

**ORALITY- LITERACY DEBATE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO SELECTED WORK OF S. E. K. MQHAYI**



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

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THE ORALITY - LITERACY DEBATE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
SELECTED WORK OF S. E. K. MQHAYI

By

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

THE ORALITY - LITERACY DEBATE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED WORK OF S.E.K. MQHAYI

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M A Thesis, Department of Xhosa, University of the Western Cape.

In the thesis, I explore the relation between orality and literacy and my emphasis is on oral poetry and written poetry.

It is true that we live in times of technology and print as a result there is a tendency to overlook the role of orality or of oral literature. The thesis draws the attention of its readers to the role played by orality in the development of written literature. It also highlights the fact that orality and literacy exist in a continuum. In other words, the two are inseparable.

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Because of the broad nature of orality, it is difficult to cover everything on orality. My focus is on Xhosa oral and written poetry. The discussion in the thesis is based on the information from existing literature, the responses from the questionnaires and the interviews with some Xhosa *iimbongi* who have reflected on their personal experiences. In addition to this, Mqhayi is at the centre of discussion because as a prominent Xhosa *imbongi* he features in both the oral and the written world. He is a renowned traditional *imbongi* as well as a preacher, a teacher and he has published widely. In the thesis Mqhayi features as an agent who represents a transition from oral to written poetry.

Since literature exists in a socio-cultural and socio-historical context, my discussion on orality and literacy is based on the historical development of Xhosa literature. In

my discussion, I take into account the socio-political changes that took place over the years.

August 2004



DECLARATION

I declare that *The Orality - Literacy debate with special reference to selected work of S. E. K. Mqhayi* is my work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

1.

Nosisi Lynette Mpolweni

August 2004-05-20

Signed:



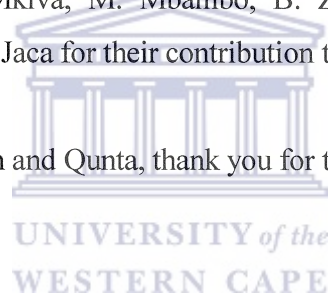
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I thank the Almighty, without Him; I would not be where I am today.

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- The iimbongi, Z. Mkiva, M. Mbambo, B. Zantsi, D. Hoho, Z. Batyi, B. Lizo, D.Mkangisa, and M. Jaca for their contribution to the study.

To my children, Tusin and Qunta, thank you for the patience.



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This means that when analysing literature, one should not see it as an isolated entity but rather as a component of the culture of that particular society. Factors affecting society are also reflected in literature. The underlying assumption of this viewpoint is that literature does not occur in a vacuum and has existed since the earliest times whether through writing or by word of mouth.

With this background in mind, the thesis will focus on the extent to which orality and literacy are related. Xhosa poetry, oral and written, will serve as the basis for the investigation.

1.2 Statement of the problem

It is a fact that the debate on the relationship between oral poetry and modern or written poetry has been going on for quite long. Important questions that still need to be addressed in this debate are:

- How do oral poetry and modern poetry interact?
- To what extent do socio-historical, socio-cultural and socio-political factors influence the content and form of poetry, be it oral or written?

No consensus agreement has been reached in this regard. It is for this reason that I decided to embark on this study.

Some of the factors that contribute to the contradicting viewpoints regarding oral and written poetry stem from the different theoretical frameworks from which critics of literature operate. As Schipper (1989: 64) puts it, “oral literature has often been left by scholars of literature as a stepchild to anthropologists and folklorists”. This point is confirmed in Finnegan (1970:1) who states clearly that:

The concept of an oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy or written tradition. The unwritten forms (of literature) however, are far less widely known and appreciated. Such forms do not fit neatly into the familiar categories of literate

cultures.

This view raises a lot of questions to many people more especially to African people whose literature has its roots in oral literature. In response to this argument we can refer to Awoonor's statement:

In discussing oral literature in Africa, it must be assumed that we are discussing a large corpus of material which has its total integrity, impact and realisation only within the scope of performance, transmission and occasion.
(1983:1)

The above argument clearly illustrates that oral literature does exist and it has clearly identifiable qualities which are manifest in performance, transmission and the occasion. If oral poetry is an entity of oral literature, how do these arguments affect the status of oral poetry? Let me shelve this question for a later discussion in Chapter two.

Another crucial question is whether some critics doubt the existence of oral literature or oral poetry despite the fact that written or modern literature or more specifically modern poetry has its roots in oral poetry. To some critics modern poetry is in fact oral literature in written form. Other critics such as Schipper (1989: 64) argue that “most of the time we deal with oral literature only in transcribed, written form”. The question is, what criteria do the critics of literature apply to motivate their arguments? Do they regard written poetry or literature as a mere transformation of the oral word into print, or do they consider the fact that written poetry is a composition by humankind who is constantly influenced by experiences in the environment? On the other hand, critics such as Finnegan who has done important research on African literature, see the link between oral and written literature as rather relative. These contending viewpoints do not only affect the critics per se but the student of African literature is also left in a dilemma as Amuta (1989:104) puts it:

The initial shock which a first year (African) undergraduate student of African literature is bound to experience will rise from the fact that the identity of his subject of study is presented as an object of controversy. Our student's shock is bound to be aggravated by

the fact that, although his basic identity as an African is not in doubt, an aspect of his cultural heritage and identity is subjected to such a wide variety of interpretations.

