

The royal women of the Zulu monarchy through the keyhole of oral history: Queens Nandi (c. 1764 – c.1827) and Monase (c. 1797 – 1880)

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Abstract

Historians, following typical chauvinistic tendencies, have chronicled events in a manner that relegates women to the background and confines their role to caring for homes and children. However, south east Africa in general and the Zulu monarchy in particular are replete with examples of female dynasties, regents and rulers who took up positions of leadership through periods of nation-building and wars of resistance. Zulu culture has a plethora of women, the most important of whom included Queen Nandi, the mother of Emperor Shaka, and Queen Monase, who contributed in shaping the Zulu monarchy behind the scenes in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. They were undoubtedly the heroines of the Zulu monarchy. The very mention of the word 'heroines' conjures up images of larger-than-life personalities, hearty souls who never backed down from danger. As much information as possible has been obtained for this article from resource material and interviews about these Zulu royal women. In researching the subject one could not find many written historical sources that give a detailed account of their influence except for brief references and descriptions. It was only through the keyhole of oral history or indigenous knowledge that one could comprehend the nature and extent of their thinking, character traits and contributions.

Keywords: Oral history, royal women, Zulu monarchy, Queen Nandi, Queen Monase

Introduction

Zulu royal women of the 18th and early 19th centuries, whether they were princesses, queens or members of the palace (*isigodlo*) had more privileges than responsibilities. This was attributed to the fact that they were always served by the court servants (*izinceku*) and slaves (*izigqila*) or prisoners of war. The lives of princesses were somewhat restricted in that they were discouraged from marrying commoners (Gunner 1991: 253).

The praise poems of royal women were not performed socially as were those of married women. These praises would be used rather as salutations or greetings by both men and women upon their arrival at the royal house. They would also be used by the women attending the queen. Furthermore, they would be bellowed as a way of expressing thankfulness by men after they had been served with the royal food.

In the latter case, it would not be necessary to repeat the whole praise poem; it would be considered sufficient to call out a single praise name, such as "Msizi"! Before embarking on an analysis of the praises of the individual royal Zulu women, it is imperative to provide a biographical outline of each woman to enhance a better understanding of the incidents and places alluded to in the praises. Msimang (1991: 51) concurred with this point of view when he attested that it was common knowledge that, due to their allusions to specific historical events and personalities, praise-poems were not always intelligible to people unfamiliar with the relevant history.

Zulu history is interspersed with oral traditions in the form of *izibongo* (praise poems). Praise-poems were and are still a form of history in which the world view of the rulers was expressed, and a vehicle for the expression of social disaffection. They were and still are the chronicles of individual lives, of both rulers and commoners, for praises were not confined to the scions of the royal houses (White 1991: 17).

A discernible contribution of women in the Zulu monarchy could be traced from the chieftaincy of Jama in 1771 who built his palace of Nobamba (the place of unity or binding together), near the Mpembeni stream. Jama had two wives, the chief of whom was Mthaniya, daughter of ManyelelaSibiya. Mthaniya begot twin girls, i.e. Mkabayi and Mmama, as well as a boy named Senzangakhona and finally a girl, Mawa.

The three daughters of Jama became heads of military harems (*izigodlo*) and evinced an aversion to matrimonial bonds, preferring to remain princesses. Mkabayi headed the *ebaQulusini* meaning: "where they pushed out buttocks"; Mmama ruled the *Osebeni* meaning "on the river bank", while Mawa reigned over Emperor Shaka's *eNtonteleni*. Jama died in 1781 and due to the minority of Senzangakhona, his heir, Mkabayi became regent.

It could be argued, however, that the evolution of the ideal of nationhood among the Zulu people had its genesis in Senzangakhona's praises. When the court poet or praise-singer (Dingizwe 1984: 4) to Senzangakhona said:

A cord of destiny let us weave,
 O Menzi, scion of Jama,

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That to universes beyond the reach
Of spirit-forms, we may ascend,

he was indicating that the destiny of the Zulu people was to traverse the universe and transform the human being into a conscious citizen of the cosmic order (in southeast Africa). The Emperor Shaka adopted this imbongi's (court poet's) ideal as the main inspiration for the revolution which he led after his father's death. It was the ideological blueprint on which he built the Zulu monarchy. The death of Senzangakhona, Shaka's father, in 1816 marked the end and the beginning of two distinct periods in East-Nguni political history. Under Shaka a new era in Zulu history was inaugurated.

The earlier system of countless clans would be gradually demolished, and out of its ruins would be built a grandiose nation ruled by an imperious emperor. Thus, the Zulu monarchy began with Shaka who reigned between 1816 and 1828. Shaka was able to fully apply his military and political genius. It was he who brought together the people from different clans as one mighty sovereign nation. It was during his twelve year rule that Queens Nandi and Monase (though the latter made more history during the times of Emperor Mpande) featured prominently.

Queen Nandi (c. 1764 – c. 1827): a biographical outline

The history of Nandi and that of her son Shaka, the great Zulu emperor and founder of the Zulu nation, has mostly been gleaned from oral sources and some written references from the diary of the African trader, Henry Francis Fynn (1883: 32-36). He spent a great deal of time with Emperor Shaka and was also present at the death of Nandi.

The subject, however, is fraught with inconsistencies. Some of the most crucial events leading to the establishment of the Shakan empire took place within a few kilometres of Melmoth, situated between modern day Eshowe and the Zulu capital Ulundi. The legacy of Queen Nandi is intertwined with that of her son Shaka and it would be impossible to compile a historical background on her without including references and a background to the rise and fall of Shaka, as Nandi played such a pivotal role in his life (Pridmore 1987: 86).

Queen (iNdllovukazi) Nandi (the sweet one) was the daughter of a minor eLangeni inkosi (potentate), Bhebhe (also referred to as Mbengi) Mhlongo and his wife Mfunda. She was born in 1766 at the eBozini homestead (umuzi) on what later became the Bull's Run estate on the banks of the Mhlathuze river (in close proximity to the present day Phobane Lake). Little is known about her early childhood, but one may presume she grew up according to Zulu customs and fulfilled the various chores a young girl would in the household (Stuart 1926: 18).

On her way with friends to visit relatives near the Babanango hills, she passed close to Senzangakhona's ikhanda (head) of esiKlebheni which was situated very near the area where the Babanango road turns off from the R34 Melmoth/Vryheid road. Taking the location of esiKlebheni and the various watercourses in the vicinity into consideration, there can be little doubt that a meeting took place between Nandi's party and a group of young men that included Senzangakhonakajama.

