

Justice and the Zulu Heroic Ideals in Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*

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Abstract

The discourse engendered within this scholarly examination was stimulated by Kunene's perspective on the ascendancy of heroism above justice. This paper explores the legendary deeds of Shaka who embodies the archetype of the Zulu epic hero, aiming to define the essence of Zulu heroic ideals. It argues that justice serves as the moral guide, directing the course of Shaka's heroic endeavours. The study adopts a qualitative research method, since the selected text is narrative data. Theoretical inspiration that illuminates Shaka's deeds is derived from Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey, the *mythos* of adventure where the hero undertakes a journey to confront a formidable obstacle, wins in that confrontation and returns home with boons. Shaka's journey from obscurity to legendary status as a warrior and leader reflects many aspects of the hero's journey, making Campbell's theory a relevant and insightful lens through which to examine Shaka's heroic character. The study reveals that the poem's depth lies in its depiction of Shaka's commitment to justice through his efforts to establish a more structured and equitable society, his promotion of meritocracy, his military discipline, and his protection of the Zulu people. The study concludes that contrary to the claim of Kunene that heroism is a higher virtue than justice in Zulu society, justice emerges as the quintessential bedrock upon which Zulu heroism is built, as those who act heroically are those who uphold the principles of justice that sustain the harmony and dignity in Zulu society.

Keywords: *Justice, Heroic ideals, Zulu society, Emperor Shaka, Kunene.*

Introduction

The Nguni-speaking Zulu Society of South Africa, from which Shaka emerged between 1816 and 1828, boasts a profound historical

legacy and a vibrant cultural heritage that has been greatly studied by several scholars (Kaya and Seleti 35). Mazisi Kunene, for instance, cherishes the vibrant folk life, customs, norms and values of the Zulu society, such that he staunchly upholds the supremacy of the oral over the written form.

This tendency is obvious in *Emperor Shaka the Great* which manifests a fascinating confluence of oral tradition in the written mode. Kunene's deliberate approach of initially composing the poem in Zulu before skilfully translating it into English resulted in purposeful cultural infusions that faithfully echo the essence of oral rendition in the work. Drawing from the wellspring of traditional oral narratives, *Emperor Shaka the Great* deftly captures the essence of an ancient tradition, transmuting fragments of collective memory into captivating written form. This position has been criticised by several scholars who feel that it is a needless contradiction, given that Kunene's oeuvre is produced mainly in written form. Ogundele, for instance, observes that "the matter would have been quite simple if both authors (Okot p'Bitek inclusive) were producing and transmitting their works, and carrying on their anti-literacy campaign, in the performance medium rather than in that of the written text" (9). Nevertheless, this experiment has proven very successful in the works of Mazisi Kunene and Okot p'Bitek. Therefore, within this scholarly investigation, we entertain no proclivity for delving further into that discourse.

However, the impetus that has given rise to this study emanates from Kunene's view on justice and heroism. He argues that within the fabric of Zulu society, heroism occupies an exalted position and is intrinsically entwined with notions of sacrifice and selfless service for the upliftment and betterment of the community. We read: "The highest virtue is not justice...but heroism, that is, self-sacrifice on behalf of the community" (Kunene 11). This is particularly intriguing because heroism, in its essence, encapsulates a constellation of virtues encompassing justice, valour, strength, selflessness, perseverance, loyalty and myriad other attributes (Deme 98). Therefore, heroism is not a solitary act but a profound commitment to values that

elevate the human spirit and society at large. It emerges from a complex interplay of values and principles that define an individual's actions and character. Justice, within the context of this study, goes beyond mere legality; it embodies a sense of morality and ethical conduct which is a foundational moral principle that revolves around fairness and equity. It is concerned with ensuring that individuals are treated equitably, that wrongs are rectified, and that the rights and well-being of all are safeguarded. The quests embarked upon by epic heroes are often incited by a violation of justice — an instance of cruelty, oppression, or despotism that demands rectification. Whether it is the resolute pursuit of righteousness by Sundiata in the *Epic of Sundiata*, or Mwindo's efforts to restore harmony and equity in the *Epic of Mwindo*, justice stands as the guiding star. Moreover, in African societies, heroes encompass both legendary figures and ordinary individuals who exhibit remarkable courage in seeking justice, often challenging established norms for community improvement. Nelson Mandela, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Patrice Lumumba and many others exemplify how heroism is fundamentally tied to justice, underscoring the connection between these two principles. Hence, it is doubtful if there can be heroism without justice.

Therefore, in this paper, we shall undertake a critical examination of the Zulu ideals about heroism as seen through the legendary deeds of Shaka, who is the quintessential embodiment of the virtue of heroism in the selected text, to determine whether heroism in Zulu society is distinct from justice, or intrinsically intertwined with the pursuit of justice. We will argue that heroism devoid of justice will inevitably culminate in calamity for a society that nurtures heroic ideals that are not grounded in the pursuit of justice.

