

## 'So that I will be a Marriageable Girl' *Umemulo* in Contemporary Zulu Society

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BEFORE THE 1990s in KwaZulu-Natal, white authorities sought to control crucial indigenous rituals marking the passage of isiZulu-speaking youths to greater social standing. For example, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Natal colonists imposed 'native customary laws' that regulated bridewealth (*ilobolo*),<sup>1</sup> limiting the number of cattle that could be offered by a 'tribal' isiZulu-speaking man to his wife's family. White magistrates interfered with nuptial negotiations by insisting that an African 'official witness' employed by government verify whether a Zulu bride wished to marry her prospective husband, regardless of any agreement between elders of the betrothed. And, most notoriously, following the British conquest of Zululand in 1879 the enrolment of male and female youths into Zulu regiments was severely restricted. Yet *umemulo*, the 'coming-of-age' ceremony held for a girl reaching marriageable age, eluded disruptive external shocks and manipulation. Perhaps this is because a custom recognising the potential of adolescent girls was perceived as no threat to white minority power.<sup>2</sup>

Today, many Zulu people still enact *umemulo*.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is common for the isiZulu-language newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*, to highlight various *umemulo* celebrations as part of its topical coverage.<sup>4</sup> Why then, we might ask, is *umemulo* such a prominent feature of contemporary Zulu society in South Africa?

If Zulu parents do not elect to perform this coming-of-age ceremony, they can imperil their unmarried daughters, who may encounter serious problems in the future. For one, the ancestors, the *amadlozi*,<sup>5</sup> will not have been told of a girl's rise to nubile status, and will be unable to support her aspirations to become a wife and mother or, simply, a full woman. Indeed, *umemulo* is also known as *ukuthomba*, a 'blossoming forth' of a girl into womanhood, which requires ritual notification of and permission from the *amadlozi*. The ancestors in turn bless the girl, known as the *intombi emulayo* during her *umemulo*, with the capacity to bear children.<sup>6</sup> This link between spiritual sanction and female fertility hinges on the *intombi emulayo* learning from elders and peers the obligations of deference expected of a married woman. In this sense a girl's maturation involves much more than her capacity to reproduce.