One will notice that Amuta is raising a crucial aspect in this argument, i.e. that literature is a socio-cultural phenomenon. In other words, the understanding and interpretation of literature also means the understanding of that particular culture, or conversely, one could argue that one's identity is also reflected in one's literature. It means that literature whether oral or written, exists in a particular social context.

Macleish in Heyen's **American Poets** (1976:106) shares the same feelings:

To present the great alternative is to present the poem not as a message in a bottle, and not as an object in an uninhabited landscape, but as an option in the world, an action in which we ourselves are actors.

The above quotation emphasizes the fact that to understand poetry, one has to perceive it in the context of the society in which it exists. The implication is that, poetry is a creation by humankind living in a particular society and who is influenced by his culture and socio-political changes that may take place during a particular period. If humankind lives in a changing world, what does this imply regarding his thoughts? How is his art, in this case poetry, influenced by these changes? These are the kinds of questions one has to address, before one can arrive at a conclusion whether oral poetry is merely written orality or not. In other words, one has to consider many factors such as the context in which the poem is written, the prevailing conditions of that particular period, the subject to which the poem is directed, etc. These arguments will form the essence of the thesis.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The main objectives of the thesis are to:

- a) Clarify the nature and status of orality with special reference to the status of Xhosa oral poetry and that of the oral poet (*imbongi*).

- b) Investigate the significance of the transition from oral to written poetry using selected work by S. E .K. Mqhayi and some of his contemporaries such as J .J .R. Jolobe, W. B. Rubusana, W. Gqoba and J. P. Solilo.
- c) Determine the impact of oral poetry on modern poetry with special reference to Mqhayi's work and the work of modern poets such as Shasha, Hoho and Mkiva.
- d) Find out whether modern Xhosa poetry is just written oral poetry.
- e) Explore the role of socio-historical, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic factors in the development of Xhosa poetry.

It will be noted that Mqhayi is the key figure in the thesis. The reason for this is that Mqhayi is one of the greatest Xhosa oral poets (*iimbongi*) whose work and talent have made a remarkable contribution to the development of Xhosa literature, both oral and written. This is evident in the poems, essays and novels he has produced which encompass both the historical and socio-political experiences of his people.



His first two poems which were published in the journal, *Izwi labaNtu* (The Voice of the People) in 1897 are a good illustration of the above statement. In the first poem which is entitled, *Izwe lakwaNdlambe* (The Domain of the Ndlambe People), Mqhayi declared his unshakeable loyalty and fidelity to the policy and traditions of his people. Hence after publishing these two poems he was acclaimed as " *Imbongi yakwaGompo neyeSizwe jikelele*" (The *imbongi* from Gompo and of the whole nation).

His second poem also shares the same convictions because in this poem Mqhayi portrayed his quest to transcend local and ethnic considerations and by so doing advocated unity among his people. Mqhayi's commitment to his people is further acknowledged in Opland's *Izwi labaNtu*:

Naxa uMqhayi wayesengumfana okuma-27 eminyaka, wayeselebonakalisa iimpawu ezathi zamenza wathandwa ngabefundisi bakhe, ebonisa ulwazi olunzulu lwembali

yabaMnyama nezithethe zabo, ukubathanda kwakhe ngendlela engumangaliso abantu bakhe, nokuzingca okungenakumbi ngezinto abathe bafikelela kuzo, ukuzikhathaza okukhulu ngabacinezweyo, nomsindo ovuthayo ngokuphathelele kuloo ngcinezelo yabo, nokuyithiya kwakhe okungafihlisiyo intswela-bulungisa...

(1994:102)

Although Mqhayi was still a young man of 27 years, he already had qualities which made his teachers proud of him, showing his indepth knowledge of the history of Black people and their customs, his love for his people, his sincere pride for their achievements, his deep concern for the oppressed and burning anger regarding this oppression, and an uncompromising resentment against injustice.

(my translation)

The above extract is self explanatory of Mqhayi's dedication to the success and freedom of his nation hence he acquired the name "The poet of the Nation." His convictions are not only evident in his poems but also in his novels such as *Ityala lamaWele* (1914) (The Lawsuit of the Twins) in which Mqhayi tries to instil in the hearts and minds of his people that they have a tradition that they should be proud of. For instance, in the introductory chapter of this book Mqhayi states:

Kweli balana ndizama ukubonisa imigudu, nenkxamleko, nexesha elithatyathwayo ngamaXhosa xa alanda umthetho...Intetho nemikhwa yesiXhosa iya itshona ngokutshona...

(1914: v)

In this short story I am trying to illustrate the efforts and the time taken by the Xhosa people in conducting court procedures...The language and the customs of the Xhosa people are gradually fading away....