Literature Review

A multitude of scholars and researchers have extensively examined Shaka and the remarkable feats attributed to him from a wide array of perspectives. Several scholars and writers (Ritter's *Shaka Zulu: The Rise of the Zulu Empire*, Langa's *Shaka*, Mulikita's *Shaka Zulu*, Cohen's *Shaka, King of the Zulus: A Biography*, Osei's *Shaka the Great: King of the Zulus*, Omer-Cooper's *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa*, Knight's *The Anatomy of the Zulu Army: From Shaka to Cetshwayo 181 – 1879*, Gareth's *Serving Shaka*, Morris' *The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation*, etc.) have undertaken extensive investigations into the life of Shaka, approaching their studies from a wide spectrum of scholarly disciplines and methodologies. Their explorations encompass a range of forms, including historical narratives, biographical accounts, sociocultural analyses, and anthropological inquiries. By employing a variety of lenses, these scholars have aimed to unravel the complexities of Shaka's existence, his impact on society, and his historical significance. Their collective efforts have unearthed details about his leadership, sociopolitical influence and cultural contributions.

Many have devoted considerable efforts to comprehending Shaka's military strategies and tactics. Laband (1998), for instance, scrutinised Zulu strategic and tactical alternatives during the British invasion of January 1879, contending that the Zulu forces' triumph over the British was primarily attributable to British overconfidence or ineptitude, rather than stemming from the Zulu strategy and tactics' superiority. Similarly, Allen (2014) undertook a comprehensive investigation into Shaka's military methodologies. Allen's work advances the notion that Shaka's tactics and

strategies bear a striking resemblance to the contemporary concept of operational art. This alignment suggests that Shaka's techniques can be interpreted as a precursor to modern operational approaches, offering a model for adroitly navigating the multifaceted challenges of military engagements. By critically engaging with historical events and military insights, these scholars shed light on Shaka's tactical prowess and strategic acumen.

However, some others approached the Shaka phenomenon through the lens of literature. Two of these works directly relate to our study. Kone (2012) questions the hero-villain classification for Shaka and the complex definitions that surround it. He explores whether a character can be seen as both a hero and a villain by different readers, challenging the authority that assigns these labels. The scholar also considers whether specific genre traits are necessary to define a character as a hero. Bazimaziki (2017) compares Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* and Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great, a Zulu Epic*, focusing on how literature mirrors society through the characters' heroic traits. The study revealed that heroism and patriotism have an unchangeable connection to one's homeland. While these works align with our study on the theme of heroism, their focus primarily revolves around examining the heroic attributes of Shaka's character. In contrast, our study delves into the intricate relationship between justice and heroism within Zulu society. And this is the gap this study attempts to fill.

The Harmonious Confluence of Heroism and Justice in the Pursuit of Equilibrium

Shaka, born to Nandi, the daughter of a chief, and Senzangakhona, chief of the Zulu clan, faced early adversity due to his illegitimate birth, which led to his mother's exile from the Zulu community. Raised in the Mthethwa Kingdom under Chief Dingiswayo's care,

Shaka eventually returned to the Zulu clan after his father's death, seeking to assert his leadership. Shaka's rise to power was characterized by military excellence and strategic innovations, introducing new tactics and weapons like the renowned "iklwa" a short stabbing spear (Bazza, 7). Under his command, the Zulu army became highly disciplined and efficient. His reign left an enduring mark on southern Africa's history, impacting politics, culture and military strategies significantly.

His journey can be likened to the first stage of Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey, known as the "Call to Adventure" (Campbell 51). His birth into the humble Zulu tribe serves as the initial call that beckons him toward a destiny far beyond the ordinary, setting the stage for the epic journey and heroic deeds that would follow. We are told:

He dreamt of a visitation from the
Forefathers.
They came to him and said: 'Take courage,
Somlilo.
One day you will grow in fame beyond the
stars.
You will cast your shadow over nations far
beyond the horizon
Nations of the earth shall sing of your;
Great heroes and heroines shall pay you
their tribute.
They shall talk of you until the sun falls
into eternal darkness (30)

This aligns closely with the "Call to Adventure" stage in Joseph Campbell's hero's journey framework. In Campbell's theory, the "Call to Adventure" is the second stage in a hero's journey and is a crucial moment in a hero's life that sets him on a path of transformation and heroic deeds. This momentous event marks the inception of a path that would ultimately lead Shaka to attain the status of a legendary figure. The mention of great heroes and heroines paying

tribute to him and nations singing of him reflects the idea that the hero's journey often leads to a lasting legacy. This legacy is a significant part of the hero's return.

