





Selected Themes in Jabulani ‘Sjava’ Hadebe’s South African Music

A Literary Study

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on themes found in Jabulani Hadebe’s South African music. Themes are evident in music as much as they are evident in other literary forms such as poetry and prose. The themes to be explored in this study are from the following albums: *Isinamuva* (2016), *Umphako* (2018) and *Umqhele* (2018). They touch on the following social aspects: love, valuing women, and religion and belief systems.

Jabulani Hadebe, well-known as ‘Sjava’ in the music industry, has received local and international recognition for his music. Between the period of 2016 to 2019, Hadebe was nominated 11 times for different musical accolades and won 6 awards. The biggest of his achievement was a nomination and a win at the BET awards in the United States of America (USA). Hadebe’s music is a fusion of different sounds, ranging between hip-hop, R&B, and rap and is rendered mostly in isiZulu. This makes it one of its own kind. It goes without saying that his

work is peculiar. Despite these highlighted achievements though, it is disappointing that Sjava's music has not been given the attention it deserves in academic discourse. Maphala's honours research essay (2020), on which this chapter is based, is probably the only scholarly endeavour to explore the artist's works. A paper by Dlamini & Maphala (2023) titled 'a literary critique of some poetic aspects in Jabulani 'Sjava's Music', was derived from this study and it seems to be only published study on Hadebe's music so far. The chapter thus makes its contribution to scientific knowledge in this sense. It seeks to add to the existing works on Hadebe's craft.

The chapter starts by commenting on research methodology and the post-colonial theory as the selected theory for the study. The definitions of the concepts of 'theme' and 'social aspect' are also provided. It was deemed necessary to integrate and define the concept of 'social aspects' because the analysed themes are of a social nature. Since this discourse investigates music as the primary source of data, the qualitative research method was adopted and uses textual analysis as a research technique.

In this investigation, data is primarily collected from Hadebe's lyrics, which are available online. No interviews, observations or other data collection methods are used. The study of written lyrics and listening to music indicate that the research study is done qualitatively. Commenting on the qualitative method, Malterud (2001: 483) states: "The qualitative method involves the systematic collection, organisation, and interpretation of textual material derived from talk or observation". This study leans on this understanding of the qualitative research method, although talks and observations are eliminated. Information is collected, organised, and interpreted from lyrics and the songs listened to. Postgraduate research works and dictionaries will serve as secondary data sources.

Castle (2007: 3) explains the necessity of theory in any work of literature. He claims that a theory is important to literature, and it is used for interpretation and comprehension. Maintaining a similar view, Abed in Dlamini (2018: 6) remarks:

“Theories are intended to explicate, predict and enhance the understanding of phenomena”. The above views highlight that a theory is important to literature, as it enables individuals to comprehend, analyse, and develop meaning and engage with different works of literature. In this discourse, the post-colonial theory is the selected theory through which the analysis of Hadebe’s music is done.

Post-colonialism emerged from within anti-colonial activism and political movements in Asia, Africa and South America (Nayar, 2010: 2). Post-colonial theory studies literature with lenses that focus on life after oppression, how the formerly oppressed lives dealt with the challenges and social issues on a day-to-day basis. Castle (2013: 242) states:

Post-colonial studies are an interdisciplinary domain in which we can discern two very broad trends: on the one hand, we see a concentration on imperialism and colonialism; while on the other hand, we see primary accounts of post-colonial literature, culture, society, and politics.

In support of the argument by Castle, Dlamini (2018: 7) argues that post-colonial theory focused on imperialism and colonialism initially but has now shifted to include studying current social issues that may have little or nothing to do with imperialism. The themes to be discussed in this study comment on the current societal aspects and how people live. The post-colonial theory is thus relevant to this paper since the paper discusses themes that are of a social nature.

Theme defined

An insight into the concept of theme is provided by Cuddon (2013: 721) who states: “Properly speaking, the theme of a work is not its subject but rather its central idea, which may be stated directly or indirectly”. This definition seems to imply that theme could mean either subject/topic or central idea. Childs and Fowler (2006: 239) distinguish the concept of theme from subject by stating that a theme is a subject, but a subject is not

always a theme. Diamond, in Dlamini (2018: 39), alludes to the views above by stating:

A topic is general while “theme” is specific. Theme refers to the insight the dramatist is trying to communicate to the readers by means of a certain topic, plot, and characters.