(my translation)

In the above quotation, Mqhayi highlights an important point about the function of an *imbongi*

namely that of being the eye of the nation. This function is illustrated by the phrase, “ *Intetho nemikhwa yesiXhosa iya itshona ngokutshona...*”. In other words, Mqhayi is concerned that Xhosa tradition should be preserved. Since a discussion of the role of an *imbongi* will be dealt with in Chapter 2, I will not dwell on this point.

Another significant point for choosing Mqhayi is that he bridges the nineteenth and the twentieth century regarding the development of Xhosa literature. As Kuse (1996: 5) puts it, Mqhayi “was an oral bard in a literary age, and he was a literatus carrying an oral tradition”. It is because of the role that Mqhayi played in the development and upliftment of not only Xhosa poetry but of Xhosa literature in general that I feel he is best suited for my research.

1.4 Definition of terms

The following terms are some of the main concepts that I will use in the thesis:

a) LITERATURE:

Literature refers to both oral and written forms of art. This concept includes all literary genres usually distinguished in modern (written) literature as: poetry, novel, drama, short stories, etc, as well as those genres usually distinguished in traditional (oral) literature namely, folktales, oral poetry, proverbs, riddles, etc.

b) ORALITY

The term orality can be described in different ways depending on the context in which one views it. In its broadened sense, orality as described by Warren d’Azevedo in Kaschula (2001:128) can be defined as:

An artistic way of doing, of behaving and of seeing, having as its primary goal, the creation of a product or the effect of a particular kind. Such effect may be religious, communicative, recreative, economic, political, moral, legal etc.

According to Amuka in Kaschula (2001: 128):

Orality constitutes the whole repertoire of a people's communicative network by means of which they construct their culture through religious, artistic, political and other social arrangements. Orality may include oral literature which in turn includes oral poetry that is composed orally and circulates mainly in oral form.

It is against the above background that orality will be viewed in the thesis. In other words, I will look at orality from a broad perspective taking into account all the aspects that constitute oral and written traditions.

c) MODERN LITERATURE

The terms Modern Literature and Written Literature will be used interchangeably. They refer to literature which appears in written form.

d) IMBONGI

The term *imbongi* refers to a person who sings praises.

e) IMBONGI YOMTHONYAMA

The *imbongi yomthonyama* can be described as a traditional *imbongi* who in the past was mainly associated with the chief. He has certain unique qualities and a certain type of dress. His poetry is mainly oral but in the modern times, traditional *iimbongi* also produce their poetry in print.

1.5 Literature review

The term "literature" is a broad subject because different scholars of literature have different interpretations of this term. Since the focus of the thesis is on Xhosa literature, the discussion in this section will be based on the viewpoints of scholars who have done research in African literature.

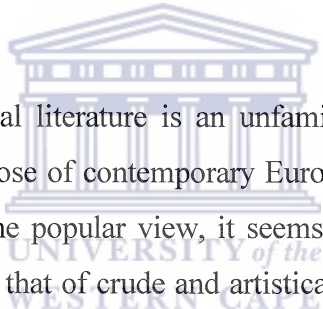
There is a general tendency with some critics of African literature to equate literature with

writing. This tendency has sparked a lot of controversy regarding the status and suitability of the term “literature” when we refer to oral literature. Chadwick N. in Finnegan (1970:15) is explicit about this point:

In civilised countries we are inclined to associate literature with writing; but such an association is accidental...Millions of people throughout Asia, Polynesia, Africa and even Europe who practise the art of literature have no knowledge of letters.

The danger of concentrating on the written forms of literature has resulted in the marginalization of the literature of societies whose art is produced and transmitted orally, as it is the case with African literature.

In response to the contending viewpoints with regard to the status of orality, Finnegan (1970: 1), has this to say:



The concept of an oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view, it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other, that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations...There is no mystery about the first and most basic characteristic of oral literature – even though it is constantly overlooked in the collections and analyses. This is the significance of the actual performance.

From the above statement, it is clear that some critics disregard the importance of oral literature, since to them literature refers to products in print. Finnegan further argues that there is no good reason to deny the title of "literature" to corresponding African forms just because they happen to be oral. In fact, she stresses the fact that oral literature possesses vastly more aesthetic, social and personal significance than would be gathered from most general publications on Africa. This point is reflected in her assertion that:

...the printed words alone represent only a shadow of the full actualisation of the poem as an aesthetic experience for poet and audience. For, quite apart from the separate

question of the overtones and symbolic associations of words and phrases, the actual enactment of a poem also involves the emotional situation...

(ibid: 3).

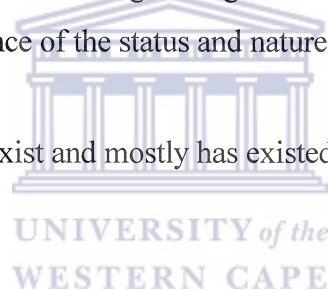
The above statement highlights the status of oral poetry since the performance of a poem transcends the words and appeals to the audience feelings. The significance of orality is also cited from Amuka's statement in Kaschula (2001:128) who claims that:

Whatever knowledge people possess, its origin lies in orality. Human beings are either 'literate' or 'orate', if not both, for, whatever they derive from written sources has to be oralised for it to make sense.

