, khuphuka nabakwenu. Uselule isandla sakho ubadonse* (When you succeed, succeed with your siblings. Stretch your hand out and pull them) (Buthelezi, 1993: 3). Through her words, MaMkhize does not only remind her son of his cultural responsibilities, she also advocates for the spirit of helping each other. This is one of the communal morals that are shared and valued among Africans. Hence, Brown (1993) highlights that, among African communities, the sense of individualism is not encouraged.

In some African societies, the clash of ideologies is mostly influenced by religion. Nevertheless, Creff (2004: 3) argues that Christian churches should adopt a new mind-set and participate in the African renaissance. This new mind-set would entail the advocacy of African cultures, languages and histories. As Bhekani is no longer staying in Jonono, he has converted to Christianity. As misfortunes befall him, he decides to reconnect with his indigenous culture. Following the accidents that Bhekani has survived, he decides to invite his church members to join him as he gives thanks, for he has survived. On the day of the ceremony, to keep up with culture, he insists that they make traditional beer for the ancestors. This does not only reveal cultural commitment, it also affirms Creff's (*Op cit.*) view that Christian churches should also advocate for the African renaissance. In African culture, traditional beer is one of the mechanisms used to connect with ancestors; hence Bhekani sees it crucial to make it. Moreover, Mtumane (2014: 24) highlights that ancestors are considered as a

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linkage between human beings and God. Therefore, Bhekani sees it fit to make traditional beer for the ceremony.

Husien and Kebede (2017: 61) maintain that, in most African communities, people do not perceive themselves as distinct and individuals. On the contrary, Bhekani finds it difficult to move back to Jonono. He continuously stresses that he is an individual and he has established his own life in Durban. However, Samvu (his wife) disagrees with his decision. Buthelezi narrates Samvu's response to Bhekani:

Masiphindele ekhaya Bhekani. Ngiyacela sthandwa sami. Injabulo yami ayigcwali, ayipheleli njengoba singumndeni onhlakanhlaka.

(Let us go back home Bhekani. I am pleading with you my dear. My happiness is not fulfilled as we are a scattered family.) (Buthelezi, 1993: 67)

In Africa, family is the cement of society. Even though Bhekani has adapted to the Western system of individualism, Samvu finds it her responsibility to remind him of the importance of the family. In this circumstance, Samvu emphasises that, without other family members, she feels empty. The idea of being distinct from their community does not compliment her principles. She further highlights that the family is scattered. This attests to Husien and Kebede's (2017: 62) view that communal morals are crucial to Africans. The spirit of *ubuntu* and solidarity is vital to ensure the well-being of society. Therefore, Samvu finds it significant to remind Bhekani of culture devotions. Moreover, Sibani (2018: 62) proclaims that a decent family structure in African societies is reached through the sense of good human relations.

Bhekani finally decides to move back to Jonono to fulfil his late mother's wishes, even though his concern is that, without his parents, Jonono is no longer a peaceful place. There are quarrels between his siblings and his uncles but he commits himself into fulfilling his responsibilities. As it has been maintained, the spirit of *ubuntu* and solidarity is of vital value to Africans. Therefore, Bhekani gathers his family to resolve family matters. He says:

Imizamo yethu yokwenyusa izindonga zomuzi kababa ingeke iphumelele uma ingaxhumene nemimoya yethu sonke esikulo muzi kababa.

(Our efforts to re-build our father's household will not succeed if our spirits are not in harmony in this household.) (Buthelezi 1993: 99)

Bhekani finds it important to firstly unite the family before engaging in other family responsibilities. He maintains that if their spirits, as a family, are not in harmony, nothing will succeed. According to Van der Walt (2003: 52), in African culture, truthfulness, charity, honesty, loyalty, generosity, respect and solidarity are important elements of good morals. Bhekani attempts to lay the foundation of re-building his home with honesty, truthfulness, loyalty and solidarity. Hence, he finds it necessary for the family to gather and iron out issues that are triggering conflicts in their home. This reveals Bhekani's will to commit to his culture and his family.

At Jonono, Bhekani puts his family farm into good use. He also uses the knowledge and skills he has acquired while still residing in Durban to open a huge shop and other facilities that would help his community. Everything goes accordingly until their unfortunate day, when they get attacked by bees at the shop. Oddly, the bees sting Bhekani only. Looking at this unfortunate matter, Kubheka (Bhekani's worker) requests a traditional healer, Khanyile, to come and give Bhekani traditional medicine. This reveals or highlights the confusion among Africans of whether to seek answers of deaths, misfortune, disasters and accidents from the Christian church or traditional healers. Even though Bhekani is a Christian, Kubheka represents the Africans who still seek clarity from traditional healers and who foster to maintain their culture. In addition, Gumede (another traditional healer) pays visit to Bhekani's home after the incident. He maintains:

Ungakhohlwa phela ukuthi thina singabantu, sinezethu izinkolo okungafanele sizilahle ... Namakholwa amakhulu ayazi ukuthi idlozi liyabhekelwa nokuthi imibhulelo ingatholakala phakathi esontweni ...