Shaka's approach to justice is complex and multifaceted. While some aspects of his rule may seem harsh by modern standards (Makuadze, 29), they are shaped by the realities of the time and his vision for a powerful Zulu state. His concept of justice is intimately tied to the notions of balance and reciprocity. It is characterised by a combination of traditional African customs and his innovations, which reflected his vision for a strong and centralised Zulu state. He believes that leaders are expected to resolve conflicts, mediate disputes and ensure that wrongs are righted in a manner that restores equilibrium in the community. This restorative approach to justice underscores the interconnectedness of all members within the society and emphasises the importance of maintaining social cohesion. There are abundant events and incidents in Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great* that illustrate a symbiotic relationship between heroism and justice; demonstrating how the remarkable deeds of Emperor Shaka resonate with an unwavering commitment to ethical rectitude. Our discussions shall be centred around Shaka, since he is the central character in the selected text, the ultimate archetype of the Zulu hero.

Most of Shaka's military exploits in the text are not wars of conquests or expansion but about addressing perceived injustices and avenging wrongs committed against the Zulu people and other helpless and blameless nations. While this nature of warfare might not align perfectly with modern ideas of justice, within the context of Shaka's time, seeking retribution and restoring a sense of

balance might have been seen as just actions (Edgerton 62). Instances where Shaka holds individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of their positions, underscore his sense of justice. A case in point is the war waged against Phungashe. Phungashe's rule is characterised by injustice, violence and oppression. We are told that:

Phungashe was the powerful king of the
Buthelezi nation.
He made many a neighbouring nation live
in constant fear.
Some fled from him to the sanctuary of
towering mountains;
Some ran to the kindly and generous
Dingiswayo.
One day Phungashe told his war-hungry
regiments:
'I shall strike Dingiswayo, the stubborn,
indomitable fool.
I shall make him flee, humiliating him
among his followers.'
He boasted, believing that having crushed
the monster's arms
He shall have broken its body.
Phungashe, the wily one, even boasted:
'We shall acquire the authority to rule the
earth.
We shall reap freely of its harvests.
All its wealth shall be for our children.'
His army was infused with this crusading
spirit.
From all distant hills emerged the fiercer
army of Phungashe.
The high cliffs resounded with slogans of
war.
Battle songs echoed like the many voices
of thunder.
Even distant kings, like Zwide, sensing the
smell of iron, began to arm,
Through no threat was posed against
them.
They hoped when the two giants had
drained each other's strength
They would intervene to rule the world.

When Dingiswayo heard of Phungashe's
impending attack
He roamed the royal grounds restlessly,
Knowing the terror Phungashe often
brought with his army (56 -57).

Dingiswayo beckons to Shaka, who at this
stage is a young soldier in one of the
regiments, to take up the challenge;
entreating him to adopt his new war
strategies (which he had earlier scoffed at) to
ensure victory over Phungashe. Shaka's new
military strategies of war end Phungashe's
menace. Shaka emerges from that war a
vanguard of valour. Thus, bravery and
courage, both cerebral and physical,
intertwine to shape Zulu warfare thereafter.
A praise singer says of Shaka in that war:

Thunderbolt that fell into the House of
Phungashe
All-spreading-fame, son of Menzi!
Shaka, the invincible one, no one can
conquer!
Uncontrollable overgrowth, son of Ndaba!
Luxuriant vegetation that grows wild over
the village-cities!
Until dawn, the flames of the villages
overwhelm each other.
Multi-voiced one, who is like a lion! (60).

Shaka's heroic intervention brings about a
just resolution to the menace of Phungashe,
potentially sparing the lives of those who had
suffered under him. Shaka's actions in
countering Phungashe's aggression exemplify
heroism and justice. His courage, strategic
brilliance and leadership protected his people
from oppression, restored stability, and
established a more just societal order. This
showcases his commitment to righting
wrongs and safeguarding the well-being of
his people, making him a heroic figure in the
pursuit of justice. There is no doubt that
Shaka's heroic courage is a defining aspect of
his character. After this wonderful outing,
Dingiswayo is forced to favour him and he is

given the regiment of iziChew to command on account of his sterling courage and bravery, saying:

Your bravery I have seen with my own eyes.
I saw your strategies reaping substantial fruit.
I wish I could reinforce them through many battles
But I fear their outcome.
Son of Zulu, bloodshed begets bloodshed.
But since I love your courage and mind
I give you the regiment of iziChew to command (58).

This encounter fulfils Campbell's stage of "Meeting the Mentor" (2003, p.71). Dingiswayo recognises Shaka's potential and offers him leadership opportunities. The Zulu concept of heroism, thus, orbits around the crucible of combat, wherein the ability to demonstrate exceptional bravery in the throes of battle holds paramount significance (Eldredge, 27). Zulu society reveres leaders who demonstrate bravery and astute judgment, translating into the capacity to lead their people with sagacity and foresight. This Dingiswayo demonstrates by appointing Shaka commander of the regiment of iziChew. Within Zulu heroic ideals, wisdom, bravery and courage weave a tapestry of depth and admiration. Shaka's rise can be seen as a manifestation of this narrative, reflecting the Zulu belief that heroes are fated to catalyse change, much like the thunderbolt that alters the course of nature.

