



Physical Pain as a Source of Spiritual and Artistic Inspiration in Jackson Hlungwani's Work

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Abstract

Jackson Hlungwani is a locally recognised South African artist and he is internationally acclaimed with a considerable amount of literature written about his life and work, highlighting his uniqueness distinct rural style (Leibhammer & Nel, 2022) and commercialised value (Lauwrens, 2007: 121-124). He was born around 1923 (according to his grandmother, it was during the time of the Kaiser's war) (Burnett, 1989: 4). Having acknowledged his contribution to the arts, this paper analyses the man and his work from a different viewpoint, focusing on three aspects of his life namely the human, spiritual and artistic. However, these three aspects should not be considered three independently functioning sides of this man's existence but three tightly interwoven elements. The research investigates how Hlungwani's physical pain was embodied in his religious activities and wooden creations and how his suffering, caused by a chronic condition of damaged body tissue, was faced, accepted and assimilated to become a source of spiritual strength supporting his religious ideology and artistic inspiration guiding his remarkable creativity. This study highlights how this South African-born artist dealt with his chronic, somatic condition and turned it from a supernatural condemnation into a source of spiritual strength and creative inspiration. Therefore, through a comparative approach, the study uses relevant published and unpublished biographic material, justified critics and preserved manuscripts in libraries, the media, art museums and exhibitions to unpack the theme of physical pain as a source of spiritual and artistic inspiration in Jackson Hlungwani's work.

Keywords: Spiritual, human, artistic, creativity, pain.

Introduction

Hlungwani: The man

Born into a XiTsonga-speaking family, Jackson Hlungwani spent his early years in Mashamba village in Northern Transvaal, South Africa, (subsequently Venda and now part of Limpopo Province) (Maluleke, 1991: 11; Steyn & Burroughs, 2023: 49). His sister, N'wa-Xidonkane, relates that their parents maintained the traditional religion of ancestor worship (Maluleke, 1991: 29). Although his family's beliefs prevented him from attending school, he acquired basic literacy standards, believing Christ to be his mentor (Maluleke, 1991: 15). His background rejected the Christian faith, which evokes amazement and wonder at this man's devotion to and belief in Christ. Yet, his family's traditional beliefs deeply impacted his worldview by shaping it into a unique, harmonious coexistence of diverse cultural traits. This integration was also expressed through Hlungwani's external appearance. He wore knitted Rastafarian-like caps, one of which closely resembles Ethiopian bishops' crowns. Another distinct feature of his outfit was his necklaces, which Maluleke (1991: 48) describes as follows:



On his woollen necklaces, Hlungwani has three crosses and the medicine bottle. He says one cross is for God, one is for Jesus and the other is for Mary the Virgin. The medicine bottle is the token of his ancestry. (Maluleke, 1991: 48)

Hayashida (2000: 70, 77) noted Hlungwani's interaction with his African roots, where he proudly used the appellation Xagani (Shangaan) and created two smaller *Shangaan Warriors* (from the Hlungwani's clan) and other sculptures between 1985 and 1995, to protect the Altar of God in his *New Jerusalem* temple. Affirming this, Steyn and Burroughs remark that Hlungwani descended from a warrior group, who 'had migrated into southern Mozambique in the early 1800s under the leadership of Shoshangane, formerly a general under Shaka kaSenzangakhona' (Steyn & Burroughs, 2023: 49).

Pain and despair

As a teenager, Hlungwani developed an ulcer on his right leg, which became a source of constant physical pain and mental suffering for the rest of his life. After traditional healing proved unsuccessful in healing the damaged tissue, his parents turned to Elim Hospital, where the only solution was to amputate his leg. Confounded by the horrifying suggestion, Hlungwani left the hospital 'a disappointed man and went straight to the church' (Maluleke, 1991: 29).

In 1944, he joined the Zionist Christian church, and two years later, he was an ordained priest, even though he still did not find the spiritual fulfilment he sought (Martin, 1987; Maluleke, 1991: 30; Nettleton, 2009: 54). To comprehend the heterogeneous cultural concepts in Hlungwani's worldview, one must consider the influences of two main politico-religious streams, Zionism and Ethiopianism, which will be discussed later.