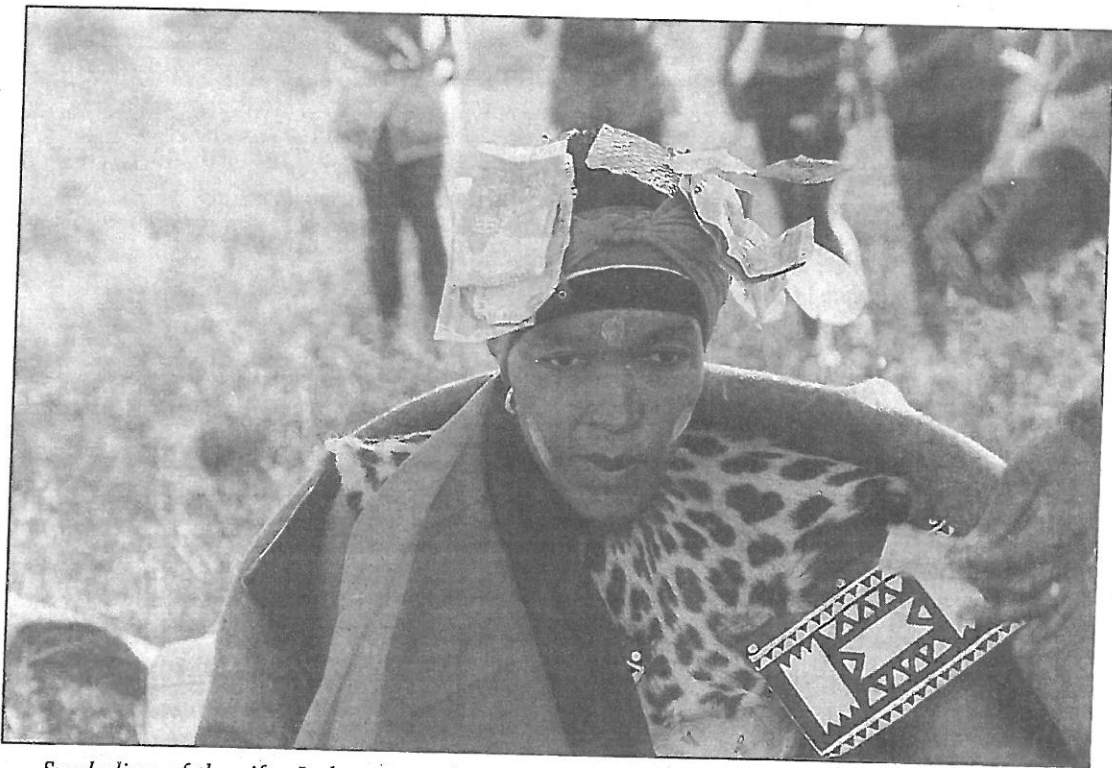


*The combined meaning of political freedom and 'coming out'. The young woman, intombi emulayo, being celebrated at the centre of the umemulo assembly is bestowed with monetary donations and other presents. Her affirmation of traditional Zulu culture is made clear by the grass mat, ucansi, upon which she sits (instead of a chair or modern carpet). She accepts a blanket, which incorporates the colours of the new national flag, and reflects the transformation to freedom in South Africa. The giver of the blanket also chants praises to and for the intombi emulayo. A woman on the left gestures with a grass broom, umshanelo, reinforcing invocations that celebrate multiple liberations of the Zulu people who were released from oppressive apartheid and the intombi emulayo who will be free to marry.*

This chapter, based on fieldwork conducted between November 1987 and August 1999, examines the central features of *umemulo* in several locations in KwaZulu-Natal, from Durban (eThekweni) and communities surrounding this city, to more remote sites near the rural towns of Vryheid, Mahlabathini and Eshowe. I collected relevant ethnographic data in interviews with 22 informants, many of them ceremonial participants, and while attending (or viewing on video) thirteen *umemulo* rituals – one of which was my own.<sup>7</sup> In unique ways the videos provided more useful evidence than personal observations written on paper. For one, the taped images displayed a broader range of audience reactions, while presenting the researcher, seeking to note different angles of performance, with another advantage – being able to replay a pivotal moment at slower speed.<sup>8</sup> I also created audio recordings of songs, speeches and chants, which enabled me to transcribe the complex isiZulu verse associated with various kinds of oral praising. Finally, my pool of evidence revealed remarkable continuities in cultural outlooks that ranged across diverse settings, showing that

despite the social disruptions caused by colonisation, urbanisation and industrialisation, *umemulo* retains much of its longstanding traditional character. Of course, changes in ritual protocol, objects and garments were also critically examined.<sup>9</sup>

Since at least the nineteenth century *umemulo* was connected to the onset of a girl's menarche, but nowadays this is not strictly the case. Some parents perform the ceremony for their daughter when she has finished higher education (completing either high school or university study); in this case *umemulo* represents a graduation party. Occasionally, an *umemulo* celebration is held on the same day as the *intombi emulayo's* 21st birthday; or just before she marries, when her lover's elders have indicated their wish to proffer bridewealth. It used to be that youths were expected widely to maintain certain virtuous practices such as abstaining from premarital sex, which precluded the possibility of having a child out of wedlock. But now breaking vows of chastity is not a cause to halt a planned *umemulo*.



*Symbolism of the gifts. In keeping with umemulo custom (certainly within the last century, as more amaZulu entered the wage labour market), gifts in the form of money are conferred on the intombi emulayo. During this 1997 event, R10 notes (about \$2.00 at the time) were fastened to her headgear. Since unemployment is rife in rural Zululand (also in urban areas in KwaZulu-Natal, where Zulu people live in large numbers) and few migrant workers earn sufficient wages to support their families, it comes as no surprise that the cash donations did not exceed R10 notes, the smallest paper currency in South Africa. Izinyongo, gall bladders from slaughtered animals, also adorn the head of the intombi emulayo.*

For a patriarchal father, initiating his daughter's coming of age is as much a milestone in his life as it is in hers. A father leading an *umemulo* ceremony publicly confirms that he is willing to uphold relationships of gendered authority. One major purpose of *umemulo* is for the father of the *intombi emulayo* to offer thanks to his daughter for embracing ideals of respecting one's elders, *ukuhlonipha*, a set of behaviours including stringent rules of avoidance that a wife follows when interacting with her husband and ranking members of his family. Just prior to the coming-of-age festivities, the father of the *intombi emulayo* expresses his joyous approval of her passage to womanhood by presenting a prized ox for slaughter; parts of this beast will be symbolically allocated to the *amadlozi*, while other parcels of meat and organs will support a feast to congratulate the *intombi emulayo* on reaching the age of maturity.<sup>10</sup> As a successful *umemulo* always needs spiritual blessing, the *intombi emulayo* is secluded the week before in a special room or hut called the *umgonqo*, where the ancestors can easily recognise and reach her.