His first assignment after his new status as the commander of iziChew regiment is to liquidate the Wild Man of the forest. The Wild Man's actions disrupt peace, threaten individuals and destroy families with impunity, creating a climate of fear and lawlessness. Shaka's commitment to dealing with the Wild Man illustrates his sense of responsibility for maintaining order and

security in the land. He acknowledges that tolerating such acts of violence threatens the very fabric of Zulu society. He announces his mission:

'Too often I have heard of the Wild Man of the Forest,
Whom it is said cuts down travellers with his battle axe.'
He spoke of the notorious bandit who lived alone in the forest,
Waylaying passers-by, defiantly reaping all neighbouring fields.
It was said even those spears flung at him Only grazed his ox-hide skin.
Like twigs that are blown by the wind they fell.
Shaka said angrily: 'The country cannot live in peace
So long as there are those who swagger and threaten others,
Who besiege peaceful people in their homes.
Destroyers of families who go unpunished Make popular acts of lawlessness.'
Some tried to restrain him, saying:
Those who do these things are violent animals.
They should not be followed into their sanctuaries.'
It was as if these very words incensed Shaka.
He said: 'By my sister, I swear I shall deal with this madman.'
He went on to sharpen his angry spear.
Even Nandi sent a word to try and dissuade him.
But Shaka simply said: Not I alone desire the death of this beast.
But many who have suffered through his acts of brigandage (61).

This incident fulfils another stage of Campbell's hero journey: 'Tests, Allies, and Enemies' (2003, p.72). It represents a phase in which the hero encounters various challenges, forms alliances with helpful

characters, and faces opposition from enemies. Shaka is confronted with the test of dealing with the notorious bandit, the “Wild Man of the Forest.” The bandit represents the enemy in this case. Shaka is tested not only in his physical ability to confront this threat but also in his commitment to restoring peace and justice to the land. His resolve to confront the Wild Man is not merely a response to violence, but a principled stand against lawlessness. He understands that allowing destructive individuals to go unpunished fosters an environment where wrongdoers feel emboldened. His response to the menace reflects his commitment to rectifying wrongs and upholding justice, thus aligning him with the archetype of a hero who acts not out of vengeance but as a defender of order, protector of the vulnerable, and enforcer of rightful conduct. His unwavering stance, even in the face of discouragement from those close to him, underscores his tenacity for justice. His mother’s attempt to dissuade him and his acknowledgement that others also desire the brigand’s demise highlights his principled leadership. This incident holds considerable importance as it serves as a poignant illustration that Shaka’s valorous deeds are firmly anchored in the principles of justice. This underlying theme reverberates throughout the subsequent conflicts he engages in.

Shaka’s reorganisation of the military thereafter and his efforts to break down tribal barriers within his army reflect his commitment to unity and equity. The several wars that the Zulu army engaged in under the dexterous command of Shaka were done to rectify wrongs and ensure that everyone was treated with respect and equality. This is seen in the war against Zwide, king of Ndwandwes. The battle happens to be the fiercest in the text. Zwide is depicted as inviting people to celebrations only to slaughter them in cold blood, taking

advantage of their vulnerability. The narrator tells us:

Zwide was the king of the Ndwandwes of
the Nxumalos.
He was the son of the fearful Queen
Ntombazi.
In the house set aside for the purpose
She put the skulls of many famous victims.
Everywhere along the walls gazed skulls
of once-great men.
There were the heads of Mlotha of
Matshalimi;
Of Zayi; of Ngudlubela, the once-famous
hero of Nguniland.
Queen Ntombazi was, like a wizard feared
by her own children.
It was she who egged Zwide on to
interminable battles.
She made him pursue all victims into their
fortress of stone.
Never before in Nguniland was known
such a disgrace.
A hideous crime it was to drive people
away from their homes
The vanquished must be left to reap their
own crops;
They must have their wounds washed by
the victor.
This was the sacred law of Nguniland.
Perchance it was this blasphemy of the
Ancestral laws
That made Zwide rave as if possessed by
an uncontrollable force.
Many nations lived in constant fear of him.
Many people were revolted by his
ruthlessness.
Was it not this man who often invited
people to a hunt?
And then, in the midst of all celebration,
slaughtered them?
The poet who records and remembers all
these things says of Zwide:
‘By your secret strategies, great heroes
have been killed.
The families that were unlucky were
destroyed,

None dared attach you.
 Among the paths, which one does he
 resemble?
 He is like the one that crosses.
 Among the trees, which one does he
 resemble?
 He is like the tough essenwood plant.
 Among the sacred snakes of the
 Forefathers.’
 The poet tells us, that Zwide attacked
 without cause (71).