This meeting took place south of the White Umfolozi river in the wooded bed of the Mkhumbane river (probably upstream from the bridge where the present Melmoth/Vryheid road crosses it.) It seems they met again on their return journey and this time the flirting between Nandi and Senzangakhona could not have been so innocent, as she fell pregnant by him (Shamase 1996: 32-38).

It is claimed that Shaka was born at Senzangakhona's household and that although Nandi was betrothed to Senzangakhona, they were not yet married according to traditional custom. This, however, appears unlikely, as the relationship was illicit and it is more than likely that Shaka was born 'esihlahleni' – (literally in the bushes or outside the normal social setting for a birth), in 1787 in the eLangeni territory at the Nguga homestead of Nandi's uncle. According to Zulu custom, in those days pregnant women who were not married were sent away with the child to live in obscurity; their children were never recognised as being of royal blood.

When Nandi first reported her pregnancy to Senzangakhona, the tribal elders claimed that she was not pregnant but suffering from a stomach ailment caused by the 'ishaka' beetle. This was an intestinal beetle on which menstrual irregularities were usually blamed. Nandi was said to be suffering from this because of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy. When the child was eventually born, the child and Nandi were taken to the Zulu capital with much shame and no welcoming festivities, as there were no ceremonial celebration for a woman already with child. Nandi took the child to Senzangakhona and presented him with his son and named him 'Shaka'. (Stuart 1926: 18-20)

Despite Senzangakhona's attempts to deny paternity, he eventually married Nandi and she was relegated to the lowly position of his third wife. According to Ritter (1995: 41-52), Nandi was not only a mother but also in interclan marriage, which was forbidden. This came about because Nandi's mother Mfunda was the daughter of Khondlo, a Qwabe chief, with whom clan intermarriage with the Zulu was unacceptable.

Shaka and Nandi spent their early years at Senzangakhona's esiKlebheni homestead near the present day Babanango. Nandi appeared to have a fiery temperament but was devoted to her son. Although there were strong indications that the relationship between Nandi and Senzangakhona was never happy for long, she did bear him a second child, a girl

named Nomcoba. Nandi was apparently not very popular and found herself unwelcome and neglected. Fortunately Mkabi (the wife of Jama) to whom Nandi as Um-Lobokazi (young wife) was entrusted, was a close relative of Nandi's mother Mfunda. Queen Mkabi took Nandi under her care and displayed some sympathy towards her (Isililosika Nandi 1915: 6-8; 1917: 4-7).

The version given by Henry Francis Fynn differs from the above. Although he also wasn't present, the oral representation in time frame was much closer and he might also have gleaned information from Shaka. According to Fynn, Senzangakhona was uncircumcised at the time of his encounter with Nandi. Although a chief may have set aside a group of women, the women were not allowed to conceive before his circumcision was completed.

According to Fynn, Nandi was included in this group and within six months became pregnant with Senzangakhona's 'illegitimate' child. The other women in the group publicly charged Nandi with having illicit intercourse. Senzangakhona, to avoid disgrace in the estimation of his people, told the other women that she suffered from 'itshaka', a looseness of the bowels, and that that was the cause of the swelling. In due course, Shaka was born (Stuart 1926: 22). Henry Francis Fynn also gives more insight concerning the temperament of Nandi.

He describes her as being of a 'violent, passionate disposition' and states that 'during her residence with Senzangakhona she frequently got into fits of outrageous violence'. He claims that 'Nandi was a masculine, savage woman with a tongue like a rasp'. Fynn also states that Nandi and Shaka's expulsion from Senzangakhona's presence came as a result of Nandi striking one of his leading men over the head with a knobstick (Bulpin 1952: 105-33). In consequence of this, she was on the point of being killed, but Senzangakhona ordered her out from his presence and told her to never return.

Other sources (Perrett 1911: 34) described the events differently. When Shaka was six years old he had allowed a dog to kill one of Senzangakhona's pet sheep. A quarrel ensued between an arrogant Nandi and Senzangakhona when he threatened Shaka with a beating. As a result Nandi, Shaka and Nomcoba, Shaka's younger sister, were ordered to return to Nandi's own people, the eLangeni.

Senzangakhona married several other wives and appointed Bibi, daughter of Sompisi, chief of the Ntuli clan, as his queen. She bore him a son named Sigujana, who was to become king after Senzangakhona. Other sons, notably Mhlangane, Dingane and Mpande, were born to the other wives.

Nandi, Shaka and Nomcoba sought sanctuary in the Mhlathuze Valley with the eLangeni people, where they were apparently not welcomed. Shaka became a herd-boy at his mother's iNgugo homestead in the Elangeni area about 48 kilometres away from his father's homestead. It was obviously not a happy time for Shaka or Nandi, as she felt herself disgraced by Senzangakhona. Shaka himself was subjected to humiliation and bullying by the older boys who referred to him as 'the fatherless one' (Stuart 1926: 21-23). He became anti-social and unpopular. Few people liked the arrogant Nandi or her son.

This unhappiness could explain Shaka's subsequent lust for power and his hatred of the eLangeni. In Zulu chronicles Nandi is said to have soothed Shaka by saying: 'Never mind, my Um-lilwane (Little Fire), you have got the isibindi (liver, meaning courage) of a lion and one day you will be the greatest chief in the land.' (Ritter 1995:43-47). A few adult women defended him and were kind to him. Among these were his grandmother, Mthaniya, Mkabi the chief wife of Senzangakhona and Mkabayi, Senzangakhona's sister (Mkabayi later played a pivotal role in the plot to assassinate Shaka).

Mkabi (Senzangakhona's stepmother) and Mkabayi, his older sister, visited Nandi throughout Shaka's childhood years. Shaka never forgot this and when he came into power he placed them in the highest positions in the land: they became reigning queens of his military homesteads and he maintained them there to his death. Shaka idolised Nandi and he had great resentment for the way she had been treated by Senzangakhona and the people of the eLangeni clan who mocked at his illegitimate birth (Isililosika Nandi 1915: 8-10; 1917: 7-9). On the one hand he exalted those who had treated his mother well, but took revenge on all who had slighted Nandi and ridiculed him.