Although the above view refers to theme in the genre of drama, the meaning is applicable to any literary work. Abrams (1999: 170) states: “The term (theme) is more usefully applied to a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader”. The above insights reveal that a theme is the main idea of a literal work; it is the general idea that the literal piece presents, and not necessarily the topic. The songs in *Isina-Muva*, *Umphako* and *Umqhele* will be analysed to get the main ideas that Sjava communicates through them. The themes found in these songs are of a social nature.

The concept of ‘social aspect’

Childs and Fowler (2006: 221) state that critics from Plato and Aristotle onwards have argued that literature is essentially ‘social’ – has social causes, contents, and effects. The discourse at hand has identified the themes in Hadebe’s music to be of a social nature and this is in accord with the view presented above. The South African Oxford Dictionary (2002: 860) defines the word ‘social’ as something that has to do with society. Gidden, in Dlamini (2018: 40), then defines society as: “the system of interrelationships which connects together the individuals who share a common culture”. Ronney, in Dlamini (2018: 40), on the other hand, says that society is: “the sum total of relationships among groups of humans or animals ... a structured community of people bound together by similar traditions, institutions, or nationality.”

The definitions of society given above show that society is where a group of people with related ways of living, customs, laws, culture or traditions can be found. The themes to be

discussed are of a social nature as they are part of people's lives and how they live. The discussion below shows how Sjava's music engages in social topics, such as love, religion and belief systems, as well as the value and treatment of women, which affect individuals directly or indirectly in day-to-day living.

The analysis of socio-thematic aspects in Jabulani Hadebe's music

The discussion of the identified socio-thematic aspects in Sjava's songs is done according to the following sub-headings: love, the value of women, and religion and belief systems.

Love

There are at least three facets of love that are evident in Sjava's music, namely family love, love for friends, and romantic love. The South African Oxford Dictionary (2002: 534) defines the term love as "a strong feeling of affection". Similarly, The MacMillan English Dictionary (2002: 851) states that love is "a very strong emotional and sexual feeling for someone". The above definitions reveal that love is a multifaceted mix of emotions, behaviours, and beliefs connected to strong feelings of affection.

Family love

The South African Oxford Dictionary (2002: 319) defines a family as a group of people consisting of parents and their children. Families co-exist in societies. In the song 'Baba', from *Isina Muva*, Sjava demonstrates affection for his father who has passed on before he became successful. He is wondering whether his late father can see his progress and how much he has achieved, and how proud he would have been of him. The fact that Sjava is asking himself these questions shows how much he thinks of this father. In verse one, he reveals that he has been through a lot. It is almost as if his life is a fiction. One can argue that this song also reflects the sincere and authentic conversations he would have had with his father. His love for

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his father is deep to an extent that he distances himself from anything that happened between him and his mother. The following lines from the song allude to this:

Le eyok 'xabana kwakho nomama anginyngeni. Ukuthi ngubani owenzani kanjani lezo ezenu. Ngibonga ukuthi nangletha emhlabeni

(I am not involving myself in the conflict between you and my mother. It does not matter who did what and how, it is an issue between the two of you. I'm grateful that you brought me to earth.)

(Hadebe, 2016)

The lyrics above show that Sjava decides to stay out of this conflict as he feels it has nothing to do with him, out of love and respect for his father/parents. This song shows that the father was mostly absent in the artist's life, because of two reasons: the conflict between him and Sjava's mother, and secondly, because of death. Because of the love Sjava has for his father, he chooses to overlook all his faults. The following words highlight this: "Ukuthi wabaleka noma awubalekanga, anginankinga nawe" (Whether you ran away or not, I have no problem with you...) (Hadebe, 2016). He chooses not to judge his father. One can argue that such a gesture complements the adage "Love knows no wrongs". At the end of the verse, he directly declares his love for his father as highlighted by these words: "Into engizokutshela yona noma unamaphutha ukuthi mina ngiyakuthanda" (What I will tell you even if you have your own faults is that I love you) (Hadebe, 2016).

The songs 'Ugogo', 'Umama' and 'Isibhamu' further expand on the theme of family love in the artist's collection. In the song 'Ugogo' (grandmother), Sjava shows his affection for his grandmother who has taught him valuable life lessons and prayed for him to be safe. He avers: "Mhlambe emhlabeni ngabe angisekho. Kube ak'yona imithandazo yakho" (Maybe I would have left the earth had it not been for your prayers) (Hadebe, 2016). Throughout the song, he appreciates all the prayers, the support and encouragement he received from his grandmother.

He further thanks the Creator for keeping her for him as shown in this verse: “Dankie, dankie Mdali for ukungigcinela ugoto” (Thank you, thank you Creator for keeping my grandmother for me) (Hadebe, 2016).