Amuka's statement points out to a crucial role of orality, namely, that written literature is derived from orality. This point has a great significance in stressing the link between orality. Ong who also speaks in defence of the status and nature of orality, has this to say:

Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality.

(1982:8)



Without doubt, this comment enhances the status of orality. He further stresses his point by saying:

Thus writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organise the principles or constituents of oratory into a scientific art...

(ibid: 9).

There are two crucial points that can be highlighted from Ong's argument. Firstly, he states that orality has existed without writing but writing never without orality. This statement emphasizes the inevitable role of orality as it is a stepping-stone of written literature. Secondly, the statement suggests a chain of continuity between orality and written literature.

Using Thuynsma's terms (1983:16), the controversy surrounding the use of oral literature as a viable term seems purely technical, specifically semantic. We might as well "liberate" literature from its erstwhile, over-literal definition, and get down to appreciating the work. Our concern should rather be to savour its transmission as we do the published work, for it is in the transmission that we can best approach the aesthetic.

We can summarise the debate on the status of oral tradition or oral literature by referring to Lawrence Lerner's suggestion in Thynsma (1983) on the term "literature". He identifies three basic qualities which determine the term literature namely:

Literature is knowledge,
it is the expression of emotion, and
it has the power to arouse emotion in its audience.
(Thuynsma: 1983: 20)

If we base our argument on the three qualities mentioned above, we can conclude that literature requires one to operate both at an emotional and intellectual or imaginative levels. In other words, the ability to articulate intellectual activity is more apt to constitute literature than the ability to document it in writing. The power of orality is confirmed in Kaschula (2001:129) who states that, "orality has always held sway over the shaping of human consciousness and experience". If viewed in the light of its spellbound influence over the human mind and body, orality means power.

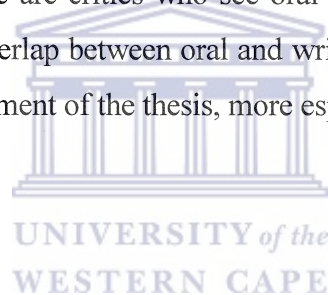
How do these arguments affect the status of oral poetry? Finnegan (1979:127) emphasizes the status of oral poetry by identifying three ways in which a poem can be called "oral," namely: through its composition, through its mode transmission, and through its performance.

These characteristics are not only crucial in the discussion of the nature of oral poetry, but also in identifying the relationship between oral poetry and modern poetry. Similarly, the viewpoints of some critics who perceive modern poetry as merely written orality also raise many questions.

The above argument is based on the assumption that literature refers to "texts". But Whitaker and other critics such as Moto see literacy as transcending the text itself. I share the same feelings because literature is a creation of a social being whose art is influenced by socio-cultural circumstances and changes. Francis Moto confirms this point because he describes literacy as a fairly complex phenomenon. In his article, *The effects of Literacy on an Orally-Based Society* in Whitaker and Sienaert (1986:115), Moto describes literacy as "a fundamental human right, a basic need, an instrument for social and economic development, and as a means to politicise a generation". This view will play an important part in the discussion of the role of Mqhayi's work in the development of Xhosa literature in Chapter 3.

In the above discussion, crucial issues have emerged regarding the status of oral literature and the relation between oral literature and written literature. It became evident that for some critics, literature refers to words or text while to others literature transcends the word and includes aesthetic oral qualities. There are critics who see oral literature as a stepping-stone of written literature. This implies an overlap between oral and written literature. These issues will play an important role in the development of the thesis, more especially in Chapter 5.

1.6 Research methodology



In the thesis, I have used three methods of data collection namely bibliographical research, interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaires were most convenient in cases where the *imbongi* was not easily accessible. The reason for using these methods was to gather a wide range of information on the topic. Most of the material that I have gathered is from the books and theses that deal with Xhosa poetry, journals and conference papers. I obtained most of the material from the libraries of the following universities: Western Cape, Stellenbosch and Cape Town.

The interviews were very helpful because I could get first-hand information on the issues I intended to address in the thesis. I conducted my first interview with Zolani Mkiva on 6 October 1999 in Johannesburg. Mkiva is a dynamic *imbongi* who has performed both nationally and internationally. He has also produced a poem which has been taken up in Mtuzze and Kaschula's *Izibongo zomthonyama*. On 18 February 2000 I held an interview

with Daluxolo Hoho in Gugulethu. Hoho performs in public and is a co-writer of the anthology of poetry, *Imbongi ijong' exhantini*. The interview with Mncedi Mbambo was conducted on 17 March 2000 at Stellenbosch. Mbambo performs in public and has produced a number of books that include prose and poetry. Among his publications are *Iphoco* and *Ucanzibe*. The interview with Zama Batyi was conducted on 20 June 2000 at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). At the time of the interview he was a student at UWC. He also performs in public and was in the process of writing for publication. On 15 September 2000, I held an interview with Dr. Abner Nyamende at the University of Cape Town. Nyamende is a co-writer of the poetry anthology, *Imbongi ijong' exhantini*. Most of his poems are written in English. The interview with Bulelani Zantsi was held on 22 July 2001 at the University of the Western Cape. At the time of the interview Zantsi was a student at UWC. He has performed at many occasions at the university such as the graduation ceremony and on Heritage Day. His performances extend to the community and in parliament. The interview with Dalukuhlomla Mkangisa was held on 3 March 2002 in Gugulethu. Mkangisa is an aspiring *imbongi* who performs in public. He is a member of the *Icamagu* Institute: an organization of African Traditional Religion. The interview with Melikhaya Jaca was held on 12 April 2003 at the University of the Western Cape. Jaca is a student at UWC. He performs in public. Since some of the *iimbongi* that I have interviewed do perform in public and have published some of their poems, I found this a favourable situation in establishing the link between a poem that is presented orally and the one that is produced in print.