According to the diary of Henry Fynn (Stuart 1926: 23), Nandi had married a 'commoner of the Langeni clan named, Gendeyana (Ngendeyana) and bore him a son called Ngwadi'. In about 1802 the eLangeni were affected by a great famine and Nandi, unable to provide food for her children, moved the family to the Mpahla flats, east of Eshowe near the Amatigulu River.

Nandi at this time went to join Gendeyana, by whom she already had a child and who lived among the Ama-Mbedweni people, a sub-clan of the Qwabes. She was well received, but Shaka felt no rightful place and was sent by Nandi to live with Macingwane waseNgonyameni of the Chunu clan (Ritter 1995: 67). Shortly afterwards, Nandi again sent Shaka to live with her father's sister in Mthethwaland north of the present day Kwambonambi.

Nandi and Shaka found refuge with her aunt in the mDletsheni clan which fell directly under the rule of the powerful Mthethwa and their ageing Emperor Jobe. Jobe was succeeded by his son Dingiswayo, *alias* Godongwane. Ritter stated that Nandi, Shaka and his siblings all went to live in the area presided over by Ngomane, son of Mqomboli of the

mDletsheni clan which paid homage to Emperor Jobe. This was in 1803 and at the Mthethwa home of her aunt, the first time in many years that Nandi and Shaka were treated with kindness and sympathy. Shaka became a herdboyc for Ngomane and lived with Mbiya, who became a foster-father to him. In 1809, Jobe died and his son Dingiswayo returned home and became inkosi (potentate) (Ritter 1995: 70).

Shaka was about twenty-three years old when Dingiswayo called up the emDlatsheni Intanga (age group) of which he was a member, and incorporated it in the iziChwe regiment. All the young men of Shaka's age group were called up and Shaka became a soldier living at the Ema-Ngweni homestead under the leadership of General Bhuza. Shaka served as aMthethwa warrior for six years, and distinguished himself with his courage, rising to be a general (Ritter 1995: 71).

In 1815 inkosi Senzangakhona, Shaka's father, fell ill. Despite the fact that Shaka had made an impression on him and was a protégé of Dingiswayo, Senzangakhona nominated one of his younger sons, Sigujana, to succeed him. When Sigujana was killed by Ngwadi, Shaka's half-brother, the way was open for Shaka to return to eMakhosini. With the support and approval of Dingiswayo and the Mthethwa, Shaka was installed at eSiklebheni, his father's capital, and became the new inkosi of the Zulu clan.

He immediately selected a new site for his homestead as it was not customary to occupy the dwelling of a deceased inkosi. He chose a site on a ridge situated on the east bank of the Mhode stream near the present farmhouse of Koningskroon just below the Mthonjaneni Ridge (Isililosika Nandi 1915: 7-8; 1917:12). He had returned to a site very near the original settlement of his ancestor, Zulu.

Emperor Shaka immediately organised his army, calling up all the Zulu males between 20 and 40 years and forming regiments. He also built military settlements between his capital and the White Umfolozi River. His first military attack was one of revenge against his mother's people, the eLangeni clan. Shaka established a new royal palace, kwaBulawayo and a number of similar royal palaces known as amakhanda (of royal authority) were built around his monarchy (isililosika Nandi 1915: 9; 1917: 13). These served as centres of administration and regimental barracks.

Taylor (1994: 112) has argued that Shaka had a deep respect for his mother, Nandi, and his aunts, the princesses Mkabayi, Mmama and Nomawa. In 1816, Nandi had returned to live with Shaka as the Queen Mother. She held a reputedly cruel sway over her household and exercised a great deal of influence over the affairs of the Zulu monarchy. Nandi, with other women surrounding Shaka, was put in charge of military homesteads and given power to govern while he was on campaign. It is said that Nandi was a force for moderation in Shaka's life, suggesting various political compromises rather than violent action.

Each settlement had a selection of royal women usually headed by one of Shaka's aunts. According to evidence later given by Emperor Cetshwayo, the woman's work in a homestead consisted of cultivating and reaping crops, fetching wood and water, cooking, making matting for covering huts, making sleeping mats, making izilulu (a grass receptacle for corn), and cleaning house (Webb & Wright 1976: 12).

As Shaka swept through Zululand incorporating various clans into the Zulu, all the unmarried Buthelezi women – about 100 – aged from eighteen to twenty, became Shaka's crown property. They were divided into three equal groups. He appointed one group each to his military homesteads, the mBelebele (ruled by his aunt Mkabayi) and the Esi-Klebheni (ruled by his father Senzangakhona's first wife Mkabi and fourth wife Langazana (Webb & Wright 1976: 13). The third group formed the nucleus of the Um-Dlunkulu (those of the great house) under the watchful eye of Nandi. At Bulawayo Nandi was responsible for their good conduct and careful monthly inspections to ensure that they were not pregnant.

Laband (1995: 10-18), referring to Nandi, wrote:

his mother was clearly of a most difficult, aggressive temperament however, and Nandi's praises refer to her physical unattractiveness and sexual frigidity, as well as to her violent temper: 'she whose thighs do not meet, they only meet on seeing her husband'.

After Shaka's great victory at the Umhlathuze river, he gave Nandi a herd of thousands of cattle and started the building of her own royal palace at Emkhindini not far from the Mfule river, halfway between present-day Melmoth and the Umhlathuze river. Early in 1821, six years before Nandi's death, Shaka built a new capital on the southern slopes of the Umhlathuze valley to the right of the present-day road between Eshowe and Empangeni. Like the first he also named it kwa-Bulawayo (place of the killing).

As soon as this was completed, Shaka built Nandi a similar palace but of lesser dimensions. That palace was situated on the broad flat summit of a hill five km south-west of the new Bulawayo. It was called the Emkhindini (girdle) after the name of her earlier one situated near Melmoth, and was almost encircled by the Emateku and Embuzane streams with the Empongo hill to the east. Nomcoba, Shaka's sister, now presided over the old Emkhindini palace (Marks 1969: 130).

The history of the death of Nandi is filled with contradictory statements and there are various views on how she actually died. It is difficult to separate fact from fiction as most information is by oral representation or from the diary of Henry Francis Fynn, which for the most part is a memoir. In the spring of the 11th year of Shaka's rule, in October 1827,

while hunting 130 km from Nandi's Emkhindini palace, Shaka received news that Nandi the iNdllovukazi (The Female Elephant, meaning the Great Queen) was gravely ill. He rushed to her palace between the late afternoon and noon the next day (Webb & Wright 1976: 277-278).