The song ‘Umama’ (mother) reveals his affection for his mother and the relationship they have. It also addresses a generic stereotype among men, namely that men who love their mothers are ‘mamas boys/sissies’. They are generally regarded as not being man enough. Sjava conquers the stereotype and reveals that because of the strong bond between him and his mother, nothing can stand in his way. The following verse shows how his mother rejoices when he gets home and that their love is not materialistic but reciprocal in nature:

Yojabula uma ngifika. Into engiyithanda ngekhaya ukuthi ekhaya akungenwa ngemali. Noma ngingasebenzi, umama ungingithanda ngingenani

(You will delight when I arrive. What I love about home is that you do not need money to gain access. Even when I do not work, my mother would still love me, even when I do not have anything.)

(Hadebe, 2018)

Lastly, in the song titled ‘isibhamu’, one of the central ideas presented in the body of the song is love. Sjava is pleading for his life; he is negotiating with the man holding him at gunpoint not to kill him. His plea reveals that he has a family to work for. These words demonstrate the utmost love and care he has for his family. The following lyrics from the verse demonstrate the love: “Nginomndeni ekumele ngiwusebenzele (I have a family to work for.) (Hadebe, 2018). Sjava shows that he values his family more than anything as he would give up material things for his life to be spared. He states: “Kungcono uthathe imoto, uthath’ ifoni mina ungixolele” (Rather you take the car, the phone and forgive me). (Hadebe, 2018).

In verse two of the same song, the artist reveals that he lost a brother he loved in a hijacking and further shows his love

for his brother's widow: "Qina ntombi yam' Madlokovu" (Be of courage Madlokovu). (Hadebe, 2018). This song is one of the songs he uses to disclose his love for family and the lengths he would go to just to spare the lives of his loved ones. The songs demonstrate the artist's affection for his family.

Romantic love

The South African Oxford Dictionary (2002: 778) defines romance as a "pleasurable feeling of excitement and wonder associated with love, and a love affair". Sjava presents the different stages through which romantic love evolves. From courting to marriage, difficulties of a relationship, and the end of a relationship. The song titled 'Intombi' reveals the courting process, using an old tradition of 'izikhuzelo', where a gentleman would publicly recite lovely words to get the attention of a girl. It is also a way to appreciate their beauty and to lay down a request for the girl to agree to a proposed relationship.

'Izikhuzelo' are different from confessions. In confessions, the gentleman is not making a bold move but sits and wonders whether the girl has strong feelings for him or not. He has observed her and now questions how the lady feels. By this stage, it is assumed that the gentleman has developed strong feelings for the woman. He would like to know how the girl or woman feels about him. It is generally known that rejection in these kinds of relationships happens, and some people do not take it well. Since this is the case, men tend to have fears and thus guard their hearts. This is supported by the following verse in the song titled 'Intombi': "Yaz ngisaba ukuthi angeke ungithande the way ngikuthanda ngakhona" (I am scared you won't love me the way I love you) (Hadebe, 2018).

Unlike family love, where love comes naturally, romantic love means exposing oneself to a stranger and sometimes, the love is not reciprocated. There are thus a lot of risks that one takes when one acts on this kind of love. It is for this reason, that the artist has these worries in the verse highlighted above.

The theme of romantic love is also highlighted in the song titled 'Amagama'. In this song, Sjava indicates how there

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are just not enough words to express his love. By making this declaration, Sjava communicates that his love for this lady cannot be sufficiently expressed in words. The following lines allude to this:

Amagam' othando akhona emhlabeni
Engingakubiza ngawo awanele

*(Words of love that exist in the world
There are not enough to refer to you.)*

(Hadebe 2018)

On the same note, the song titled 'Intomb' Yam' is used by Sjava to communicate the responsibilities of a guy in a romantic relationship. Sjava shows that there are certain responsibilities that come with this kind of love. Among others, he mentions provision, being a comforter, being a protector, and so forth, as shown in the lines below:

Ntambama baby, zophekelwa yim
Nkinga zakho ezam' kumel usizwe yim
Ma uy' empini yamaphupho akho usaba
Kumel uphelezelwe yim
Mpilo mayik'qhwaya oh
Kumel' ulwelwe yimi

(In the evenings baby I will cook for you. Your problems are mine; you must be helped by me. When you fearfully go to the battle for your dreams, I should accompany you When you scuffle through life I should fight for you.)