#### Seclusion in the *umgonqo*

The *intombi emulayo* stays in the *umgonqo* with other female age-mates, adhering to an austere regimen in the days before the *umemulo* celebration, which usually takes place on a Saturday.<sup>11</sup> She is not allowed to leave the *umgonqo* except at night, when few people might see her. Social isolation ensures that she is not affected by sorcery, for her intention to go through *umemulo* means that she will be acquainted with the targets of sorcerers, and that the revered *amadlozi* will consecrate her. Whoever wants to greet the *intombi emulayo* or give her a gift must walk into her room and not remain outside. Whenever she leaves the *umgonqo*, even for a short time, she adopts an extremely shy attitude, exhibiting deference common to *ukuhlonipha*. In *Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos Amongst the Zulu*, the social anthropologist Otto Friedrich Raum writes that neither the parents nor brothers of the *intombi emulayo* may ordinarily enter the seclusion hut.<sup>12</sup> They can, however, come to the *umgonqo* if they have brought a present, but any conversations that occur must be kept at a whisper. Raum also describes other requirements and prohibitions placed on the *intombi emulayo*: she must not talk too much, speak loudly or laugh heartily, showing that she is becoming a suitable wife capable of *ukuhlonipha*; she must drink water medicated with a pinch of ash to make her a good cook for her future husband; to boost her fertility, she eats bitter roots of the *impindisa* shrub<sup>13</sup> and she avoids sour milk like a traditional married woman.<sup>14</sup>

There are clear reasons why so many *umgonqo* prescriptions pertain to marriage and motherhood. The *umemulo* ritual is designed to form part of a single woman's training to be an ideal wife in the eyes of her spouse and in-laws. Yet it must be noted that the typical *intombi emulayo* does not usually seek formal cultural/religious instruction of the coming-of-age ceremony itself, of the kind imparted to a Christian girl preparing for her confirmation or a Jewish boy learning to recite the Torah on

the eve of his bar mitzvah. Indeed, an *intombi emulayo* is not explicitly taught how to participate in her *umemulo*, and she herself does not generally seek any formal lessons because she has likely seen and participated in many prior coming-of-age ceremonies.

Finally, special body adornment is also important in preparing the *intombi emulayo* for passage to womanhood. She puts red ochre on her face, arms and legs, but her age-mates keeping her company only put ochre on their faces. According to *Kusadliwa Ngoludala*, a study by the linguist and ethnographer Themba Msimang, this practice signals her state of seclusion and entices the ancestors to have greater contact with her than with the rest of the *umgonqo* girls.<sup>15</sup> He adds that if males see *umgonqo* girls wearing red ochre, they typically run away, an evasive action that demonstrates abiding respect and healthy fear of ancestral visits to the seclusion hut.<sup>16</sup>



*Women, bearers of tradition. This photograph captures the rhythms of young women dancing the ukusina, with men in the background keeping time by clapping their hands and chanting. The women are attired in traditional garments and artefacts, highlighting how umemulo ensures the continuation of Zulu material culture. The intombi emulayo is draped with the special caul (cape), umhlwehlwe. She also wears the married woman's customary isidwaba, skirt, to show that she is ready to become a wife. The intombi emulayo's head cloth, umnqwazi, which is donned by women in the front row and on the left, displays an intention to enjoy the affections of a boyfriend. Unlike the married women pictured at the back, the young women cover only a quarter of their heads, suggesting that they are in a liminal stage between youth and adulthood.*

The weeklong residence in the *umgonqo* can be exacting, as one of my informants, Mrs Nokuthula Dlamini of KwaMashu township north of Durban, reported. She performed *umemulo* ceremonies for her two daughters in 1990 and 1992, respectively, and made the *umgonqo* period a key part of their coming of age. Mrs Dlamini wanted to instil in her daughters an appreciation of adult hardships, particularly the prescriptions they would encounter in married life, such as not being able to consume sour milk, having to exhibit great deference every day, and generally being separated from natal kin – three realities that define a new wife's experience.

To end the *umgonqo* phase and initiate *umemulo* festivities, a goat is slaughtered or a significant amount of money is presented to the *intombi emulayo*. Thereafter, the father or recognised senior guardian of the *intombi emulayo* ritually kills a beast, calling attention to the fact that people are now invited to a big feast with dancing and singing.