Henry Francis Fynn, who accompanied Shaka on the hunt, was asked to attend to Nandi. Fynn described Nandi's hut being filled with mourning women and smoke; he had to ventilate the hut to be able to breathe. Nandi was already in a coma and Fynn reported to Shaka that he did not expect her to live through the day. Soon Shaka was given news that Nandi was dead. Fynn attributed her death to 'dysentary' but persistent Zulu tradition has it that Shaka killed her. There is also the possibility, however, that Mkabayi spread the rumour of Shaka killing Nandi in order to turn people against him, and that she had been the one to order his assassination (Stuart 1926: 24-28).



Modern portrait of Queen Nandi kaBhebhe

In Zulu oral history, Shaka was said to have put women to death within his palace who he had made pregnant, in order to prevent the birth of rivals to his throne. Shaka, upon discovering that his mother had not told him that she had permitted a Cele woman (Mbuzikazi) to leave the palace with her son, was enraged and stabbed Nandi, 'with the sharp shank of a spear through her leather skirt and up her anus, as she stooped to feed the fire' (Laband 1995: 22-26).

Whether this is true or not, Shaka was overcome with remorse at the death of Nandi. In a public show of unrestrained grief people tried to outdo each other in their show of mourning as proof of their innocence of any complicity in Nandi's death. Two days after her death, Nandi was buried. Various personal attendants were killed and buried with her. According to custom, a person of her rank could not die alone, but had to have servants to cook and serve her in the underworld. Nandi was to be shown all the funeral honours of a royal queen.

In the book *A Zulu King Speaks – Statements made by Cetshwayo*, the king stated that beyond what he had been told he did not know what happened at Nandi's death but that the ceremony observed at the burial of a great person was more or less similar to that of a commoner (Webb & Wright 1978: 16). The only difference was that the grave of a great person was made into a nicer shape; a wooden fence erected around the grave and that every year when the grass was burnt, there were men to ensure that the grass on or near the grave was not burnt. After Nandi's death Shaka and his people were thrown into a general hysteria. Thousands of people and cattle were killed and there was an enforced year of mourning (Stuart 1926: 24-29).

Queen Nandi: through the keyhole of oral history

Quoted in Cope (1968: 175), Queen Nandi was praised thus:

USomqeni,
 UMathangakawahlangani,
 Ahlanganangokubon'umyeni.
 UGedgedelwasenhlanenkundla.
 UPhokophalalakuMaqhwakazi,
 Angibonang' uphokoukuphalala.
 UMboniwamabhuzengeuSontanti.
 USontantionjengowakwaGwazana.
 USontanti kayidl' inkom' ensizwana,
 Udl' ubisi lwenkom' enezimpondo,
 Ukwesab 'abayisegayo.
 Intombi kaMbengi weNguga kaSoyengwase kaMaqamande,
 UXebe woMhlathuze
 Mfazi ontongande zingamadoda,
 Uyishaye yenyus' iSabiza

UMathanga kawahlangani,
 Ahlangana ngokubon' indoda.
 Obengabafana baseNguga,
 Abezabeluhayizana.
 Father of troubles!
 She whose thighs do not meet,
 They only meet on seeing the husband.
 Loud-voiced one from the upper part of the court.
 She who rushed out to Maqhwakazi,
 I did not see the millet rush out.
 She who sees confusion, Sontanti,
 Sontanti who is like the daughter of Gwazana;
 Sontanti does not partake of a little hornless cow,
 She drinks the milk of a cow with horns,
 For fear of those who milk it.
 The daughter of Mbengi of the Nguga homestead,
 Son of Soyengwase, son of Maqamande
 Sweetheart of the Mhlathuze valley.
 Woman whose long staves are like those of men,
 Who struck it and it went up the Sabiza River.
 She whose thighs do not meet,
 They only meet on seeing a husband.
 She who was with the boys of Nguga,
 Who came in a small group
 (Cope 1968: 175)

Turner argued that Nandi's praises might have been composed long before she became Queen Mother. He stated that they reflected the attitude of both the eLangeni and the Zulu people. Nandi's praises pointed at her falling pregnant by Senzangakhona out of wedlock as a disgrace.

They also revealed that he had never accepted her as a real queen with full rights. The survival of her praises could therefore be attributed to her subsequent political influence within the Zulu monarchy (Turner 1990: 46).

Nandi was addressed in a manner akin to that of men. She was also addressed as USomqeni (father of laziness) which set the tone for the rest of the ensuing criticism, oaths and outright insults to her character. The following lines, 2 and 3 of her praises, were full of sexually ambiguous imagery:

UMathanga kawahlangani,
 Ahlangana ngokubon' umyeni.
 (Zondi 1996: 12)
 She whose thighs do not meet,
 They only meet on seeing a husband.

The ambiguity in meaning entailed the word '*hlangana*' which could also mean 'to have sexual connexion'. These lines might imply that Nandi had widely spaced thighs. This was undoubtedly an unattractive feature which meant that she conducted herself like a man.

Socialization, in terms of Zulu culture, took place very early in children's lives, from the time they started playing with dolls and mud cattle. Boys emulated adult males, visualizing themselves as possessing large herds of cattle, while girls played games that were aimed at improving their supportive role. The above praise lines therefore portrayed Nandi as "social deviant and non-conformist" (Mtuzze 1990: 97).

Nandi was aware of the norms and values governing the behaviour of girls and women, but chose to ignore the rules. She sat as she pleased and this was an indication that she had a mind of her own. Nandi would do whatever pleased her in her personal space.

In praise line 4, Nandi was referred to as:

UGedegedelwasenhlanenkundla.
 Loud mouthed one from the upper part of the court.
 (Cope 1968:175)

The line made reference to the ability Nandi had to stamp her authority on various matters to Senzangakhona and his councillors. It revealed her low esteem or her strong-willed and domineering character. This also exposed her

persistently deviant behaviour. People, especially women, were precluded from raising their voices at the upper end of the arena or courtyard – a place of assembly.

Zondi stated that Nandi was an ill-tempered and sensitive woman who was not susceptible to jokes. This might justifiably be ascribed to her early miserable life experiences. People occasionally gossiped and made insinuations about her falling pregnant out of wedlock. Even her son Shaka bore the wrath of society that kept reminding him of the impropriety of his mother's behaviour (Zondi 1989: 11).