The epiphany

The wounds on Hlungwani's right leg caused such severe pain and serious depression that in 1978, he intended to end his life by sipping the 'Euphorbia ingens, the Candelabra tree' poisonous sap (Schneider, 1989: 12). According to his interpretation, the suffering was caused by Satan, who hit him with arrows in both legs. While quickly removing one, he was too late for the other arrow, which transformed into a snake, penetrating his leg and causing a permanent abscess (Schneider, 1989: 11). His suicide attempt failed because of 'an epiphany in which Christ and two figures appeared to him and made three promises: that he would be healed, that he would see God, and that he would become a preacher' (Steyn & Burroughs, 2023: 51). Interpreting Hlungwani's description, he saw 'God's feet, majestically and clearly ambling above the mountain and treetops', while the two angels accompanying Christ had lifted Hlungwani 'into a seated position while Christ held his hand' (Steyn & Burroughs, 2023: 53). His vision ends with Hlungwani drenched in a downpour of blood in his hut and himself hopping up to the roof beams as his leg was cured (Schneider, 1989: 12).

This vision became the central cause of his spiritual enlightenment and, consequently, the inspiring force of his artistic creativity. According to Maluleke (1991: 51), Hlungwani believed he was educated in heaven by Christ himself, who instructed him to establish a direct apostolic succession. The step from the physical to the spiritual world is equally natural for a believer yet intangible for outsiders. It guided Hlungwani through a process from total despair to stoic acceptance, followed by a complete conviction of an apostle charged by God with a healer's mission.



Furthermore, Hlungwani believed he was the incarnation of his maternal grandfather, who had died a week before he was born. Him being named after his grandfather strengthened his conviction as a carrier of a sacred name and successor of his grandfather's prophetic gift, which Hlungwani believed he had received after the vision of his encounter with Christ. Noteworthy is the integration of metaphysical elements, such as his vision and incarnation, with information about his birth date, his grandfather's death and his naming after him.

Like a newborn empowered by solid religious concepts, Hlungwani turned from despair to hope, from passive self-suffering to healing others. According to West, this turning point in the life of an 'injured' shaman (West, 1975) is a common phenomenon in Africa, 'as most prophets in Zionist and Apostolic African Churches have a personal history of illness' with which to relate. Empirical knowledge gained through self-suffering might empower a former patient to become a healer, but such an experience will not necessarily render him a prophet (West, 1975: 98).

This point defines Hlungwani's paradigm as unique from a human being's stoicism to suffering. It illustrates tremendous willpower and exceptional capacity for creative thinking by integrating the intangible, such as his vision, beliefs and concepts, with the reality illustrated by his words, actions and works of art.

His life-changing experience inspired and motivated Hlungwani to become an independent preacher and healer practising in his newly established church (Nettleton, 2012: 10). West states that the positions and powers of prophets significantly influence independent Apostolic and Zionist churches in South Africa (West, 1975: 98). The prophet is a healer with great powers because he can forecast and heal with divinity. West proposes that these powers might often come from God through the 'direct agency of certain guiding shades' or drawing power from God (West, 1975: 98). Furthermore, weaker prophets have limited activities and are assistants, unlike stronger prophets, who lead healing services and provide healing through private consultations.

He named his newly founded church the *Yesu Geleliya One Apostol in Sayoni: Alt and Omega* (Jesus of Galilee, One apostle in Zion: Alpha and Omega). Hlungwani could bring to the fore, with bold defiance, an Africanised version of the Christian faith. He integrated these two traditions and the words Alt and Omega, standing for the Greek *Ἄλφα* and *Ωμέγα* and defined by the biblical phrase '*I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end*' (Revelations 21:6 and 22:13), also depicted in his works related to his New Jerusalem ideology.

Zionist independent churches, Ethiopian Orthodoxy

South African Zionist independent churches, of which Hlungwani was a priest, had indirect relations with the Ethiopian orthodoxy through the Ethiopian South African church. Christianity, originally an Eastern faith, existed from the fourth century in Africa via Nubia and Axum-Ethiopia, and by the end of the 15th century, reached sub-Saharan Africa (Sundkler & Steed, 2000: 1038).