Apart from the *iimbongi*, I managed to gather valuable information from the following people: Prof Ed Katz, Mr D. Ainslie and Ms Alet van Huyssteen. Prof Katz is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape. Mr Ainslie is a former lecturer at Good Hope of Education in Khayelitsha. Ms van Huyssteen is a lecturer in the Xhosa Department at the University of the Western Cape.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 gives a background to the term 'oral literature' and introduces the reader to the different viewpoints of some scholars of literature with regard to the nature of oral literature. The aims and objectives of the study are highlighted as well as the research methodology that

was used to collect information for the study. The issues that emerged in Chapter 1 regarding the nature of oral literature form the basis of the discussion.

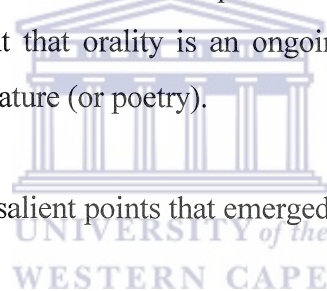
In Chapter 2, I explore the nature and status of the traditional *imbongi* and that of Xhosa oral poetry. The discussion includes the characteristics of oral poetry.

In Chapter 3, I look at the link between oral and written poetry. The role of Mqhayi as a transitional figure between oral and written traditions forms the core of the discussion.

In Chapter 4, I explore Mqhayi's role as a transitional figure by comparing his work with that of his contemporaries such as Jolobe, Rubusana and Solilo.

In Chapter 5, I investigate the influence of Mqhayi on modern *iimbongi*. My emphasis is on the themes, subject of praise and the context of performance. Other issues that I address in this chapter include the argument that orality is an ongoing process and that there is an overlap between oral and written literature (or poetry).

In Chapter 6, I reflect on the salient points that emerged from the discussion. I also highlight my findings of the thesis.



CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE AND STATUS OF THE TRADITIONAL IMBONGI AND THAT OF XHOSA ORAL POETRY

2.1 What was the role of the traditional imbongi?

Before we can answer the above question I think it would be wise to first understand the role of oral tradition from which the notion of a traditional *imbongi* stems. In other words we should not only see the traditional *imbongi* as a person but rather as a product of a certain tradition with its customs and values or what can be termed its philosophy of life. The perception of the traditional *imbongi* will be guided by the background of the oral tradition to which the *imbongi* belongs. Speaking about oral tradition, Zumthor has this to say:

No one would deny the important role traditions have played in the history of mankind: archaic civilizations and a good many cultures still marginal today have maintained themselves solely or principally by means of these traditions.
(1990:4)

The above quotation places tradition at the centre of one's life. This implies that an *imbongi*'s work of art is determined by his cultural background. One will remember that each society has its tradition that encompasses habits, beliefs and customs. The way in which members of that particular society interpret the world is manifested in these beliefs and customs, in other words a member of a particular society is able to identify himself with other members through the common tradition that is followed in that society.

If we take the example of African oral literature, we will find that African people were marginalized for decades due to colonial rule, but since they had strong adherence to their oral traditions which were transferred from generation to generation through folktales, praise songs, dance etc, this enabled them to retain their status. Even today, one will notice that in the new dispensation of a rainbow nation in South Africa, Africans are still proud of their traditional

songs, dances and praise songs. They are performed both at social and official gatherings such as the illustrious inauguration of a president.

The contribution of oral tradition can be reinforced by looking at the definition of oral literature as described by two unidentified East African scholars in Okpewho's *African Oral literature* (1992:56). These scholars contend that:

Oral literature may be defined as those utterances, whether spoken or recited or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination and ingenious expression.

The above definition highlights an important quality of oral tradition or oral literature, namely that it is an intellectual activity that involves imagination, in other words, it requires a sharp eye which can observe accurately and at the same time create a mental picture of the subject which will be transformed into a particular art form. This apt description of how oral tradition operates corresponds with Ong's claim that human beings in primary oral cultures, i.e. those untouched by printing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practise great wisdom, but they do not study. This implies that a great deal of wisdom is acquired even in those cultures where knowledge is transferred orally. This claim will be substantiated in the forthcoming description of the role played by the traditional *imbongi* or oral poetry.

To start with, the traditional *imbongi* had certain unique qualities that made him different from an ordinary man. This unique quality of an *imbongi* is illustrated in Jordan (1973: 112) where he states that one of the essential qualities of *ubumbongi* (being an *imbongi*) was "true patriotism, not blind loyalty to the person or the chief, but loyalty to the principles that the chieftainship does or ought to stand for". The *iimbongi* drew attention to the praiseworthy habits and attributes of reigning monarchs as well as to their foibles. This point is evident in the following lines from chief Ngangelizwe's praises where the *imbongi* exposes his tyranny.