Nkumane pointed out that:

In any given cultural context, male and female behaviour patterns are fixed by norms. Anyone trying to break these rules can expect to meet with serious problems in the community in which the ruling group produces images and conceptions of the others to legitimise the *status quo*. This emphasises the connection between people and their social environment, underlining the reciprocity between the environment and personality. Personal and environmental factors do not function as independent determinants; rather, they determine each other (1999: 118).

Nandi paid a high price for breaching the moral codes. In her quest to attain personal freedom, she violated the cultural norms. This included, among other things, submissiveness, which she was supposed to venerate as a bride in the presence of her in-laws.

About the outspoken woman, Schipper (1987: 46) argued thus:

In all cultures, the woman who formulates her own claims or who protests against her situation is given the cold shoulder. If the woman who expresses herself orally is already labelled in a special way, the women who dare fix thoughts for eternity are criticised all more.

In lines 5 and 6, Nandi was praised as:

UPhokophalalakuMaqhwakazi
Angibonanga, uphok' ukuphalala
She who rushed out to Maqhwakazi
I did not see the millet rush out .

The court poet again levelled subtle criticism by conjuring up the image of the impulsive Nandi rushing out. Uphoko was a small species of millet used for improving beer and roasted by warriors when preparing for a journey. Phalala could mean to rush out in haste. The combination of the two conjured up a vivid image of the ever journeying Nandi (Vilakazi 1945: 88).

Line 7 praised her thus:

UMboniwamabhuzenge uSontanti
She who sees confusion, Sontanti

This contained an unflattering reference to Nandi as uSontanti, a drifter, again making special use of the masculine morpheme -so- emphasizing her behaviour of wandering around without fixed place of abode (Isiliosika Nandi 1917: 14; Zondi 1996: 12).

The above praises presented Nandi as a courageous and persistent woman. She did not give up hope, but forged ahead in the face of misery and impossible odds. Bemused as she was, Nandi appeared as a woman capable of facing life without support from the male partner. Her main strength could be seen to have been drawn from the fact that she had to be there for children. The happiness and well-being of children were of paramount importance to Nandi. One could also argue that as a single parent she assumed the role of guardian to her children. This was a status monopolised by men of her days.

Ongunyemi (1985: 73), a womanist scholar, has said that:

A black woman is not as powerless in the black world as the white woman is in the white world; the black woman, less protected than her white counterpart has to grow independent. After each mental upheaval, the black woman knows in her subconscious mind that she must survive because she has other people without resources depending on her. In a positive about- face she usually recovers through a superhuman effort.

In Nandi's praises, lines 10 and 11 stated:

USontanti kayidl' inkom' ensizwana,
Udl' ubisi lwenkom' enezimpondo.
Sontanti does not take part of the little hornless cow
She drinks the milk of the cow with horns.

In these lines, the use of language has erotic ambiguity, as *ukudla* could mean to have sexual intercourse, as well as eat or drink, conquer, capture, annihilate, achieve or stab, etc. Thus, the inferred meaning of the court poet here could be

that Nandi had sexual intercourse with a chief of importance. At the same time it carried the meaning that she did not fool around with anyone who was unimportant, a shrewd reference to her burning ambition (Zondi 1996: 10-12).

Nandi was portrayed as a bold, wayward and uncompromising woman. She broke societal norms to achieve her goal of being married to a man of importance. She abdicated her role as custodian of mores of society in order to realize her wish. She gambled with her marriage by having an extra-marital affair with her son's arch-rival in the hope of becoming a queen. Her lack of decency and respect for her son Shaka presented Nandi as a woman who would eschew the norms and values of society to get what she wanted, at whatever cost.

In line, 13 Nandi was praised as:

UXebewoMhlathuze

Sweetheart of the Mhlathuze valley

The court poet openly criticized Nandi by referring to her as uXebe or flirt, a personalised noun derived from the class 5 noun isixebe, meaning a "concubine". This could also refer to her alleged romantic flirtation with inkosi Phakathwayo, one of Shaka's arch-rivals, and the paramount chief of the area in which she resided with her husband Gendeyana (Bryant 1929: 196). The affair was said to have incensed Shaka.

Nandi's unusual height earned her another slating comment in line 14 of her praises:

Mfaziontongandezingandoda

Woman whose long staves are like those of a man.

(Cope 1968: 175)

Fynn(1950: 12) described the physical structure and behaviour of Nandi as follows:

She was said to have been masculine and a savage woman, ever quarrelling with, and so enraging her husband, that he was compelled to exercise some salutary authority and reprimand her for the impropriety of her conduct.

Turner explains that line 14 contained criticism of Nandi's fierce temper. In a fit of rage, Nandi was reported to have struck one of Senzangakhona's senior councillors in the face. The impropriety of her conduct was one of the reasons for her ultimate banishment from the royal court (Turner 1990: 44).

Nandi was portrayed as a bold, scornful and angry woman. A lot of depression and anger had built inside her. The only way to avenge herself and to make her voice heard was to resort to violence. She was angry at society for being critical and unsympathetic towards her. Her flawed behaviour during her teens caused her a lot of heartache and she lost societal respect.

Nkumane(1999: 162) states that:

In traditional African societies, the role of each citizen is to perpetuate the *status quo*, to assume responsibility for the continuity of the clan, to work within the tradition and to maintain a closed society. Each member of the society has his or her mission which has to be fulfilled to ensure prosperity and survival. There is no room for change in the attitudes for girls. Freedom to choose one's destiny is characteristic of individualism, a concept which is not found in most African cultures.

Zulu society was seemingly hard and unflinching when it came to meting out punishment to women who had acted *contra bonos mores* (contrary to societal norms and values). The society neither tolerated nor accepted disgraceful antics displayed by women. Senzangakhona was not an innocent party, as he had impregnated Nandi. He was, however, not subjected to the same harsh judgement as Nandi.

This could be attributed to the position he occupied in society. Perhaps the society believed that it was the woman's fault for falling pregnant. Whatever the reason, Nandi was stigmatized as a "fallen woman" and her mistake turned her and her son into cold, sensitive and insecure beings. Nandi was not the only one to suffer shame; her children were constantly and nauseatingly reminded of their mother's unbecoming behaviour. Shaka's ruthlessness could be ascribed to the bitter life he experienced as a boy. Thus, he pledged his life to take revenge on those who ill-treated him and his mother.