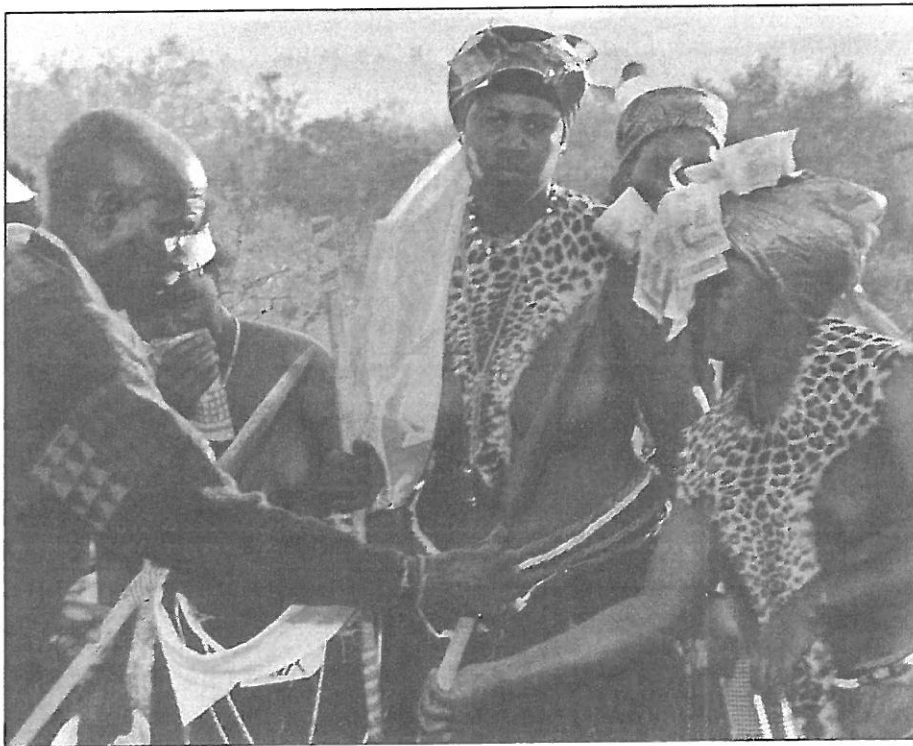
#### *Umemulo* day: Song and spear

With seclusion over, the *intombi emulayo* is also released to engage in the revelry of the *umemulo* day.<sup>17</sup> As her relatives, friends and scores of acquaintances of her family stream in, the *intombi emulayo* and her age-mates from the *umgonqo* wash off their red ochre and don married women's leather kilts, *izidwaba*, and other artefacts, which they can borrow from older women.<sup>18</sup> Today, much of this attire can be hired from shops such as Kwayikhulu in the Ndwedwe rural area and Emakhehleri in KwaMashu township, both of which specialise in traditional ceremonial wear. The girls then go to a place far from home, where they gather under a tree, next to a friend or relative's house, or just in an open space not visible to the *intombi emulayo*'s family. There they wait until the father or guardian of the *intombi emulayo* sends a message calling them back. On their return they sing songs in call-and-response mode commemorating the special occasion. Some verses appear below:

- A     Leader: *Ubaba uthe angimule*  
          Father said I must celebrate the coming of age  
          Girls: *Awe yehheni ngiyakwesaba*  
          Oh no, I am afraid of it (i.e. *ukwemula*)  
          Leader: *Khona ngizoba intombi*  
          So that I will be a marriageable girl  
          Girls: *Awu yehheni ngiyakwesaba*  
          Oh no, I am afraid of it (i.e. *ukwemula*)  
          Leader: *Khona ngizokweshelwa*  
          So that I may be courted  
          Girls: *Awu yehheni ngiyakwesaba*  
          Oh no, I am afraid of it (i.e. *ukwemula*).<sup>19</sup>

- B Leader: *Mina ngeke ngibalekele ikhaya labazali*  
 I won't run away from my parent's house  
 Girls: *Ngeke ngilibalekele noma sengikhulile*  
 I won't run away from it even when I have grown up.<sup>20</sup>

These songs describe the *intombi emulayo's* predicaments: how to balance her fears and aspirations. Song A, for example, expresses the continuum of hope and anxiety. The *intombi emulayo's* newly recognised fertility frightens her, as she does not know what really to expect in the naked world of adulthood. Will she be courted right away by a man who eventually becomes her husband? When she weds and stays with her in-laws, will she be happy? Song B memorialises the *intombi emulayo's* love for her family home and promises to be forever loyal to her natal kin after she marries and moves away.



'You are victorious.' A spear is given to the *intombi emulayo*. Sometimes a father may opt to conduct one *umemulo* ceremony for several maturing daughters close in age; if this occurs, he may elect to present more than one spear on the day of festivities, as is the case in this image. Another mark of achievement and elite power is the *intombi emulayo's* donning of leopard skins (rare for commoners, much less women), which in this photograph likely indicates that the family sponsoring this coming-of-age ritual is of a chiefly or royal lineage.

While members of the *umgonqo* group serenade one another, there is another indication that the *umemulo* celebration is about to commence. The *intombi emulayo* displays a spear in her hand, which she would have received from her father, his brother or her maternal uncle, if her father has passed away. In rare cases the *intombi emulayo*'s lover, a suitor accepted by her family, might be asked to buy the spear for her. I have observed that some people put paper, cloth or a potato at the tip of the blade indicating that the weapon is intended for goodwill.