(Do not forget that we are Africans, we have our own beliefs that we must not forsake...Even highly

religious people know that ancestors need to be pleased and that sorcery acts can also be found in church...) (Buthelezi, 1993: 122–123)

In the above extract, Buthelezi exposes the importance of African beliefs. Gumede encourages Bhekani not to forsake his culture. Moreover, he warns him that, even though he is a Christian, he must be watchful because sorcery acts can also be found in church. As Bhekani is in the process of self-discovery, maintaining African ways of life seems to be important to his journey. Hence Gumede, as an elder, finds it his responsibility to remind Bhekani of how they perceive life in rural Jonono.

Based on Ushe's (2011: 5) views, traditional African morals are identified to encourage human well-being. Moreover, Metz (2007: 338) highlights that African morals grasp some acts to be wrong. In this regard, Bhekani looks at his sisters' children and states:

Uma intombazane itholele ingane ekhaya, le ngane kuba ngeyabazali bentombazane noma kube ngeyomalume.

(If a daughter gives birth to a child before marriage, that child belongs to her parents or the child's uncles.) (Buthelezi, 1993: 133)

Bhekani points out an act that is practised by most Africans. It is a common belief among these Africans that a child born before marriage belongs to the mother's family. It can be assumed that this cultural practice was established to maintain human well-being, especially if the mother wishes to marry into another family. The foregoing quote reveals the cultural commitment that Bhekani is keen to uphold. As stated earlier, Metz (2007: 329) proclaims that African morals value human life, community, honesty, hospitality, discipline, protection, respect, etc. Bhekani also emphasises these morals among his family members. In a conversation with his nephew about the influence of white people in South Africa, Bhekani articulates:

Bafunza izingane zethu ukungahloniphi lutho olwazo, zingahloniphi imilando yethu ... Loku kubiza amakhosi ethu, abantu abadala, ngamagama akuyona inhlonipho yase-Afrika ...

(They teach our children not to respect what is theirs, not to respect our history ...The culture of calling our kings and elderly people by names is not our African respect...) (Buthelezi, 1993: 138)

Through this conversation, Bhekani infuses the prominence of identity and respect. According to Sefa Dei (2012: 49), there is no African identity without the affirmation of cultures, spirituals, indigenous histories and language. Bhekani finds it necessary to inspire African culture to his nephew. This shows the importance of enculturation among African societies. Later on, Bhekani's efforts to transform Jonono into a vibrant area of development succeed. In this novel, Buthelezi strives to reveal the importance of embracing African identity and indigenous culture. Moreover, Bhekani's journey highlights the significance of cultural commitment and maintaining the African way of life.

Conclusion

This paper offered a discussion on cultural devotion in relation to Buthelezi's novel *Kushaywa Edonsayo* (1993). The aim was to explore cultural commitments presented in the novel. The discourse revealed cultural conflicts and cultural devotions as portrayed in the novel. The main sub-titles were culture, culture conflict and culture commitment.

From the above discussion, it is observable that there is a great culture conflict within African societies. The principles and ideologies that westernised traditional Africans, and which they maintain, vary dramatically. The major result of these differences is the conflict they cause in different societies. While it is understandable that societies at large are developing and improving, it is also noticeable that some of the developments looming in communities clash with the indigenous African cultures. It is still arguable that Western culture has a great influence on contaminating African cultures. Members of different societies now prefer maintaining Western culture rather than maintaining African culture. That includes abandoning ancestral beliefs and other African customs. The situation portrayed by Buthelezi suggests that there are still a number of Africans who do not regard African culture as important to their lives.

Although Buthelezi discloses culture neglect, he also strives to reveal culture commitment. Through his main character, Bhekani, he reveals the importance of maintaining African culture to ensure societal harmony. Before Western influence, many Africans valued African morals such as honesty, love, humanity, respect, *ubuntu*, hospitality, etc. Due to popular culture and globalisation, many Africans seem to have abandoned such morals. In his novel, Buthelezi encourages the enculturation of the African valued morals. The emphasis is on preserving communal morals that will unite Africans. It is, however, worth mentioning that not all Africans are victims of the acculturation of Western values. There are those who are still in line with their culture and traditions.

At the time of moral renaissance, it is a necessity to argue that there is a fair enculturation process taking place in Africa, especially among the youth. There seem to be some African individuals who are keen to maintain African culture and identity. On the other hand, there are still a great number of African individuals who are consumed by Western culture. Therefore, it is still a challenge for African societies to strive to maintain indigenous African values.

Recommendations

As the subject of culture is broad and not many scholars have analysed it as it is illustrated in African literary works, it is necessary that more students of literature conduct research on it. As this paper has considered the aspect only in one isiZulu novel, scholars may consider works by authors in the same or other languages. These works could include other genres of literature as well.

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