(Hadebe, 2018)

The above lines are used to outline some of the roles and responsibilities attached to a romantic relationship. These roles and responsibilities are not formalised anywhere but have come to be generally accepted. The song titled 'Amafu' is another example of a song that depicts romantic love. The song reveals the length a man in a romantic relationship would go to be with

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his partner without being prohibited by circumstance, including bad weather. This demonstrates how much he loves and values his partner. He would do anything to be with her. The following lines support this view:

Noma lingaguqul' amafu
Noma kungadum' izulu
Noma kungithiwani ilanga liyoshona
Ngiyolala ngimbonile owakwami

*(Even if it clouds gather,
Even if thunder strikes
No matter what and the sunsets
I will sleep having seen my partner.)*

(Hadebe, 2016)

Romantic relationships, ideally, are intended to lead to marriage and people living happily ever after. Sjava confirms this in the song titled 'UJesu'. In this song, he vows to love his lover until Jesus returns. However, at times this 'promised land' is not reached due to different reasons. These reasons include the messages communicated in the song titled 'Wamuhle', a song about the death of a partner and the song titled 'Madludlu', a song about regrets after a break-up. One of the reasons is contained in the song titled 'Before', a song that talks about how love in a romantic relationship has deteriorated. These are some of the reasons that people in romantic relationships encounter and end up ending the relationships.

Friendship love

The reflective song titled 'Abangani' depicts the love and appreciation the artist has for his friends. In this song, he communicates a clear message of how rare it is to find real friends. He is grateful for the ones he has. These lyrics in the song attest to this: "Abasekho abangani. Uma umtholile bong uMdali" (Real friends no longer exist, be grateful to the creator if you ever find them) (Hadebe, 2018). He appreciates his friends for the role they played in uplifting him while he had nothing,

by saying: “Kwakungekona ukuhlakanipha kwam. Nami ngasizwa yinkab’ zami” (It was not my wisdom, I was helped by my ‘oxen’) (Hadebe, 2018). Because of the strong love they have for each other, even before the fame, Sjava believes that their friendship is worth it all and will survive even when they are all successful and famous.

Lastly, in the song titled ‘Xola’, Sjava shows love to a friend after the friend had just had a break-up. A friend is consoled and comforted as well as shown how the relationship that has just ended was not worth it. The following lines attest this: “Mngani wami bamb’ isandla sami Bengingathandi nami uma usukhala njalo” (Take my hand friend, I didn’t like it when you cried all the time) (Hadebe, 2018). The amount of love one has for a friend compels them to stand by them in times of need to offer support.

The value of women

Women experience a lot of challenges in their day-to-day lives. Ongunyemi, in Masuku (2005: 56), highlights some of these challenges and struggles by saying:

“The conviction that the gender question can be dealt with only in the context of other issues that are relevant for African women. An African womanist will recognize that, along with consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations to her philosophy. Moreover, an African womanist must deal with, among other things, interethnic skirmishes and cleansing, religious fundamentalism, the language issue, gerontocracy and in-lawism.”

Even though women are viewed from an African context in the above view, this generally applies to all women. Sjava comments on some issues that women face in the song titled ‘Abafazi’. The following lines voice out his sentiments and concerns:

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Abafazi la ngaphandle bathwele kanzima
Aba nabo omama
Bathwele kanzima
Bathwele kanzima
Bading' uthando lwethu

*(Women are carrying a heavy burden out there.
They do not have mothers.
They are carrying a heavy burden.
They are carrying a heavy burden.
They need our love.)*

(Hadebe, 2018)

In this song, Sjava expresses his unhappiness about how women are suffering. As the song continues, the artist shows how men inflict some of these challenges. He then challenges men that they should change and love all women, even if they are not romantically involved with them by saying: “Noma kungeyena owakho mthande” (Even if you aren’t romantically involved with her, love her) (Hadebe, 2018). The above line depicts that the artist believes that women deserve to be loved not only when they are in relationships with men. Sjava advocates for justice, fair treatment and the right way to love women in the song titled ‘Abafazi’. The claim that women do not have mothers seems to mean they need people to love, nurture and comfort them just as a mother would.

In the song titled ‘Amagama’, he does not only appreciate his lover, but also honours Winnie Mandela’s beauty by saying, “Ngoba abusekho ubuhle obunjena. Lokhu ngakugina ngo Winnie Mandela” (For there is no longer beauty like this, I last saw this in Winnie Mandela) (Hadebe, 2018). In this statement, the artist is not appreciating the beauty of his lover but payshomage to Winne Mandela who is one of the iconic women in the history of South Africa.

Through his music, Sjava advocates for fair and good treatment of women. In his songs, this is evident when he broadly speaks about the general wellness and fair treatment of women. Sending a direct message to men that they do not need

to be romantically involved with the women to love them. He recognises that a major cause of women's mistreatment is men. In the song titled "Abafazi" he pleads with men that things should change, as if awakening the men that change lies in their hands. This message joins in the many voices in society that advocate for the fair treatment of women.