One of my informants, Mr Mahlanaza Makhoba of Dlebe in Mahlabathini, elaborates on the implication of this practice:<sup>21</sup>

Although the girl's spear is not for fighting, it however symbolises her victory, having fought and won childhood and teenage battles, which to some are difficult to conquer. And because she conquered childhood illnesses that killed some, her father amongst other things sees it necessary to perform the ceremony for her. She also conquered teenage immoral acts that led many to have illegitimate children. The spear symbolises the fact therefore that she is indeed a conquering hero, as no coward or loser can be made to carry a spear in public.<sup>22</sup>

#### Ceremonial ritual and revelry

With the arrival of the *umgonqo* girls before the assembled guests, the *intombi emulayo*'s father performs a pivotal rite, preferably in a central cattle enclosure.<sup>23</sup> Away from the view of onlookers, he smears the thumbs and big toes of the *intombi emulayo* with gall from a beast slaughtered the day before the *umemulo* ceremony, tying the *inyongo*, the gall bladder, around her wrist. The presence of gall invites the ancestors to continue to protect the *intombi emulayo*.<sup>24</sup>

Before the bladder contents are used, they are stored in a safe place, with the precious gall hidden in the sacred *umsamo* section of a hut (the back part of the hut or chosen urban room used to communicate with the ancestors), shielded from evildoers like witches who may turn an ancestor against the whole living family.<sup>25</sup> Next, the father of the *intombi emulayo* puts the slaughtered beast's caul, *umhlwehlwe*, a layer of fat covering the viscera of a slaughtered beast that hangs like a cape over the girl's shoulders and breasts, which Themba Msimang says is also meant to invite the ancestors to ensure the girl's good fortune.<sup>26</sup> Whilst performing this rite, her father calls to the ancestors, *ukuthetha*, thanking them and requesting their blessing.<sup>27</sup> The father and his *intombi emulayo* then go to a chosen area, *isigcawu*, cleared for a large assembly, where the rest of the *umemulo* performance occurs and the guests are already waiting. In the *isigcawu* the father commences with a speech, telling the gathering and his familial ancestors about the significance of the 'coming-out' occasion.





*The dance of girls. During an umemulo ceremony, girls without boyfriends such as those pictured here gather to perform. This image depicts 'innocent' dancers, whose 'virginal' condition is corroborated by the white purity beads around their waists and necks. Such exhibitions of chastity boast to visitors that the ceremony is being held in a district that contains a good number of 'proper' girls. Clearly accustomed to each other, the dancers follow choreographed movements. It is likely that this routine called for rehearsals that probably took place when the girls previously came together on an errand to fetch water or collect wood, or perhaps when they accompanied one another home from school.*

### **Umemulo speeches: Patriarchal and matriarchal influences in 'coming-out' prayers**

This address was recorded in 1993 at Umbumbulu, a rural area 30 kilometres (18.5 miles) south of Durban. It was the *umemulo* speech for Sibungu Sekhwani Mshengu.<sup>28</sup>

1. *Uma umuntu elimile ensimini, uyavuna.*  
When a person has sown in the field, s/he reaps.
2. *Uma evuna, uyazidla izithelo.*  
When s/he reaps, s/he eats the fruit.
3. *Induku le ikhombisa ubuqhawe bakhe,*  
This stick (referring to a presented spear) shows bravery,
4. *Akekho umuntu olwa ngaphandle kwesikhali.*  
Nobody fights without a weapon.
5. *Induku le ikhombisa ubuqhawe bakhe,*  
This stick shows her bravery,
6. *Ngoba ngempela akekho umuntu ongalwa ngaphandle kwesikhali sakhe.*  
Because indeed nobody can fight without her/his weapon.
7. *Le nto le nguphawu lokukhombisa ukuthi usekhulile.*  
This thing is a symbol that shows that she is now grown up.

8. *Useyimbambile impi wayilwa, wayilwa, akaqhubeke nokuyilwa.*  
She has fought the battle, and fought, let her continue fighting.
9. *Lona kuyoze kube ngumkhonto wakho wokulwa njalo njalo ndodakazi yami.*  
This will be your fighting spear always, always my daughter.
10. *Ungihloniphe gugu lami, ngalokho-ke ngithi ngiyabonga Mshengu.*  
You have shown me respect my precious thing, because of that I am saying thank you Mshengu.
11. *Sihlangene lapha bantabenkosi ngalo mntwana uGugu.*  
We have met here today children of the king because of this child, Gugu.
12. *UGugu lo ungiiphathe kahle ngaphenduka ingane kuyena,*  
Gugu has treated me well and I was like a child to her,
13. *Ekubeni mina ngimdala.*  
Whereas I am the elder.
14. *Ungiiphathe ngenhlonipho, nami-ke kanjalo,*  
She respected me, therefore in turn,
15. *Ngamhlonipha njengengane ngoba engihloniphile.*  
Like a child I respected her because she acted respectfully first.
16. *Ngiyabonga, ngiyabonga kule ngane. Ngiyabonga Gugu.*  
Thank you, thanks to this child. Thank you Gugu.
17. *Futhi ngiyabonga kinina futhi abaphansi bakaMajola,*  
Again I thank you the ancestors of the Majola,
18. *BakaMacingwane, bakaMshengu.*  
Of the Macingwane, of the Mshengu.
19. *Gugu bathi angibonge kuwe abakaMshengu.*  
Gugu, the Mshengu say that I must thank you.
20. *Bathi angibonge, nomkhulu uStefani, uStefani ozala uMcondo,*  
They say I must thank you, and my grandfather Stephan, Stephan who begets Mcondo,
21. *UMcondo ozala mina, uSibungu sekhwani, uSibungu-ke ozala uGugu lo.*  
Mcondo who begets me, Sibungu Sekhwani who then begets Gugu.