Zwide’s brutal actions reveal a ruler who employs deceit and violence to achieve his goals, a stark departure from the expected ideals of integrity, fairness, and protection in Zulu society. Shaka perceives Zwide’s behaviour as impulsive and destructive and if left unchecked could consume more innocent people. In one instance, despite having been shown mercy in defeat, Zwide succumbs to treacherous intentions:

Those who watched the openings of the
 black Mfolozi river
 Saw Zwide armies set out to raid all
 around Nguniland.
 He attacked Zwangendaba of the
 Mnewango clan but suffered
 Zwide begged for mercy.
 The Mnewangos said to him: ‘Go to your
 own lands.
 Take a herd of cattle if hunger is the cause
 of your wars.’
 But Zwide was not appeased:
 He raided the peaceful clans of Matshalimi
 And there obtained the coveted head of
 Prince Mlotha,
 Presenting it to Queen Mtombazi, he only
 said: ‘Here it is.’
 His armies continuously sang their fearful
 war song.
 Encouraged by their victory and such
 rituals (71 -72)

Zwide’s relentless and ruthless attacks on peaceful nations and cunning tactics reveal a

lack of ethical restraint and a self-serving agenda. This aligns with our earlier observation that heroism without justice leads to societal disaster. His presentation of Prince Mlotha’s severed head to Queen Mtombazi, accompanied by the chilling statement “Here it is,” seeks to gain her support through a display of power. This incident reinforces the image of Zwide as a ruler who values power over justice, fostering a destabilising and treacherous atmosphere in Nguniland.

Driven by the influence and encouragement of his mother – Queen Ntombazi, Zwide’s menace is extended to Dingiswayo’s kingdom. The mother urges him to capture Dingiswayo and destroy him:

Zwide vowed to remove the proud feather
 from Dingiswayo’s head
 He claimed: ‘With it, I shall be master in
 Nguniland.’
 Long had Queen Ntombazi pestered her
 son.
 Saying: ‘Strike the snake on its head until
 it dies!’
 Should you conquer Dingiswayo utterly
 All nations and all people of Nguniland
 shall fear you,
 For whoever overcomes a feared man is
 feared himself.’
 It was for this that Zwide prepared his
 troops for battle.
 Choosing the first and best heroes of many
 wars.
 They vowed to bring back Dingiswayo’s
 coveted feather
 Dingiswayo put his numerous regiments
 on war-readiness (72).

To put a permanent stop to the menace of Zwide, Shaka strategises on how to win the war. Part of his recommendations is the capture and destruction of Queen Ntombazi who seems to be the propelling force behind

Zwide's brutalities and violence but the merciful Dingiswayo would not have that:

My son, I know that the blood of youth
spoils for battle.
I know, too, that Zwide is a ruthless and
violent ruler.
But still, I call for a war of reasonable
proportions'
With these words, Dingiswayo rejected
Shaka's plan of a total war (73)

Dingiswayo's measured and cautious approach to the impending war is guided by a sense of responsibility and kinship rooted in the Zulu concept of brotherhood – *ubuntu*. The ethos of *ubuntu* emphasises love and humaneness through compassion, empathy and forgiveness towards others (Lefa, 4). This position does not go down well with Shaka and his army but they comply out of loyalty. Loyalty to rulers and ancestors is a defining trait of Zulu culture; individuals derive purpose and identity from their allegiance to the collective forces of their ancestors and kindred (Edwards, et al., 136), epitomising the interconnectedness that shapes the Zulu worldview. The war proves a fierce one; Zwide is captured and brought alive before Dingiswayo:

Dingiswayo's army reassembled, singing
their song of victory.
Zwide himself was captured. He sat in the
centre, trembling with shock.
The triumphant generals assembled
together.
It was there that Dingiswayo said to
Shaka:
'Yes, my son, we have won our victory.
I thank you for your quick actions and
strikes
...He spoke intimately to Shaka: 'Zwide is
now in our hands.
Tell me, Nodumehlezi, what fate would
you reserve for such a man?'

When he asked this question, Dingiswayo
was troubled.
He hoped Shaka would soften and forgive
the captive.
He was apprehensive too, lest Shaka have
the true solution.
Shaka answered bluntly: 'My lord, it is you
who knows best.
Were it in my hands, I would stop now the
misery of nations.
It is no crime against the Ancestors to kill
a bandit.
The blood of Mlotha cries out for revenge.
By this act, we may appease the hearts of
many victims.
Dingiswayo was quiet as though in deep
thought.
Finally, he said: 'My son, I shall think
seriously about your words.
For the moment we must drink and praise
the Ancestors' (73-74)