On the issue of pre-marital sex in the Zulu society, Jili (1995: 28) has argued:

Premarital sexual relations are allowed by the Zulu customary tradition. On the other hand virginal intactness is highly recommended. In what way may premarital sexual relations be permitted while at the same time affirming the values of virginity? In Zulu practice this was done through the practice of ukusoma.

Ukusoma involved a degree of sexual licence for the unmarried by allowing intercrural intercourse which was usually not coitus. Both boys and girls were intensively trained in this practice because laxity would result in pregnancy. Punishment was severe for premarital pregnancy and no one dared overlook this fact. Since many people knew which girl was in love with which boy, their premarital sexual relations were a matter of public knowledge (Jili 1995: 29).

Lines 16 and 17 of Nandi's praises were a repetition of those occurring in lines 2 and 3, and the last two lines made reference to Nandi's wedding:

ObengabafanabaseNguga,
Abezabeluhayizana.
She who was with the boys of Nguga,
Who came in a small group.

Cope aptly explained this as a reference to the wedding day when Nandi was quietly introduced to Senzangakhona's homestead, accompanied by a group of men from the Nguga homestead, where she lived then. She was installed quietly as Senzangakhona's third wife, there being no marriage ceremony for a pregnant bride. This was a mocking criticism, as Zulu custom dictated that a bride-to-be had to be introduced into the village of her fiancée in the company of a large group of men with much celebration and festivity (Cope 1968: 175).

It could be concluded that Nandi's erratic behaviour pitted her against the whole society. Her actions solicited great agitation and opposition from the community. Norms and values enforced uniformity among all women and men, since society eschewed individualism. Deviation from the mainstream norms and values led to ostracisation and stigmatisation. Nandi's erotic freedom came at a costly price. Pratt (1981: 120) explained erotic freedom as follows:

When women heroes do seek erotic freedom, which we define as the right to make love when and with whom they wish, they meet all opposition of the patriarchy.

Jili (1995: 31) commented that virginity was highly valued in traditional Zulu sexual practices. This was the pride of each and every girl and to lose it was to lose self-esteem. He stated:

A limit was set to those pre-marital relations by the rule that girl must not be deflowered, and some of the girl's puberty ceremonies (Venda, Zulu) included instruction on means to avoid this. Among some clans girls were examined periodically by their mothers or older women to see if they were virgins, and the virginity of a bride was a matter of great moment. If a girl was found to have been deflowered, a fine, in some instances a heavy one, was inflicted on the boy responsible and in the Nguni group this was increased if pregnancy resulted.

The value of virginity was crystallized in the African culture. Girls were encouraged to live virtuously as there were dividends derived from it. Mtuzze (1990: 74) argues that it was important for women to live by an approved socio-cultural code of conduct. This was particularly so because men insisted on virginity to ensure that their heirs were legitimate offspring. Men stressed strict virginity as far as women were concerned while the same rule did not rigidly apply to men. Philanderers were 'playboys' while women who did the same were labelled with all conceivable derogatory epithets.

Nandi's praises did not reflect any praiseworthy feminine features. Instead, they were composed in an exclusively personal and physical vein of pure criticism and disapproval.

Queen Monase (c. 1797 – c. 1880): A biographical outline

Vilakazi (1945: 50) argued and said that Queen Monase was originally one of the 'harem' girls of Emperor Shaka. Her palace, after becoming Prince Mpande's wife, was established at Mfaba hills on the south banks of the Black Umfolozi River. A section of Mpande's family presided over by Nqqumbazi (Cetshwayo's mother) resided on the South of Mhlathuze river. Thus, the two sections were about 80 miles apart, the palace of the king being between them, on the banks of the White Umfolozi River. Parties began gradually to associate themselves with either of these centers, and gave themselves the names of IziGqoza and Usuthu respectively.



Modern portrait of Queen Monase

IziGqoza and Usuthu were names of the adherents that formed respectively around Princes Mbuyazi and Cetshwayo when they became rivals for succession to the Zulu monarchy in the mid-1850s (Stuart 1926: 48-50). The name IziGqoza was derived from the fact that those threatened or about to be killed by Cetshwayo used to run off one by one to khonza (pay homage to) Mbuyazi at his Entengweni palace. This coming individually to khonza was said to be ukugqoza (Stuart 1926: 28-50). This view differed sharply from that of Maphalala (1985: 38) who argued that the word IziGqoza originated from Mbuyazi's adherents' war cry:

Laba!Laba! Lababayozebasibone!

(These! These! These we shall fix them).

According to Maphalala, these words were accompanied by the clattering of assegais and pointing in the direction of the "enemy."

Monase, however, featured during the outbreak of a civil war in the Zulu monarchy under Emperor Mpande KaSenzangakhona. The cause of the wrangle in Mpande's palace has been a bone of contention among historians. J.Y. Gibson (1911); R.C.A. Samuelson (1929); Brookes and Webb (1965); B. Roberts (1974); Jeff Guy (1979) and C. Ballard (1980) concurred with R.R.R.Dlomo (1951) and S.J. Maphalala (1985) that the main rivals to the succession were Cetshwayo and Mbuyazi.

Emperor Shaka had a romantic flirtation with Monase, the daughter of Mntungwa of the Nxumalo clan, born in 1797 (Dhlomo 1960: 59-60). He suspected Monase of being pregnant and presented her to Mpande. This was Shaka's tendency; his real motives could only be a matter of speculation. Thus, Monase became Mpande's honoured but not chief wife. She bore a son of Shaka called Mbuyazi, and gave birth to the following children of Mpande: Mkhungo, Mantantashiya, a girl named Hloyisile, Mdumba and another girl named Bathonyile (Okoye 1974: 93).

Shortly afterwards, Shaka sent a delegation to Tshana, chief (inkosi) of the Zungu clan, to pay ilobolo (cattle given to a girl's parents before a wedding) for his daughter Ngqumbazi to become Mpande's first order wife. She gave birth to Cetshwayo. Thus, Cetshwayo became heir to Mpande's throne according to Zulu customary law (Stuart 1926: 24-26).

In accordance with Zulu custom, Monase was a commoner. Her first-born son, therefore, could not normally become heir. That honour was reserved for the eldest son of the king's 'Great Wife' whom he would choose later. In Mpande's case, however, Ngqumbazi was his first order wife and a princess. This eventually justified Cetshwayo's contention that he was entitled to claim the rights of succession.