Africa was Christianized long before Western Europe was. In the first three centuries of the Christian era, the church had been planted in Egypt, Roman North Africa, and the Kingdom of Nubia. (Nthamburi, 1991: 89).

Later, Nthamburi affirms 'a strong Christian presence in Africa' linked to Ethiopia (1991: 89). While Zionism was introduced in South Africa from the United States via Protestant beliefs, it was, like Pentecostalism, a form of worship known in early Christianity.



The Rastafarians were an excellent example of Africans returning to Africanism and first looking to Ethiopia for inspiration. Not only is Hlungwani's bishop's headdress Rastafarian and Ethiopian Orthodox, Afro-Byzantine¹ elements and traditions are also part of his religious syncretism. Therefore, one should avoid only analysing Hlungwani's works from a Western viewpoint.

Hlungwani developed his independent Zionist church, including some Rastafarian beliefs (Maluleke, 1991:16; Memela, 1992; Steyn, 2019; Burroughs, Leibhammer & Nel, 2022). Beyond these relations with Ethiopia and Rastafarians, Hlungwani grew up in an environment where the epic *Ngoma Lungundu* (drum of ancestors) tradition has been respectfully preserved. Guided by the stars, the ancestors of the Venda people brought the *Ngoma Lungundu*, which the priestly family of the Lemba carried from Sena to Southern Africa (Le Roux, 2021: 2). The *Ngoma Lungundu*, also referred to as the Voice of Mwali (God) or the Drum that Thunders, was embellished with loops to insert poles for the easy transportation of the drum. Stayt (1931: 53), cited by Le Roux (2009: 106), describes the *Ngoma Lungundu* as a drum or shell made of wood, typically known as the egg of an ostrich. The head of the drum is made from the skin of a man.

The Lemba people believe their ancestors, who were Israelites, travelled as traders from an undisclosed location known as Sena in the North to the Arabian Peninsula in the South during the seventh century BCE. (Mathivha, 1992: 1-7; Le Roux, 2021: 1). While on their journeys, the beating of the drum overwhelmingly impacted their foes during battles; it rendered them weak and unable to resist (Le Roux, 2009: 102-125).

Several elements in the Venda and Lemba narration of the *Ngoma Lungundu* are reminiscent of the Early Israelite version and the Ethiopian national epic *Kebra Nagast* (Glory of the Kings) related to the Ark of the Covenant (Von Sicard, 1952; Steyn, 2019; Hendrickx, 2019: 1-11; Le Roux, 2003). Hlungwani's sculptures featured Ark-like objects that played a significant role in his personal life. He created a *Ngoma* on one of his crucifixes, connecting it to the Holy Spirit and his ancestors (Figure 1). Anderson (2000) explains that in several African Pentecostal churches, the guiding role of the Holy Spirit is frequently compared to that of the ancestors.

Hlungwani strategically placed the *Ngoma Lungundu* above Christ's head, reflecting Christ's last words before His death, as described in Matthew 27:50, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit." Also, in the book of John, Chapter 12, we witness the end of Jesus's public ministry. He speaks his final words to the crowd before hiding from view (v. 36). The arrival of the Greeks, who seek to talk with Jesus, signifies the arrival of the "hour" (v. 23). This hour represents the appointed time for Jesus's death, resurrection and exaltation, i.e., his glorification.

The Greeks' request changes the course of events, casting shadows of death over Jesus and causing him significant distress (v. 27). He prays intensely; his prayer is answered with a thunderous sound from heaven (v. 28). Some hear this as thunder, whereas others hear audible speech that they attribute to an angel (v. 29).

¹ Afro-Byzantine refers to the historical bonds between Byzantium, Egypt (Coptic), Christian Nubia and Ethiopia.



Figure 1: Jackson Hlungwani: *Ngoma Lungundu* (ornamented with rings for carrying it with poles) on top of the Crucifix. 1960s. Norval Foundation. Photograph by author.