In the opening lines (1 to 4) Sibungu evokes imaginative comparisons to inform his audience of the joy brought by his daughter's *umemulo*. One of these verses drawing on a biblical allusion particularly captures his happiness: 'A sower reaping that which he has sown, rejoicing as he is now eating the fruits of his labour.' In lines 3 to 7, Sibungu uses the stick metaphor to explain the power of bravery, explaining further that the implement is important to a person who has to fight to survive. Line 8 culminates with a description of the stick, which is now a symbol that the *intombi emulayo* has grown into a victor, a theme frequently celebrated in praise poetry about great personal feats.

Sibungu devotes lines 9 to 15 to rhetorical questions, which he poses to his daughter. Will she maintain her respect for proper customary behaviour? Revering

parents and elders is a valued traditional act; an example of this obligation would be her daily use of the deferential terms *ubaba* and *umama*, which mean father and mother, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Line 10 especially focuses on the *igugu*, a precious object that personifies his daughter. It is worth noting that Zulu people do not randomly name their children; parents' wishes and life circumstances around the time of a child's birth influence her/his given name. It is also believed that one's name can determine personal behaviour, successes and failures. Lines 12 to 15 emphasise honouring and respect, themes repeated frequently by Sibungu.

At the end of his oration, Sibungu thanks the ancestors again for upholding the moral and social order that enabled his daughter to live a proper life. In keeping with a custom underpinning *umemulo*, the ancestors tend to be honoured at the start and conclusion of a ceremony. In a final statement (lines 17 and 18) Sibungu briefly extols them using lineage praises, which are held in highest esteem. I observed genealogical recitations in all the *umemulo* ceremonies I studied, which showed that if ranking family members of a girl coming out had a respectable, authentic lineage they sought to proclaim that they had traceable ancestors.

In a 1933 study on marriage customs in southern Natal, the ethnographer Marie Kohler demonstrated that presenting the order of lineage descent is a form of praying



*Synchronising old and new. At many umemulo ceremonies artistic individuals seize the opportunities to showcase their talents. The young woman in explosive stride seems to have carefully prepared for her star moment. Her leglets, izigqizo, made of tin, wire and fragments of beverage cans not only decorate her body but also augment the sounds arising from her stamping feet. Most significantly, Western materials and indigenous artefacts comprise her costume. She thus reflects a hybrid style prevalent even in remote Zulu communities affected by urban influences.*

among traditional Zulu people. During the recitation of genealogy, ancestors are enumerated in the putative order of their succession.<sup>30</sup> However, in the speech above, Sibungu starts with the most recent ancestors and goes only three generations back.

In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, the linguistic theorist Walter Ong points out that a primary characteristic of oral thought and speech is the reliance on repetition, which keeps both speaker and listener on the same track.<sup>31</sup> Overall, this 1993 speech is profoundly shaped by spoken metaphors and repetitive words and phrases. But this tells us only part of the narrative. Marcel Jousse has explored how voiced language powerfully expresses ideas, but he also reminds us that manual gesticulations perhaps contribute even more to an audience's awareness of what is being communicated.<sup>32</sup> We tend better to understand a person when we see his bodily gestures. It should be noted that Sibungu's strong body movements punctuated his oration, for he sought to exhibit how the sower disseminates and the warrior fights.

Often a performance of clan praises and/or personal praises accompanies such speeches. These dramatic recitations might be exclaimed by a senior family member older than the *intombi emulayo's* father, if there is one at the ceremony, or a talented



*Older women's endorsement of umemulo. Senior women are critical to the moral sanctity of the umemulo ceremony. During dances, for example, older married women excitedly cut the air with grass brooms. Such slicing movements symbolise the intombi emulayo's dramatic severance from childhood, express their joy that she has risen to adulthood and serve to ward off the evil that may disrupt her progress to marriage. It is crucial to note that neither male attendants nor unmarried women partake in this activity.*

family orator who can *ukuthetha* (call the ancestors) with expressive force. The missionary-ethnographer and fluent isiZulu linguist, Axel-Ivar Berglund, notes that eloquent addressing of the *amadlozi* is profoundly important, for it is a formal act of seeking spiritual favour.