A few years later Mpande married Nomantshali KaSiguyana Ntuli of the Bheleni. She gave birth to Mthonga and Mpande loved her more than his other wives, including Ngqumbazi, who was held in high esteem by the Zulu people. Mthonga, realising that his mother was perceived as Mpande's favourite, thought that the realities of succession were likely to favour him. Thus, Mpande had three sons who, because of his vacillation, posed as possible claimants to the throne (Dhlomo 1960: 16).

To the Voortrekkers of the Transvaal Republic (especially in the Utrecht region), Mpande regarded Cetshwayo as his rightful successor. At his palace he publicly announced that Mbuyazi was the heir because his mother had been presented to him by Shaka. On the other hand, according to oral tradition, Mpande whispered the name of Mthonga, Nomantshali's son (Okoye 1974: 95).

The fact that Mpande had not yet named his 'Great Wife' (equivalent to queen) complicated matters. The progression of that state of incipient estrangement within the monarchy prompted Monase to encourage her son Mbuyazi to contest for the throne. This led to a growing antagonistic faction favouring Mbuyazi called iziGqoza.

Cetshwayo, enjoying a fairly large following of hot-blooded young men, assembled his adherents, called Usuthu. The Usuthu faction got its name from beautiful cattle captured from Swaziland in 1852. Because Cetshwayo had fought bravely in that campaign, these cattle were associated with him and became a symbol of Zulu pride (Maphalala 1985: 38).

Nevertheless, Mpande's skilful diplomacy, displayed in handling colonial establishments, proved ineffective in forging unity among his envious sons. This also stigmatised his dignity as the reigning monarch. A king he was, one may argue, but political matters in the 1850s were practically tabled before his sons Mbuyazi and Cetshwayo. Dhlomo (1960: 63) has argued that Mpande's extrication from public affairs was also due to his 'endless love' for his wife Nomantshali, with whom he spent long hours. Mtshapi (Stuart 1926: 61) one of James Stuart's informants, pointed out that the abantwana (princes) were set on to fight by the king himself, who said: 'Makhasana rejoices; let him see his rams butting each other.' Through Monase's nagging, he then set them on by cutting war-shields for them from the hide of a slaughtered beast. For Mbuyazi he cut a shield from the side with the wounds in it; for Cetshwayo he cut one from the opposite side (Pridmore 1987: 46). This infuriated Cetshwayo. In November 1856 Mpande gave Mbuyazi and his adherents territory on the Thukela southern boundary of the kingdom. Pridmore (1987: 47) argued that this was an attempt to gain support from Natal for his recognition of Mbuyazi.

While Monase appealed to the colonial establishment in Natal on behalf of Mbuyazi, Cetshwayo enjoyed considerable support from the royal amabutho and the leading amakhosi (potentates) Masiphulaka Mamba and Maphithaka Sojijisa of the Mandlakazi (Stuart 1926: 62). They saw in the conflict a chance to set up Cetshwayo as their own candidate for the throne. Upon this Mpande (Stuart 1926: 63) said: 'Wewu! Go, Mbuyazi, cross the river and go to the country of the English. I too was brought to power by them.'

Mbuyazi crossed the river at Dlokweni. When he had reached the other side his brother, Mantantashiya (Mpande to Scott 1857: 1/6/2) turned and said: 'Why are you running away from one who is the same age as you? Is it because you listened to your father, who told you to go to the country of the English, saying that he too had been brought to power by the English? Are you going to become king by hiding among the English?'

Mbuyazi turned back, for he listened to the word of Mantantashiya that he had been afraid and was running away from his brother Cetshwayo, and rejected the advice of his father. He went back across the Thukela and went up the Ndulinde ridge. Mbuyazi, however, realised the hopelessness of his position and moved towards the Thukela with the entire IziGqoza faction. Such a move was based on two reasons, i.e. a conflict was imminent and he hoped for a measure of support from the colonial government of Natal, as Mpande and her mother, Monase, had advised.

Secondly, he would have placed his adherents within the reach of safety should the battle turn unfavourable for them. An emissary from Monase informed the colonial powers in Natal that Mpande had instructed Mbuyazi to solicit the assistance of the colonial establishment and traders. Mpande apparently felt that the traders, at least, were under an obligation to him for the protection which they had previously received from him against the Voortrekkers (Theal 1908: 251). Mbuyazi had also previously been to the Colony of Natal to visit Captain James Walmsely, whose Zulu name was Mantshonga (the man who walked rather strangely). Walmsely was the British Border Agent.

The Natal government therefore exploited Mpande's preference of Mbuyazi as his successor to the throne instead of Cetshwayo. But Cetshwayo was preferred by the majority of the Zulus, while being negatively viewed by the Natal government, especially because of his avowed antagonism towards Whites. On 15 November 1856 a meeting took place near the Msunduze River, where a delegation from Mpande reported that Masiphulaka Mamba was Mbuyazi's adversary. Monase suggested that her son's delegation hold discussions with Captain Walmsley for possible military assistance (Stuart & Malcolm 1926: 79-80).

These talks ended in John Dunn ('Jantoni') leading a contingent of 135 men in support of Mbuyazi. John Dunn was Captain Walmsley's interpreter and constable. Assured of military aid, Mbuyazi went back to Zululand accompanied by John Dunn's men armed with Enfield rifles.

Maphalala (1985: 6) argued:

It was hoped that the force from Natal with the advantage of superior weapons would boost the morale of the iziGqoza faction which was numerically smaller than Cetshwayo's forces. Thus, the battle of Ndongakusuka took place on 2 December 1856. It started close to the homestead of Nongalazaka Nondela near the Mandeni stream. This was between the Ndulinde ridge and the Thukela River.

The Usuthu faction was given the order to advance at a bush at Ndulinde by Cetshwayo, assisted by Mnyamana Buthelezi. First the Ndabakawombe regiment was sent up the Mandeni stream. It was followed by the Dlambedu regiment of Mpande and subsequently the isaNgqu, the iziNgulube, then the Sihlambisinye (i.e. the Mdlalose, Manqondo, amaNcube and the Dloko) – so called because Cetshwayo forced them to join him by attacking homesteads situated in the country that had been given to Mbuyazi by Mpande. Cetshwayo and his adherents camped on both sides of the Mhlathuze, high up. That was where the Sihlambisinye subsequently joined him. This was near Nomveve (a locality in the Mhlathuze valley, northwest of the present day Eshowe) (Schreuder to Walmsley 1857: 179/43).