Dingiswayo's inquiry about Zwide's fate leads to an ethical dilemma. While Dingiswayo hopes for leniency, Shaka's response is guided by a strong sense of justice and the need to address the harm caused. Shaka asserts that killing Zwide, a bandit, is not a transgression against their ancestors. He acknowledges the necessity of retributive justice due to Zwide's bloodshed. He believes in avenging victims to provide closure and reconciliation. His intention for justice is pragmatic and resolute, balancing ethics and community welfare. He navigates justice, vengeance, and reconciliation, embodying leadership focused on equilibrium, stability, and societal integrity. His willingness to address the situation head-on and provide a candid response demonstrates courage and a sense of responsibility. Heroic figures in Zulu culture are expected to face challenges with bravery and take on the responsibility of safeguarding their people (Edgerton, 1989, p.58). The sort of justice that Shaka seeks transcends the mundane confines of retribution, encompassing a holistic embodiment of

ethical restoration that is sanctified by ancestral homage and marked by the unwavering determination of a leader steadfast in his pursuit of rectitude. A few days later, Dingiswayo sets Zwide free.

In a manner akin to the fate suffered by Zwangendaba of the Mnewango clan, Zwide perpetrates a heinous and treacherous act by orchestrating the murder of Dingiswayo. Employing a cunning stratagem, Zwide infiltrates Dingiswayo's court, using a duplicitous approach. This involves the manipulation of his sister, who craftily infiltrates Dingiswayo's inner circle by feigning a need for refuge from Zwide's tumultuous rule, all the while discreetly amassing invaluable intelligence:

He sent Princess Nobenguni, his sister,
 saying:
 'The country of all the Forefathers is
 surrounded;
 From all sides, there are hungry leopards.
 Go to Dingiswayo and say: "I am the
 daughter of King Langa.
 I am tired of the warlike existence under
 my brother's rule.
 I have come to ask for a peaceful place to
 stay."
 Because of his self-love and his desire for
 fame.
 He shall give you a special place in his
 royal home.
 It is then you shall dig deep into his heart,
 Softening it with love and stories of
 endless fantasy.
 Then he shall listen to your command;
 they shall become our weapons'
 The fearless daughter of Langa consented
 to her brother.
 . . .
 Things did go according to Zwide's
 wishes.
 When Princess Nobenguni of the
 Nxumalos arrived
 Dingiswayo welcomed her with a feast,
 slaughtering the fattest bulls

He sat with her night after night,
 Searching for the truth and secrets of
 Zwide's life (116).

Zwide's violence and destruction in some Nguni kingdoms continue unabated. Exasperated, Dingiswayo decides to visit him unaccompanied intending to admonish him, believing that he can exact some measure of influence on him to stop the bloodshed and violence in Nguni land. Having been manipulated by Princess Nobenguni and disregarding all pleas from his councillors and advisors, Dingiswayo journeys to meet Zwide in a state of intense agitation and anger, accompanied by only a handful of escorts.

Upon hearing of Dingiswayo's arrival, Zwide responds by expressing gratitude for the visit and offering his finest cows for a feast. Despite Dingiswayo's initial anger, he softens upon considering that Zwide might have chastised himself, and even admires the success of his strategic approach. Time passes as Dingiswayo awaits a meeting with Zwide, but news of Zwide's ill health is later revealed as a ploy to confuse Dingiswayo. Zwide's doubts grow, influenced by his mother's counsel to seize the opportunity for glory. Zwide's spies report the Zulus armies' proximity to his capital, causing him to panic, fearing an attack from Shaka. Disturbed by these developments, Zwide commands Dingiswayo's presence, which Dingiswayo defiantly questions. Despite this, Dingiswayo heads to Zwide's court, where – surrounded by his councillors – mocks Dingiswayo. It is only at this moment that Dingiswayo realises he has unwittingly played into Zwide's hands. Zwide asks Dingiswayo:

'Before you embark on your journey to the
 Ancestors
 What last request would you like to make
 of us?'

Dingiswayo, the son of Jobe, looked at him
fiercely.
Even those who were staring at him shied
away.
Angered, Dingiswayo's escort lurched
forward but he restrained them.
He loosened a large collar of beads
Which had been made and designed only
for him.
From his neck, it spread covering his chest
and shoulders (122).

The removal of the bead symbolises the impending disintegration of the Zulu nation. This symbolism of disintegration and irreparability encapsulates the weight of the impending consequences and underscores the emotional impact of the treachery on the Zulu people as a whole. Dingiswayo then tells Zwide:

'Grant me this, Zwide, son of Langa.
When I begin to kick with the pain of
death
Break this apart, fracturing it in all its
beauty.
Thus, shall end the fragments of my
dream.
I had envisioned the rich bonds to embrace
all the children of Palm Race.
I have failed.
I have not made a feast for all the children
of the sun.
Here is my breast, wide open and
unprotected.
Do as you will. Plunge into it your blade of
power.
Quench the fire that lit the horizons of
yesterday!
His bold words made Zwide look down.
He spoke softly as if consenting to a
request.
He said: 'I shall do as you request.
Great kings rule over the grave.'
His mind suffered a conflict
Knowing his mother, Queen Ntombazi,
would not forgive,

Yet aware of the ancient saying and truth:
'He who kills in cold blood shall himself be
killed in cold blood.'
The words of Dingiswayo found their
target in his mind.
The great and famed son of Jobe was killed
(122-123).