Priests, prophets, shamans and Hlungwani

In Hlungwani's worldview, the essence of prophecy should be examined as a concept where prophets are saintly individuals or inspired apostles. Prophets can also foretell the future and interpret messages from God or the spiritual realm, as seen by shamans. Further, prophets can be healers, healing the sick through faith. However, in the academic and historical context of prophethood, prophets have been the founding fathers of establishing religion and building nations. Commonly, a unique relationship exists between prophets and their respective deities, making the divinity a 'personal God, creator, lawgiver and good father of his people' (Knappert, 1990: 200).

In the Ethiopian Orthodox context, the *Kebra Nagast* also places priests higher than prophets, giving them power over kings. 'Now the priests are like the prophets, only better than the prophets' (Wallis-Budge, 1932: 64-65). However, in the same chapter (44), the *Kebra Nagast* instructs priests to follow the examples of the prophets who were not hesitant to rebuke the kings when they transgressed. This command affirms that the divine power held by priests and prophets was under God's protection, 'for they are the children of God and the men of His house', giving them divine power to 'rebuke [men] for their sins and errors' (Wallis-Budge, 1932: 65). Similarly, in the southern African context, Morton states that South African religious writers believe Zionism was 'divinely inspired' and that 'God directly sent various Zionist leaders to southern Africa' (Morton, 2012: 99). This context, in line with Hlungwani's affiliation with the Zionist tradition, makes his conviction to serve God on earth relevant.

Hlungwani: The healer/visionary

Hlungwani opposed being considered a traditional healer and deemed himself rather a 'visionary artist' or 'Christian equivalent of a traditional healer', with a calling to heal by exploring his apocalyptic vision of redemption (Maluleke, 1991: 43). Knappert states that many healers in Africa are shamans, and the spirits they contact are often the spirits of their ancestors, 'either constantly or only when entering a state of trance' (1990: 216). Coetzee argues that despite Hlungwani disowning the traditional shaman connection, he is considered one who 'received the archetypal call to healing' (1996: 85). West proposes that most prophets in Zionist and Apostolic African Churches have a personal history of illness and claims that

once experiencing, as a patient, the healing rites, one could also become a healer, although not all 'are deemed to have powers to become prophets' (1975: 98).

The role of the ancestors in Hlungwani's life should not be underestimated. He believed that the soul of his ancestor, Bhandi (or Bandi) Pavalala, his grandfather, upon his death, returned to earth in the former's body at birth (Schneider, 1989: 12; Maluleke, 1991:12), meaning that Hlungwani's spiritual world forms part of his living world. He also believed he was a direct descendant of many prophets, including John the Baptist. Hlungwani had shown Maluleke his missing finger and a copy of a 14th-century image of John the Baptist, also with one missing finger, to prove this. Hlungwani's missing finger symbolises the Devil that was now removed from his life (Maluleke, 1991: 41).

Hlungwani's artworks frequently resemble him, especially the *Self Portrait as a Drum* piece (Figure 2). The figure captures his physical features and embodies his values and life purpose. Once again, the drum highlights the significance of ancestors in Hlungwani's life. The snakes, now resembling hands, are a constant reminder of the two snakes that had bitten and penetrated his leg, but he has learned to control them. Moreover, the snake and the drum serve as messengers, symbolising the connection between the living and the ancestors.

In this context, Hlungwani underwent an equally dramatic transformation, allowing him to move between two worlds – the one we live in and the metaphysical – reconciling them conceptually in his life and work (Leibhammer, 2014: 11). From a Zionist viewpoint, Cavallo writes that according to their beliefs, if a person shares their ancestors' names, they will form part of a living being (Cavallo, 2013: 12-13). Also, the Zionists connect angels with the ancestors as their messengers, who guide the living and 'channel messages through dreams, visions, or simple voice-guide[s]' (Cavallo, 2013: 12). This view confirms Anderson's (2000: 198) assertion that the Holy Spirit has assumed the role of guiding and instructing in numerous African Pentecostal churches, similar to that of the ancestors.