LiRhamb'elineendevu lakwa Mthikrakra elabonwa
ngabafazi bakwaMbanga bephangela.
SisiGcaw'esinoboya sakwaNgub'engcuka.

NguKhalakhulu lilum 'abantwana;
Liluml'uMbanga noGqirana...
NguGez'elagezelwa ngamagqwir'akowalo...
NguNdlw'enezibungu...

He is the Bearded Puffadder of Mthikrakra's domain, which was seen by the women of Mbanga's household while going to work.

He is Hairy-Spider of Ngubengcuka's domain...

He is Cactus-which-weans-children,
weaning Mbanga and Gqirhana.

He is Naughty -one, taunted by the warlocks of his home,...

He is House-with-maggots...

(Kuse: 1973:115-116)

The description of chief Ngangelizwe from the above lines reflects anti-social behaviour that is not exemplary. Because of his outrageous behaviour, his character is equated to that of poisonous animals namely a puffadder and a spider and also a bitter substance cactus. It is alleged that chief Ngangelizwe was a womaniser and he was once caught with women from Mbanga who were on their way to work. The metaphors Bearded-Puffadder and Hairy-Spider can be associated with his stature: he was well built, tall, hairy and a man of status. In fact, the nickname, Bearded-Puffadder is also a metaphor for the penis and this ties in well with the description of a "womaniser". This appearance intimidated the women and they found themselves defenceless. As one would imagine, this act was condemned by the society as it promotes immorality. Similarly, his description as a cactus reinforces the poisonous character of chief Ngangelizwe. The cactus is usually used by the Xhosa people as "poison" to wean children from the breast. According to the *imbongi*, he is also a poison that weans men from their wives.

In the opinion of the *imbongi*, the society is going through a phase of degeneration as he describes it as a "house of maggots" due to the disgraceful leadership of the chief. From the above description we can also highlight the role of the *imbongi* as a critic of the social unit who felt free and uncoerced to express his concerns. His licence to criticize permitted adequate room

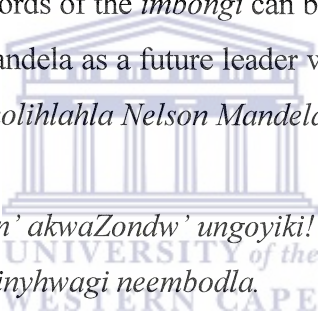
for indirect witty references to the bad habits of the chief using carefully chosen metaphors. The chief on the other hand, would accept any criticism as a constructive contribution towards nation building. In other words, the *imbongi* had a special talent of invoking a spirit of patriotism. This talent is evident in the extract found in Brown (1999:55) which is taken from Mandela's *Long walk to Freedom*. In this extract Mandela recalls the effect of hearing the illustrious Xhosa *imbongi*, S.E.K.Mqhayi, perform his popular poem, *A! Silimela* at the college he attended. He testifies how he was touched by the words of the *imbongi* in his delivery:

Mqhayi then began to recite his well-known poem in which he apportions the stars in the heavens to the various nations of the world...Roving the stage and gesturing with his assegai towards the sky, he said that to the people of Europe- the French, the Germans, the English- 'I give you the Milky Way, the largest constellation, for you are a strange people, full of greed and envy who quarrel over plenty'. He allocated certain stars to Asian nations and to North and South America. He then discussed Africa and separated the continent into different nations, giving specific constellations to different tribes... now, suddenly, he became still and lowered his voice. 'Now come you, O House of Xhosa', he said, and slowly began to lower himself so that he was on one knee. 'I give unto you the most important and transcendent star, the Morning Star, for you are a proud and powerful people. It is the star for counting the years- the years of manhood'

Without doubt, Mqhayi in the above extract displays the role that Jordan describes as true patriotism. The phrases "...now, suddenly, he became still and lowered his voice. 'Now come you, O House of Xhosa...'" demonstrate this point. The sudden pause, change in his voice and style of praising, signify respect and honour he attached to his nation. In other words, he was now drawing the attention of his listeners to the nation he was about to address and which he was part of, carefully selecting the Xhosa people from the rest of the nations. His commitment is also enhanced by the fact that while uttering these words he even kneeled down, showing respect and love for this nation. This had a great impact on his listeners. This impact is also evident in the skilful technique he applied of moving from a more nationalistic all-encompassing theme of African unity to a more parochial one addressed to the Xhosa people, of whom he was one. By so doing, he could stimulate the hearts and minds of these people so that they remain conscious and proud of their nation as the testimony given by Mandela in Brown

(1999:55) suggests, “I did not want ever to stop applauding. I felt such intense pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa; I felt like one of the chosen people.”