This scene is the most emotive moment in the text. The powerful imagery of "plunge into it your blade of power" is vivid and conveys the act of confronting mortality with courage. The mention of the "fire that lit the horizons of yesterday" refers to Dingiswayo's past achievements that will soon be extinguished. This incident re-enforces our position that the Zulu heroic ideals emphasise the bravery and courage of individuals who face adversity with resilience. Dingiswayo's acceptance of his fate and the invitation to Zwide to "plunge into it your blade of power" exemplifies a courageous confrontation with mortality. This display of bravery in a vulnerable situation resonates with the valour associated with Zulu heroes (Edgerton, 63).

The killing of Dingiswayo ushers in 'the ordeal' stage in Campbell's theory of the hero's journey. Campbell explains that during this stage, the hero embarks on an ordeal, a pivotal moment of extreme peril, wherein they encounter their deepest fear and grapple with their most formidable challenge (2003, p.). In the 'Ordeal stage,' the hero may come face to face with mortality, either experiencing it firsthand, witnessing the demise of a trusted ally or mentor, or, in a more harrowing scenario, being directly responsible for a death. This critical juncture in the hero's journey often places the hero in confrontation with their shadow or the primary Villain. If the hero fails during this crucial test, it intensifies the stakes and casts doubt on the ultimate success of the journey. In Shaka's life, Dingiswayo is not only an ally but also a mentor. Dingiswayo recognises Shaka's potential and supports his rise to

power. He plays a crucial role in helping Shaka develop his military leadership skills and provides essential guidance. Their alliance is instrumental in Shaka's early successes.

The death of Dingiswayo is a pivotal moment in Shaka's journey, mirroring the elements of the 'ordeal stage' in his heroic journey and it raises the stakes for Shaka's quest for justice. This event acts as a catalyst that initiates a domino effect that culminates in the deadliest war portrayed in the text. Thus, the emotional impact of Dingiswayo's killing fueled feelings of anger, grief, and a desire for retribution from Shaka and his army:

When Shaka heard from the Khumalos
How the great king, Dingiswayo had been
killed by Zwide,
He shed tears and lowered his forehead to
the ground.
He vowed to make Zwide and his allies pay
for this crime.
He stood at the pass of the Yiwane,
Dreaming and imagining the events of
their lives together.
'I shall avenge my father!
I swear by my Ancestors, I swear by my
sister, Nomchoba.
Zwide, the son of Langa, shall not live for
long!
He turned back his army to Zululand,
Saying to them: 'I have already begun the
war-journey.
The day that leads to the great battle with
Zwide of Langa has begun' (123-24)

Shaka's resolute commitment to justice, as epitomised by his solemn vow to avenge Dingiswayo's death, aligns harmoniously with the valorous ethos intrinsic to Zulu heroism. The Zulu people, known for their martial prowess and unyielding courage perfected by Shaka himself, extol virtues that include defending their honour, seeking retribution for transgressions, and upholding

communal integrity (Adesegun and Adejo, 22). Shaka's unhesitating determination to rectify the egregious injustice suffered by Dingiswayo exemplifies the indomitable spirit of heroism within Zulu culture. Thus, Shaka's role as a leader, standing at the vanguard of his troops, accentuates the synergy between justice and Zulu heroism. His declaration of having initiated the "war-journey" resonates with the archetype of Zulu leaders who, throughout history, have taken up arms not only to safeguard their people but also to rectify perceived wrongs. Shaka's leadership embodies the quintessential Zulu hero — guiding his people through the pursuit of justice, which itself is a heroic endeavour.

The war against Zwide known as the 'battle at the Qokli Hill' is regarded as the fiercest in the annals of Zulu war. The battle is characterised by intense bloodshed, resulting in an estimated Ndwandwe casualty count of around Seven thousand five hundred (7,500) soldiers, including five of Zwide's eldest sons, equating to approximately two-thirds of their initial contingent (Edgerton 69). Marked by strategic brilliance, Shaka's outnumbered forces secure victory. Facing the Ndwandwe invasion led by Nomahlanjana, Shaka executes a multifaceted plan. He delays the Ndwandwe advance by positioning forces at the river drifts. With his main force atop Gqokli hill, he orchestrates a diversion and conserves his elite troops. As the Ndwandwe regiments amasses, Shaka's counterattacks exploit their overcrowding, capitalising on Zulu weapons, discipline, and tactics. Shaka's strategic envelopment inflicts a decisive blow, annihilating Ndwandwe's leadership. Despite casualties, Shaka's innovative manoeuvres prevail. The battle underscores Shaka's tactical prowess. He diplomatically aligns with other tribes and recruits warriors to fortify Zulu defences against the vast army of Zwide. In the end, Shaka achieves victory over Zwide, bringing his menaces and brutalities to an end. The battle reaffirms the

Zulu people as heroes who extol virtues that include defending honour, seeking retribution for transgressions, and upholding communal integrity. Shaka's determination to rectify the fate suffered by Dingiswayo exemplifies the indomitable spirit of heroism within Zulu culture.