Figure 2: Jackson Hlungwani: *Self Portrait as a Drum*. Late 1990s. Norval Foundation. Photograph by the author. **Hlungwani's New Jerusalem**



Hlungwani recalls how God commanded him to return to his ancestral roots and build Him a temple close to his father's burial site. Therefore, in 1980 (Markovitz, 1989), on a hill at Mbhokota, he and some followers packed stones on top of a 1000-year-old stone-walled settlement of the type used by Venda-speakers in the area and created a Great Zimbabwe-like labyrinth that he called the *New Jerusalem* (Nettleton, 1996: 54-55). Following God's command, he built two altars, the *Altar of God* and the *Altar of Christ*, which had to 'include heavenly and earthly lives', as he depicted in his sculptures, and used in his religious services (Maluleke, 1991: 30-31).

Hlungwani prophesied the coming of an Apocalypse, resulting in humanity's salvation. When Lesley Spiro questioned Hlungwani about his *New Jerusalem*, referring to the Apocalypse of John, he linked the 'Old' and 'New Country' to the South African broader socio-political setting (Spiro, 1992: 69, 72). After the final judgement, Hlungwani believed that the *New Jerusalem* site, on an acropolis site overlooking Mbhokota village in Gazankulu, was where God and Christ would dwell with people for eternity. This is also why Hlungwani created two altars (Rich, 1989: 27). According to Hlungwani, the old world 'has come to an end in 1984', and the new world (or *New Jerusalem*) appeared in 1985, after 'Satan has been thrown in the Pit' (Revelation 20:3; Schneider & Hlungwani, 1989: 62; Maluleke, 1991: 84), ending with the vision of the great white throne of judgement (Steyn, 2019: 182). When Spiro (1992: 72) interviewed Hlungwani on his *Michael Star* (Archangel Michael) sculpture, Hlungwani told her to read Revelation 18-22, referring to the Apocalypse of John and Archangel Michael's (Michael Star) role in Christian salvation.

Hlungwani referred to the *New Jerusalem* as the men's church and *Kanana* (New Canaan) as the women's church (Burnett, 1989: 5; Schneider, 1989: 11; Maluleke, 1991: 44; Steyn, 2021: 12). The worshippers did not gather in the *New Jerusalem* per se but in Hlungwani's yard. The services were moved to *Kanana* and occurred in the open air under a Marula tree. However, when it stormed, his congregation faithfully followed him in his workshop (Maluleke, 1991: 31-33). According to Burnett (1989: 5) and Schneider (1989: 11), in his *New Jerusalem* temple, Hlungwani, besides faith-healing and helping the sick, continued teaching his followers, converting this God's rural holy house into a sacred place of pilgrimage inhabited by his spiritually inspired artworks.

Hlungwani: The artist

Because of his well-preserved works, the artistic aspect is the closest to the tangible reality of Hlungwani's life because it concretely represents the integration of the three aspects of his existence, mind-body-soul. This unification during life and separation after death has been the subject of discussion and interest as much in the book of Phaedo (Fowler, 1971: 279-285) as in current discourse on the topic. Referring to Hlungwani's physical chronic pain and how he endured it and even turned it into a source of spiritual inspiration, there is neurological evidence of a mind-body connection. There are 'proven neuroanatomical and neurophysiological changes associated with mindfulness in reducing the subjective experience of pain', as analysed by Raymond St Marie MD and Kellie S Talebkhah MS (2018) (Marchant, 2017; Seoyon, Yang & Chang, 2019).

According to Hlungwani, his metaphysical experience changed his life course (Schneider, 1989: 11). When Christ appeared in his vision, he promised to see God pass by him. In his vision, thus, Hlungwani saw God's feet pass by (Schneider & Hlungwani, 1989: 60; Coetzee, 1996: 86; Hayashida, 2000: 72). This vision inspired Hlungwani's creation of a most unusual sculpture of God's leg adorned with six oval eggs (Figure 3). According to Martin and Hayashida, this sculpture was created in 1984 (Martin, 1987; Hayashida, 2000), six years after he formed his church. This analogy could denote Hlungwani's wounded leg, which he believed God had healed after his epiphany. Coetzee (1996) proposes that the connection between the

sculpture of *God's Leg with Eggs* and Hlungwani's injured leg is inevitable, as the eggs on God's shin relate to Hlungwani's sores. The injured foot is viewed as an image of the fundamental connection 'between suffering and redemption' (Coetzee, 1996: 87).