The above testimony reflects a spirit of national unity that has been imprinted in the mind of the speaker by the words of the *imbongi*. The intensity of this influence is quite evident in the manner in which the speaker expresses his feelings as the words, “such intense pride” illustrate. In fact, the description of the *imbongi*'s performance is so accurate as though Mandela is actually watching the *imbongi* performing at this very moment. For instance, he indicates when the *imbongi* applied gestures, intonation, etc. This shows that the memories of this performance are still fresh in his mind. One can conclude that the *imbongi*'s words were a source of inspiration. Since Mandela is one of the great patriots, the first Black President in South Africa and renowned leader who sacrificed a great part of his life for the freedom not only of Xhosa people but of all South Africans, it means that his dream of “being one of the chosen people” has been fulfilled. Thus the words of the *imbongi* can be seen as having prophetic connotations. In fact the prophecy about Mandela as a future leader was given by the *imbongi* Yali-Manisi in his prophetic poem *Unkosi Rholihlahla Nelson Mandela* in Mtuzze (1993:66-68):



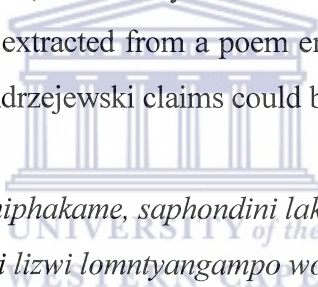
Thetha kwedin' akwaZondw' ungoyiki!
Ungazoyik' iinyhwagi neembodla.
Nokufa kusakulindele,
Kwaye kusakulungele;
Ube lidini lesizwe sikaNtu,
Kub' ungumntwan' egazi ngendalo.
Wavelel' ukuthwal' ezo nzingo neenzima...

Speak without fear, boy of Zondwa!
Unafraid of genets or wild cats.
Even if death is in store,
You've been prepared for it,
To serve as sacrifice for Ntu's nation,
For you're a child of royal blood.
You were born to bear these trials and burdens...

(my translation)

The above poem was written in 1954 at the time when Mandela was still under the banning orders of the ruling regime but the words used by the *imbongi* remind us of his inauguration as the first Black president of South Africa in 1994. In other words, the *imbongi* already had this vision of Mandela leading the nation forty years before he was actually ordained. His words, “*Ube lidini lesizwe sikaNtu, Kub’ ungumntwan’egazi ngendalo*” emphasize this point. As though the *imbongi* had read Mandela’s mind, he further states that, “*Nokufa kusakulindele, Kwaye kusakulungele*”. Since Mandela was serving twenty-seven years of imprisonment, anything could have happened to him, but because of his commitment to the emancipation of his people, he even challenged death.

The talent of being a prophet had a crucial role in the lives of the *imbongi*’s people. He could forecast what is going to happen; in that way he could forewarn and forearm the nation. A good example of this point can be extracted from a poem entitled, *Imbumba yamanyama* written by an anonymous poet whom Andrzejewski claims could be Citashe:



*Khanivuke niphakame, saphondini lakwaMbo,
Nilandele eli lizwi lomntyangampo womanyano;
Khanivuke niphakame, saphondini loThukela,
WakwaPhalo...*

Rise up, People from Mboland,
Follow this advice about unity;
Rise up, People from the Thukela,
Your destiny is that of Phalo's people...
(Andrzejewski: 1985: 553).

This poem was written during the nineteenth century in 1883. During this period missionary influence was already evident in many sectors of life more especially among the Xhosa people who were the first converts. The idea of an individual, as against the traditional way of communal formulation, had taken root.

Converts distanced themselves from the so-called heathen practices such as rituals and customs. Since some of the chiefs for instance Ngqika, were also missionary converts, this meant that the chief who had been regarded as the symbol of the tribe as a whole was now instrumental in dividing the nation. This rivalry spread even to neighbouring tribes as there were continuous battles of cattle stealing between the Xhosa people and Zulu people or the Sotho people. This disintegration among African nations resulted in them being disempowered and they lost their land and livestock from the battles.

The confusion of this period is better explained in Jordan (1973:53-54) who states that:

It must be remembered that this was a transitional period in every detail of the people's lives. While the missionary carried on his work as a preacher and a teacher, the soldier carried on with his own mission of conquest. While the missionary preached peace on earth and goodwill towards men, the wars of dispossession were working towards a climax which culminated with disastrous effects in the Nongqawuse (Cattle-killing episode). This episode led people to poverty and drove them to the level of servants.

Having realised the plight which the nation was facing, the *imbongi* saw it as his role to unite and mobilize the nation so as to regain its status. The above poem is a good illustration of the role of the *imbongi* as a mediator as the title, *Imbumba yamanyama* suggests. The term *Imbumba yamanyama* means unity is strength. This means that the *imbongi* is against this rivalry among his people and he is appealing for unity. The *imbongi* requests the African nation to wake up and jointly fight back to regain their lost land as it is reflected in the title *Imbumba yamanyama*. His plea is reinforced by his command, "*Khanivuke niphakame, saphondini lakwaMbo*". This command suggests urgency in this matter. He is not only addressing the Xhosa people but also concerned about the Zulu people because he sees these two nations as one family in the house of Phalo.