Shaka's determination to ensure that justice is upheld, even within his inner circle, illustrates his commitment to fairness and harmony. This is seen in the case brought before Shaka's assembly by a poor man. The man tells the assembly that while he went in some of Shaka's wars in his youthful days, he entrusted his beloved betrothed to the guardianship of his elder brother, who, as the familial patriarch following the loss of their parents, assumes responsibility. Upon his return from a military endeavour, a disconcerting revelation surfaces: his elder brother, the custodian of trust, had sired offspring with the very woman meant to be his wife. Undeterred by this grievous betrayal, the man proceeds to marry the woman. Nevertheless, after being married for some years, the wife departs from him for his older brother who, seizing this opportunity, claims the woman, contending that his younger brother is a failure and that the family's wealth is solely a result of his efforts. The assembly decided that the elder brother be punished. Shaka insists that the woman should also be punished since she is in the course of the disintegration. When the parties are brought before the assembly, the said elder brother pleads:

I have destroyed the name of my father's
house
I violated the sacred laws of our nation
Through the living and the dead, I ask for
your forgiveness.
...
My crime is clear, I admit to it.
Perhaps with my death, others shall learn
their lesson.

Only one request I make from the king:
Let other nations who hear of our
judgements
Say: "Punishments of death are meted out
only to men"
As he finished one man followed up his
words:
'Admission of a crime disqualifies one to
judge the fate of others.
Had you maintained the nation's pride as
you now proclaim
You would have spared us the
consequences of these debates.
To these words, many in the Assembly
agreed.
Summarizing the case, the king said:
'From your judgement, a sentence of death
has been passed.
I want only to endorse your words.
It is clear this woman, too, must die.
She must suffer for her part in this grisly
crime (193).

The discourse within the assembly captures the multifaceted nature of justice in the Zulu worldview. The observation that admitting a crime disqualifies one from judgment underlines the Zulu emphasis on ethical consistency and integrity. The king's endorsement of the verdict embodies the Zulu belief that justice is a communal endeavour (Bazza 19). The resolution to sentence the woman to death reflects the Zulu view of justice as a mechanism to restore balance and deter future transgressions. This approach is rooted in the Zulu hero's role as a custodian of justice and social harmony. It underscores the interconnectedness of actions, the importance of accountability, and the role of justice in reestablishing equilibrium within the community. A Zulu hero is an embodiment of these principles, demonstrating the courage to confront wrongdoing and the commitment to restoring harmony through his actions. Thus, justice, in the context of Zulu culture, is not merely the application of laws or regulations,

but rather a holistic concept that encompasses fairness, equity, and harmony. Therefore, in Zulu culture, justice is not a mere transactional concept but an intricate tapestry woven with communal harmony, ethics, and balance.

Based on our discourse thus far, it appears prudent to assert that heroism and justice are inseparable, with the former inherently reliant upon the latter. Throughout our discussions, a coherent theme has emerged: the intimate connection between heroism and justice in Zulu society. This connection goes beyond mere correlation; it is a symbiotic relationship that underscores the fundamental nature of both concepts. In the light of the analysis we have undertaken, it becomes increasingly evident that heroism finds its true essence and sustenance within the realm of justice in the Zulu society. And it is on this account that it is difficult to agree with Kunene that heroism is a higher virtue than justice.

Conclusion

We have been able to show that the Zulu society fervently extols and reveres heroic quests that greatly sustain the holistic well-being of its vibrant community. We have seen that many heroic events revolve around individuals who challenge injustice and work towards righting wrongs. These actions are inherently linked to the pursuit of justice and the desire to rectify imbalances. In their collective consciousness, heroes are those rare paragons of altruism who unflinchingly prioritise the exigencies of others above their own, vigilantly safeguard the feeble and vulnerable, and unwaveringly uphold the sacred tenets of justice and morality. Thus, justice not only underscores Zulu heroes' moral framework, but also galvanises their actions and shapes their quests. As a result, the Zulu hero assumes an exalted and celebrated status, earning majestic acclaim

and veneration. It is within this framework, steeped in the grandeur of literary craftsmanship, that the figure of Shaka towers majestically, gracing the monumental pages of Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*.

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