Figure 3: Jackson Hlungwani, *God's Leg with Eggs*, 1984. Norval Foundation. Photograph by the author.

Through the years to follow, Hlungwani produced more artworks depicting elements of suffering and healing. Referring to two other sculptures, *Champion Man* (Figure 4) and *Christ Playing Football* (forming part of the *Altar of Christ*), Hlungwani's presence is captured through the dynamic movement of the champ's legs and that of Christ, expressing healing and new life. As a symbolic interpretation of the scoring goal, the synthesis reflects the Saviour's death and victorious resurrection, which is, first, linked to Hlungwani's vision of jumping 'as high as the roof of the hut' (Schneider, 1989: 12) and second, to the shamanic idea that a spiritual practitioner must first experience healing himself before he can cure someone else.



Figure 4: Jackson Hlungwani, *Champion Man*, 1988. Norval Foundation. Photograph by the author.



Referring to Hillman's view, Coetzee relates profound insight into great suffering with the shamanic call to healing (1996: 87). The wound, symbolising a spiritual sickness or lack of spiritual awareness, must be consciously assimilated and treated individually 'before the collective can be healed' (Coetzee, 1996: 87). The eggs, like 'protuberances; thus, stand for both 'the ulcerated limb and the promise of healing' (Steyn & Burroughs, 2021: 101).

From Hayashida's viewpoint, the eggs for Hlungwani represent healing, harmony and new life (2000: 94). She refers to Abrahams's interpretation (1989: 15) of the eggs as healing mechanisms, transforming illness and disease into meaningful and resourceful energy. While Hlungwani's leg (physical outward body) was gradually rotting, his inner spirit was being transformed, according to Hlungwani's belief system, in God's presence. The symbolic meaning of eggs will be discussed in more detail later.

Spiritual elements in Hlungwani's art

This part of the analysis also illustrates a vital feature of Hlungwani's skills: the ability to integrate internally heterogeneous cultural elements and externally express them as a preacher with remarkable spiritual eloquence. Therefore, from a religious viewpoint, amalgamating heterogeneous elements of beliefs in Hlungwani's worldview can be considered a paradigm of syncretism. Nessa Leibhammer correctly notes, '[w]e could say that he was a liminal figure moving easily between worlds – between Christian and Tsonga beliefs, between sacred and everyday experience, and between rural and urban environments' (Leibhammer, 2014).

Hlungwani scalded his wound with fire for many years, figuratively keeping Satan out (Dietrich, 1991: 72; Maluleke, 1991: 73; Coetzee, 1996: 87; Hayashida, 2000: 94). Besides fire, he used smoke and ash to chase away evil and as positive healing by leaving burnt marks on his artworks. In his interview with Markovitz (1989), Hlungwani said that 'fire is the only doctor' and

He regards the sore as a test of strength in his battle with the Devil. 'Next year it will better,' he says. Jackson uses the ash as a religious prop and hands it out to his followers. Never perturbed, never in pain, he proudly points out that his penance is nearly at an end. (Markovitz, 1989)

During his interview with Jameson Maluleke, Hlungwani stated that his artworks were God's works and God was working through him, and together, they would tame the Devil through his sacred sculptures (Dietrich, 1991: 70-74). Hlungwani's sacred artworks were intended for religious purposes and created for a specific site, his *New Jerusalem*, reflecting his approach to religious faith. This personal approach connects Hlungwani with the Ethiopian Orthodox church and its Afro-Atlantic literary-religious tradition (*Ethiopianism*) rather than with the European Christian tradition brought by missionaries to South Africa during the 18th and 19th centuries.