### Conclusion

*Umemulo* is widely believed to be a traditional ceremony that should be performed for every girl or woman at some stage of her childbearing years. If for any reason a girl's father or any elder acting on behalf of her father is unable to perform a 'coming-out' ceremony, traditional Zulu people typically say that she will experience serious problems in her life. She might not get a husband, or she might marry and suffer infertility; in either case, she would probably endure considerable anguish. Such misfortune would be attributed to the ancestors who had no *umemulo* ritual through which to contact and protect the now-tormented woman.<sup>33</sup> Simply put, spiritual communication secured through the slaughter of livestock, seclusion in *umgonqo*, oral praising, dances and songs, speeches of thanks, and prayers not only make *umemulo* a momentous 'coming out,' but also turn this ritual into a celebration of kinship and its very life forces.

### Notes

1. (*I-lobolo*): bridewealth. The term refers to livestock, household equipment, money, etc. paid by the bridegroom to his parents-in-law.
2. Robert Morrell, John Wright and Sheila Mentjies, 'Colonialism and the Establishment of White Domination 1840-1890', and John Lambert and Robert Morrell, 'Domination and Subordination in Natal 1890-1920', in *Political Economies and Identities in KwaZulu-Natal: Historical and Social Perspectives*, ed. Robert Morrell (Durban: Indicator Press, 1996). See also Norman Etherington, 'The "Shepstone System" in the Colony of Natal and Beyond the Borders', and John Laband and Paul Thompson, 'The Reduction of Zululand, 1878-1904', in *Natal and Zululand From Earliest Time to 1910: A New History*, eds. Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1989).
3. In some families an *umemulo* ceremony for the first daughter is sufficient to symbolise all future 'coming-out' ceremonies of the rest of the daughters. Much of the context and interpretation in this chapter come from Thenjiwe Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy in Some Zulu Ceremonies' (Masters thesis, University of Natal, Durban, Oral Studies Department, 1993).
4. See for example: 'Ukuziphatha Kahle Kuyabuyisela', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 5 August 1991 and 'Bekukuhle Kanje Emcimbini Wokwemulisa Amadodakazi KaZikode', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 14 September 1992.
5. *Idlozi* (plural: *amadlozi*) usually means a human spirit or soul; in this chapter the term is used to mean an ancestor.
6. The *umemulo* ceremony is also called *ukukhulisa intombazane*, literally meaning, 'causing the girl to grow', a passage of life facilitated by her father who performs *umemulo* for his daughter. A synonym is (*uku*)-*emulisa*, meaning to initiate a daughter into a new life through public ritual acknowledgment that she has reached a marriageable age. See C. Doke, D.M. Malcom, J. Sikakana and B. Vilikazi, *English-Zulu Dictionary* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, [1958] 1990). It is significant to mention that unlike other African groups such as the amaXhosa, Zulu