The first clash took place west of Nongalaza's homestead (Nongalaza was dead by the time of the battle). A younger brother of Mbuyazi, Shonkweni, supported him militarily. His ibutho (regiment) was the iziMpisi. The Mandhlakazi faction was Cetshwayo's 'left horn' and they launched an offensive southward along the beach. They defeated the iziGqoza on the left horn of the battle array. They clashed with the iziGqoza 'right horn' (Rutherford 1929: 348-359).

The other iziGqoza, who had defeated the Ndabakawombe, Dlambedu, isaNgqu and iziNgulube began to retreat on seeing their 'right horn' defeated by the Mandhlakazi. They killed all women and children (Gouws 1856: 48/380), saying: '(Sibond' isijingi) we are mashing up porridge.'

In Zulu warfare, women were normally not allowed to escape, due to the fact that they bore fighting men. The Mandhlakazi fought the Mkhweyantaba, Khinya, and Thukela amabutho of Mbuyazi's iziGqoza. Maphitha KaSojijisa defeated them and started retreating in planned order. This mode of orderly withdrawal continued until they reached the Thukela. They could see that the Mandhlakazi had defeated the other 'horn'. Cetshwayo's 'right horn' action took place to the west of Nongalaza's homestead, near Sithebe (the present-day Mandeni) (Gouws 1856: 48/380).

This is where one ibutho after another was defeated by the iziGqoza, viz. the Ndabakawombe, Dhlambedu, isaNqqu, and iziNgulube. In the meantime, Maphitha, on the left, had caused Mbuyazi's 'right horn' to retreat. Only those warriors unable to keep up with the rest were killed by Cetshwayo's Usuthu until various places on the Thukela were reached. Many iziGqoza tried to escape and were eventually killed by the Usuthu (Shepstone to Fynn 1856: 1/1/6). The river carried their bodies away to the sea.

Then Cetshwayo caused the ingomane to be sounded. Ingomane was the noise made by the amabutho beating on their shields with their assegais. Mbuyazi was killed at Ndongakusuka together with five other sons of King Mpande. These were Shonkweni, Mantantashiya, Somklawana, Mdumba, and Dabulesinye. In fact, Cetshwayo's imbongi (Nyembezi 1983: 90) bellowed:

Wadl' uShonkweni, obezalwawu Mpande,
 [You devoured Shonkweni son of Mpande]
 Amakhubal' adliwauyenakwabaka Mpande;
 [Medicines were eaten by him from Mpande]
 Wadl' uMantantashiya, obezalwawu Mpande,
 [You devoured Mantantashiya son of Mpande]
 Amakhubal' adliwauyenakwabaka Mpande;
 [Medicines were eaten by him from Mpande]
 Wadl' uSomklawana, obezalwawu Mpande,
 [You devoured Somklawana son of Mpande]
 Amakhubal' adliwawu Cetshwayo son of Mpande;

Morris (1968: 196) painted a rather dismal picture of the battle of Ndongakusuka:

The stream at Ndongakusuka was marked for decades by a great white smear of skeletons, and was forever after known as the Mathambo – 'the place of bone'.

After this battle, Monase wept for her lost sons on the banks of uThukela River and crossed over to Natal where she lived in obscurity until she died in 1888 (Vilakazi 1945: 50).

Queen Monase: through the keyhole of oral history

Quoted from Vilakazi (1945: 50), Queen Monase was praised as:

USidididi!
 Umbiliniwezinkabi,
 Udladlalexhangomkhonto,
 Amakhosikaziedlangezinqindi,
 Umfazionesilevunjengendoda.
 Creator of confusion!
 Like the entrails of oxen,
 Thy homestead dips with a stabbing spear/ one who occupies a prominent position
 While other women's homesteads eat with short-handled spears/ while others occupy less prominent ones.
 The woman with a beard like a man!

Monase's praises were devoid of important historical events and began with an unflattering reference to her size. This was a metaphor extended by emphasis into the second line, with the entrails of an ox used as an image to describe her endless proportions!

Lines 3 and 4 of her praises were taken from the praises of Songiya, King Mpande's mother. The use of the metaphor udladla also referred to a powerful or masculine person, which, taken with the last line, was further evidence of the court poet's wish to bring home the point of her masculine appearance (Turner 1990: 49). Beauty evidently played an important role in Zulu society. Cope (1968: 21) commented that in Zulu society:

Broad face, broad hips, firm flesh, especially large firm breasts and buttocks are features that seem to enjoy special attention as far as women are concerned.

Thus a woman who was big, with a physical structure that resembled that of a man, was looked upon not with disdain, but rather with wonderment. According to Zulu social standards, women were supposed to be feminine and petite. Beautiful women played an ambivalent role in Zulu monarchy in that they were exalted for their beauty and were enjoyed merely as attractive beings. Women were, however, condemned if they used their beauty to deceive or topple men.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Queens Nandi and Monase unequivocally made an historic contribution in shaping the Zulu monarchy. Their praises provided an interesting contrast to what was normally contained in most of the traditional praises of royalty. They entailed extensive praising, in that they revealed the existence of a type of poetry that might be noted as satirical poetry. Nandi's praises detailed her favourable and unfavourable qualities in harsh reality, regardless of her royal status (Zondi 1996: 12). These particular praises, when considered as praises of royal *personae*, were not on the same elevated plane as those of their male counterparts. Rather, they were typical examples of the praises of commoners, remaining on the domestic level of criticism and complaint.

Despite the fact that Nandi's praises were not elevated, she was portrayed as strong-willed, ambitious, tenacious, bitter and a caring mother who wanted only the best for her children. Her tenacity of thought eventually paid off when her son was installed as king over the Zulu monarchy. In the case of Monase, the court poet placed emphasis on her physical attributes (Vilakazi 1945: 51). She was presented as a gigantic woman and her physical build was of interest to the court poet. These illustrious royal women of the Zulu monarchy, Queens Nandi and Monase, did in various ways clearly contribute to the history of the Zulu monarchy as we know it today. Their contributions were not the work of a novelist trying to amaze the world with super-human tales. Queens Nandi and Monase overcame giant obstacles to do the impossible, wrestled with doubt and struggled to overcome their own inconsistencies.

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