In this context, using fire, burnt wood or ashes and their importance as curing medicine is not unique to Hlungwani, the Shangaan, but is also found in other parts of Africa. Bantalem Tadesse describes the *Maskal* fire festival as one of the Ethiopian Orthodox church's most essential and celebrated feasts (2010: 50-54). This celebration of the Holy Cross upon which Christ was crucified occurs each September. A fire is lit in remembrance of the bonfire of Queen Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. According to legend, she burnt incense on a bonfire, and the smoke's direction, blown by holy winds, was believed to indicate precisely where the True Cross was to be found. The annual repetition of this ritual, with bonfire and incense, is called *demera*. The Ethiopian priests and believers gather at a square with burning torches (*chibo*). 'After sanctifying themselves', Tadesse writes, 'individuals suffering from skin



disease on the inner part of the legs cover their afflicted parts with *ashekt*, the ashes of a small plant burnt in the Maskal fire, 'and stamp on the blazing fire, hoping to be cured' (2010: 53).

According to van Zyl (1991: 119-120) and Pretorius (1992: 6), Hlungwani drew his inspiration from the Byzantine tradition. Similarly, Nettleton (2009: 64), referring to the spiritual function of Hlungwani's sculptures, connects them with the Byzantine sacred images, considered reminders of a historical and personified God. In the African context, relationships between Hlungwani's biblical artworks, fused with Tsonga and Venda traditions, and presumably those Afro-Byzantine artworks, have been substantiated through expressions and symbolic interpretations. Early Christians venerated him as a healer before Archangel Michael was regarded as a warrior saint. Sanctuaries and shrines dedicated to Michael were constructed primarily for healing devotions. The *Healing Pool* of Bethesda in Jerusalem introduced pools linked to pagan deities into early Christianity. In John 5:1-16, reference is made to the Healing Pool of Bethesda, where numerous disabled people were waiting for an angel of the Lord to stir the waters before healing could occur. Hlungwani similarly performed traditional healing practices but passionately believed that all medicine men involved must first go 'through an inner change of attitude, provided they also use the biblical "waters of Bethsaida" as their best remedy' (Schneider, 1998: 11). At Hlungwani's New Jerusalem site, water is used only for healing, not baptism, writes Schneider. Hayashida (2000:12-13) asked Hlungwani if he found his inspiration for his sculptures through dreams. He replied that he went 'up to be with God' and would return 'to teach all nations'. Hlungwani explained that he had a personal relationship with 'Christa' (sic for Christ), moving comfortably between the physical and the supernatural worlds. Hlungwani clarified that when he went up to be with God, he either walked 'through a hole' or went up 'on wings' or closed his eyes and found 'himself in the presence of God' (Hayashida, 2000:12-13).

Representations of eggs in Hlungwani's art

Eggs as healing transformation are integral in Hlungwani's creations when relaying his visions about the old and new South Africa. Relating to pre- and post-1994 state reforms, Hlungwani's conception of 'old' and 'new' South Africa should be interpreted in the context of the New Jerusalem, whereby he believed that God would judge the 'old' South Africa. When Hlungwani was asked about his 'New Country' philosophy, he referred to the Book of Revelation and described 'Michael Star' as the representative of this 'New Country', leading the other angels to defeat Satan (Rich, 1989: 30; Schneider, 1989: 12; Spiro, 1992: 72; Steyn, 2019: 184-185), protector of the 'old world' (Apartheid). As for the new world, post-1994, according to Hlungwani, the 'work of heaven' can now find a place in the New Jerusalem, in other words, 'the emerging new world of peace and harmony' (Schneider, 1989: 12).

Hlungwani created a combined sculpture of *Adam and the Birth of Eve*, along with the feet of Cain and Abel. According to the artist, the sculptural synthesis expresses his vision of a reconciled nation by bringing opposites together and transforming the old into the new South Africa. In Adam's palm (Figure 5), the artist delicately carved an egg, which appeals to people that men and women should 'treat each other gently, "like eggs rather than stones"' (Spiro, 1992: 69). Conflating 'Adam and Eve into a single personage refers to his vision of one South African nation rather than separate black and white people' (Spiro, 1992: 69). This is a plea to humanity, sending a powerful visual message of death and resurrection.