- people do not have a corresponding ceremony for a boy child. In other words strict expressions of customary respect and chastity are 'ritualised' attributes expected of a girl or unmarried woman.
7. Informants were selected on the basis of their social and biological age (i.e., generation, and here I sought a range of old, middle-aged, and young people); knowledge of 'coming-out' ceremonies and participatory experiences in several *umemulo*, either in a rural or urban area, or in both settings. Before writing up my findings, I went back to some informants and re-interviewed them. Their responses were essential to my analysis, as they further clarified meanings of rituals and traditional expressions. Other primary evidence was collected during everyday conversation with isiZulu-speaking African people in their homes and while I listened to Radio Zulu (now Ukhozi FM) programmes that discussed Zulu culture. Unpublished university dissertations from the anthropology and isiZulu language and literature departments of the University of Natal, Durban (now University of KwaZulu-Natal), as well as articles in *Ilanga lase Natal*, an isiZulu-language newspaper, similarly offered topical information on the significance of *umemulo* ceremonies in Zulu communities.
  8. It is interesting to note that there is a growing trend among prosperous Zulu people to videotape their *umemulo* ceremonies.
  9. For further reading on garments worn by women over time and changes that have impacted on them, see Thenjiwe Magwaza, 'Function and Meaning of Zulu Female Dress: A Descriptive Study of Visual Communication' (Ph.D. diss., University of Natal, Durban, 2000); 'Private Transgression: The Visual Voice of Zulu Women', *Agenda* 49 (2001): 27-34 and 'The Conceptualisation of Zulu Traditional Female Dress in the Post-apartheid Era', *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-Colonial Writing* 1 (2002): 192-204.
  10. At most of the ceremonies I attended, informants noted that *umemulo* mirrored a Western coming-of-age celebration.
  11. The period of seclusion could vary in duration depending on whether the *intombi emulayo* attends school, works, secures holiday leave, or lives at home.
  12. Otto Friedrich Raum, *The Social Functions of Avoidances and Taboos amongst the Zulu* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973).
  13. This flowering climbing plant – a species of the coffee family – can effectively combat impotence, according to Doke et al., *English-Zulu Dictionary*.
  14. During this phase, elderly women also enter the *umgonqo* to teach the *intombi emulayo* how to conduct herself as a woman.
  15. Themba Msimang, *Kusadliwa Ngoludala* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1975).
  16. In urban areas, a room within a house or outside building is often used for this purpose.
  17. Her right to participate in *umemulo* revelry is a form of public recognition that she has passed into a marriageable state. Otto Raum also refers to the 'coming out' day of celebration as a release rite; see *The Social Functions*, p. 282.
  18. Magwaza, 'Function and Meaning', pp. 141-72.
  19. This song was recorded in 1991 at Umbumbulu during Sidudla Hlomuka's *umemulo*: see Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy', p. 35.
  20. The song was recorded in 1993 at Camperdown during Gugu Majola's *umemulo*: see Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy', p. 35.
  21. A male informant interviewed at a 1992 *umemulo* ceremony I attended in Dlebe, Mahlabathini in northern Zululand: see Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy', pp. 37-39.
  22. Another reason we can assume that the *umemulo* spear is not for fighting is that it may be encircled with white beads, which signal that the weapon symbolises the presence of who support the *intombi emulayo*. The girls secluded in the *umgonqo* assemble the white beads and put them around the spear. Axel-Ivar Berglund suggests that white in puberty ceremonies initiates ancestor brooding: *Zulu Thought-patterns and Symbolism* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1976), p. 98. A female informant, named Nokuthula Dlamini of KwaMashu township in the Durban area, clarified in an interview conducted in 1991 that 'white is symbolic of peace and love': see Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy', pp. 39-43.
  23. Due to urbanisation and unavailability of cattle kraals in townships, this important rite is more often enacted in the household yard or in a chosen area immediately beyond the household.
  24. The majority of the respondents were convinced that the ancestors lick the gall (whenever it is poured) without the people concerned noticing it.
  25. For more on gall, the *umsamo*, and witches destroying a family, see Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulu* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1936).

26. Msimang, *Kusadliwa*, p. 248.
27. (*Uku*)-*thetha*: literally 'to scold'. *Ukuthetha idlozi* gives the initial impression of an aggressive relationship between *amadlozi*, the ancestors, and their *abaphilayo*, living descendants, but the literal English translation is misleading. *Ukuthetha idlozi* means to address the ancestors.
28. At the time, the father of the girl celebrating the *umemulo* was a 59-year-old factory worker.
29. *Ubaba* and *umama* are used without possessives, but are understood to mean my father and my mother, respectively, reflecting Zulu cultural reverence for senior people.
30. Marie Kohler, *Marriage Customs in Southern Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: Government Printer, 1933), p. 123.
31. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 40.
32. Marcel Jousse, *The Oral Style* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1988), p. 39.
33. Ancestors must be formally alerted to what their descendants do or are about to do. On this general point, see for example: Barbara Tyrell and Peter Jurgens, *Beads and Beadwork: African Heritage* (Johannesburg: Macmillan, 1983). If the ancestors are not contacted, disaster or misfortune will befall the living. This explains why an *umemulo* might be performed for a married woman who has never been an *intombi emulayo*. This married woman may have encountered problems, ranging from a mysterious illness and infertility, to a troublesome husband and friction with in-laws. Such was the case for several of my informants, and their *omemulo* led to their greater fulfilment. For example, Sizo Ntshangase, a childless wife living in Umlazi township south of Durban, told me she had a 'coming-of-age' ceremony in 1989, ten years into married life. After consulting a diviner in 1987, her in-laws decided to send her back to her home so that her family could celebrate her *umemulo*. Three months after the ceremony she conceived, and today she has two children. Another informant, 36-year-old Zodwa Bhengu of Oyaya Sonani in Eshowe, was to have got married, but she remained single, bearing the stigma of the *umjendevu* epithet, meaning old unmarried woman. Zodwa's father, a staunch Christian, felt it necessary in 1990 to perform *umemulo* for her, so as to invite good fortune in her life. Three years later Zodwa Bhengu became a bride. Once again Zodwa's happiness was attributed to the success of her deferred 'coming-of-age' ceremony. The data for these two cases came from interviews held at the homes of the Nsthangase and Bhengu families: see Magwaza, 'Orality and Literacy', pp. 29-51.