Religion and belief system

There are also some elements of religion in Sjava's songs. Some of these songs tend to reveal some sense of reliance on and belief in a higher being, God (uMvelingqangi). They also highlight the artist's belief in ancestors. One of the common beliefs of those who believe in ancestors is that all the good things they have received are given to them by their ancestors (amadlozi). In the first verse of the song titled 'Ugogo', Sjava acknowledges that his success is a result of his ancestors giving consent. This is shown in the verse: "idlozi selivumile emsamu" (The ancestors have agreed at the altar).

His belief in ancestors is also evident in the song titled 'Izitha' where the artist is pleading with ancestors for a better chance in life after pleasing them and accepting their call to become a 'sangoma' (traditional healer). A plea is made in this song. The artist feels as if his life is not progressing or getting better. He then questions his ancestors and asks whether he created more enemies for himself by slaughtering in attempt to please them. He is addressing these issues directly to his ancestors. This shows that he relies in his ancestors for provision, protection and guidance in his life, as shown in these lyrics: "Selokhu ngakhetha ukuhamba nawe dlozi. Ngithi inhlopheko ayisangazi, nay'ithi ngizenza ngcono" (Ever since I followed the ancestral route, affliction is a thing of the past, it thinks I now think better of myself) (Hadebe 2018).

The Zulu traditional belief in ancestors is closely connected to the religion/belief of AmaNazarethe. Sjava depicts this in the lyrics of the song titled 'Umama'. He indicates that whenever he arrives safely at home, his mother rejoices and becomes grateful to "Shembe" for protecting him on his

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journey back home. In this song it is revealed that his mother and grandmother also speak to the ancestors on his behalf, expressing their gratitude for protection. The following lines allude to this:

(U)Yojabula mang'fika, athi UShembe uyaphila.
Kuley'ngozi zomgwaqo, mntanami ngyajabula ufike
usaphila
Bek'iykhwama le emsamu, land'impepho kaGogo
erondweni
Ngiphahle ngikhulume nabadala ngibatshele
usemagcekeni

*(She will be happy when I get home and declare that Shembe lives
In all the accidents on the road, I am happy you have arrived safely my child
Put your bags on the sacred shrine, fetch grandmother's incense in the hut
So that I can speak to the elders and alert them that you are home.)*

(Hadebe, 2018)

This further reveals how Zulu traditional beliefs are practised in Sjava's family. In the above verse, the mother is perceived as having the role of speaking to the ancestors using the grandmother's incense. She talks on behalf of her son to thank the ancestors for protecting him on the road. There are also some songs where Sjava acknowledges God. The song titled 'Uvalo' (fear), for instance, advocates for fearlessness if you trust in God. The song acknowledges that the artist encounters demons along the way as Satan tries to destroy him. This song shows that the artist is fearless and confident because God is on his side. As the song continues, the artist even bears testimony when he says:

Ake ngibonge nje lapho
Ngingabongi okuningi nje impilo
uNkulunkulu wenze imilingo ngempilo yami

From zero to hero, we mngan' wami

*(Let me just express gratitude
I do not appreciate much but life
God has worked miracles in my life
From zero to hero my friend.)*

(Hadebe, 2018)

The above verses show how grateful the artist is to God. He praises God for the miracles he has done in his life. This is in light of the alarming success he has experienced in his music career. On the same note, Sjava's praise to God is also highlighted in the song titled 'Ngiyabonga'. He thanks God for provision as he managed to rebuild his father's house. It is a common phenomenon in black communities for children to rebuild their parents' houses. The artist shows appreciation to God for strength and the ability to do this as demonstrated in these lines:

Nawe bekezela owakho umndeni uzowakhela
UHlengiwe Mhlaba wathi uyalalela
Futhi wayengaqambi amanga

*(You will be able to build for your family
Hlengiwe Mhlaba said He listens
It was not a lie.)*

(Hadebe, 2018)

Conclusion

A theme is a message that is left over even after the literal work has been read and listened to. Sjava tackles love as one of the themes. He does it in an artistic way that portrays his love for his partner, friends, and family. The value of women in societies is a forever-burning topic, as women continue to try and redefine their roles and identity in society. There are many voices promoting and supporting the interests of women and Sjava does so creatively with much robustness through his music. Lastly, the artist also highlights his religious and

belief affiliation in his songs. This enables the listeners and followers of his music to relate and to understand his values and norms more.

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