Figure 5: Jackson Hlungwani, *Adam and the Birth of Eve*. Detail of Adam holding an 'egg'. 1989. Johannesburg Art Museum. Photograph by the author.

Using eggs as an artistic expression is not exclusive to South African Venda or Shangaan traditions because it was also applied in other African traditions, namely Coptic and Ethiopian churches. Eggs in the Afro-Byzantine context are associated with Easter and symbolise resurrection because the chick breaks away from the egg, representing Christ who broke forth from the tomb (Ferguson, 1961: 18). However, the ostrich egg *per se* has a unique place in African Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches. Thus, the eggs' size in Hlungwani's sculpture, *God's Leg with Eggs* (Figure 3), is in proportion comparable to an ostrich's rather than a chicken's, the former often found in Ethiopian iconography and on top of some Ethiopian churches decorating the cross (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Narga Selassie, *Lake Tana*, 2014. Ethiopia. Photograph by the author.

Merahi (2003: 113) writes that Ethiopian countryside churches often use the shape of an ostrich egg as the church dome, providing the churches of Abuna Gabre Mikael and Tewahedo as examples. The symbolic understanding of ostrich eggs is a concept of totality and not a single entity. It symbolises protection and comfort, like the female ostrich who hardly leaves her eggs unattended. Friedlander (2007: 29) relays Ethiopian stories associated with the meaning of eggs. One story is that the baby ostrich breaks through the shell, and so will individuals, through the sacrament of baptism, shed their sin and enter a new life. A different interpretation of the ostrich egg refers to the last judgement of Revelation. The female ostrich watches her eggs and awaits her chicks to hatch. This parallels the Christian who looks at the cross and awaits Christ's final judgement (Merahi, 2003: 113-114). The egg symbolises the connection between suffering and redemption and the transition from old to new, representing Hlungwani's journey towards healing and a new life.

El Sayed Kitat (2014: 25) links the ostrich eggs with the African Coptic cultural tradition, as these symbolise 'the concepts of prosperity, life and resurrection of Christ' and refer to ancient Egypt as where it could have originated from. Ostrich eggs, as a type of funerary gift, were discovered in ancient Nubian and Egyptian tombs. El Sayed Kitat states that as the 'ostrich eggshells provided food for the deceased', they were considered a symbol of 'resurrection and eternal life' and are still 'found in Muslim graves' (2014: 26). She connects them to the Egyptian 'creation myth as a symbol of resurrection and eternal life', 'a sign of life and rebirth' (2014: 25-26; notes 12, 17, 18 and 19), and a device of Imentet, the goddess of the dead and personification of the West.

The ostrich feather was not linked to Imentet alone but to Maat, the goddess of truth, who weighed the heart against it during the deceased's final judgement (2014: 26). Considering that the egg represents the soul in the context of African Coptic traditions and the ostrich feather is linked to the soul in the final judgement according to ancient Egyptian beliefs, the role of Archangel Michael as a psychopomp (guide of the soul to the afterlife) is indispensable. Michael is often represented with a sword in his right hand and his left, a pair of scales weighing the souls of the departed. Hlungwani's sculpture of *Michael Star* (Figure 7) has four extended swords resembling the form of a cross. It can be connected to the general image of the drawn sword of the Archangel, a sword symbolising a military saint or a warrior. One cannot ignore the lump on the sword's edge that resembles an egg.



Figure 7: Jackson Hlungwani, *Michael Star*, 1991. Johannesburg Art Museum. Photograph by author.



Conclusion

This study has analysed the personal, intangible suffering of Hlungwani's existence in inspiring, directing and enhancing his spirituality to finally find its concrete, cohesive expression through his artistic creativity. By dividing the subject matter into three sections (physical, emotional and mental), the research could bring forth the mechanisms, tools and skills involved in turning his personally experienced, intangible, life-destructive forces into positive motivations leading toward a meaningful and creative existence, openly shared, between himself and others. Lastly, this man's life should be considered a characteristic paradigm of unity between body, soul and mind, integrated into his personality and embodied through his art.

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