The underlying impression of this poem is that the traditional bard had great concern for the nation hence the society regarded an *imbongi* as the "eye of the nation". He could interpret what is happening around him and was a living resource for the historical events and genealogy of the nation. A typical example of this role is evident in the extract from recordings of Mqhayi's

performances which were produced in print for the first time by Opland in his unpublished collection of essays: (Traditional Xhosa poetry: 151-152). In the following extract, the poem is in praise of chief Silimela:

A! Silimela!
AmaNdlamb' amatsha,
Inkos' 'am ngumntakaNdluzodaka,
Yindod' ezalwa ngabantw' ababini,
Izalwa nguMakinana noNopasi.
UNopasi yintombi kaMon' umhlophe kaNtshunqe,
Umhlophe kaNtshunqe kwaBomvana...

A! Silimela!
The new Ndlambe,
My chief is the son of Ndluzodaka,
He is a man born of two people,
He is born of Makinana and Nopasi.
Nopasi is the daughter of Moni, the light-skinned son of Ntshunqe,
The light-skinned son of Ntshunqe of Bomvanaland..
(Translated by Opland)

Without doubt, the *imbongi's* description of this chief reflects that he has good background knowledge of the chief. He does not only refer to Silimela's parents but also to his great-grandparent Ntshunqe. This is no surprise because Mqhayi was Silimela's personal *imbongi*. The *imbongi's* indepth knowledge of chief Silimela is further illustrated by his reference to the frontier wars which his father chief Ndluzodaka Makinana fought during his reign:

'Ndithi buya Makinana uza nerhola'
Wath' uMakinana 'hayi
Asilisiko lakoweth' ukubuya ngemva'...
Kulapho yaqala khon' ukugagana
Yatshay' impampile yaseMlungwini

Yatshay' impampile yasemaXhoseni

Yaw' imikhuthuk' amacal' omabini...

Bizan' izizwe kuza kwabiw' iinkwenkwezi

'I say go back, you are bringing trouble'. Makinana said, 'No,

It is not our custom to give in...

That is when they started to face one another.

The weapons of the whites came into action;

The weapons of the Xhosa came into action.

The combatants fell on both sides.

Summon the nations, we are going to distribute the stars.

(ibid: 151-153)

It is customary to the Xhosa people that when one is praised, reference is made to his genealogy. In other words, the character of the subject of praise is seen as being influenced by his upbringing. It is the case with this poem because although Mqhayi is praising chief Silimela, his status is reflected in his father's heroic role as a leader which is evident in the words, "*Ndithi buya Makinana uza nerhola, Wath'uMakinana, hayi, Asilisiko lakoweth' ukubuya ngemva*". These lines suggest that Makinana was a brave leader who was prepared to face his opponents at all costs. The significance of this historical event is to heighten the stature and eminence of chief Silimela and to encourage him to follow his father's steps. Another important event in the culture of the Xhosa people is the initiation of boys. In this poem, this event is marked by the name *Isilimela*, the Pleiades star constellation which the Xhosa people revere so much since they reckon the years of manhood from the time of circumcision measured by the Pleiades. This notion of "*Isilimela*" also highlights another crucial role of the *imbongi* i.e. that of perpetuating the preservation of culture or customs of a nation.

Since the advent of the colonialists, Xhosa customs and culture in general were gradually marginalised and this brought devastating results to the social fabric of African people. Westernized or Christianized Africans would uphold Christianity at the expense of their own culture, and the status of chiefs was also systematically overtaken by governing bodies of colonialism. The *imbongi* would see it as his function to save the nation from the wrath of the

ancestors as the following words of the *imbongi* from the amaMpondomise in Jordan's book, *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* (1980:162) illustrate:

*Nithi yimvul' etheni na le yanamhlanje,
Le mvul' ina ezandleni kuphela,
Safa yimbalela ke thina zibhanxa,
Kuba besiba namhla sihlal' ejojweni.*

The English version of this extract is cited in Opland :

Say!
What manner of rain is this we have this day,
This rain that moistens only portions of land. Alas!
We die of drought, we simple fools,
Who thought today we lived in a rainy land!
(Opland: 1983a:27)

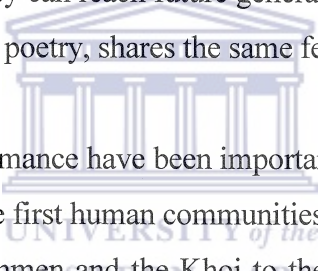
The *imbongi's* words express a feeling of discontent, "Alas! We die of drought we simple fools". The bard uttered these words after a shocking speech by the Westernized chief Zwelinzima who advocated the extermination of goats, a move which the amaMpondomise believed undermined their culture because these goats had an important function when the amaMpondomise were conducting their rituals in the process of communicating with their ancestors. The *imbongi* here rightfully criticises the chief for denigrating his own culture because he has been assimilated by the Western culture which perceives the practice of these rituals as mere heathenism. Since the chief undermined this warning, the consequences were not only detrimental to the chief and his family but to all the amaMpondomise.

The above discussion on the role of the *imbongi* can be summarised by using Mtuze and Kaschula's argument in their book, *Izibongo zomthonyama* (1993:7) when they state that, "izibongo or praise poems interpret the lifestyle of the people and are the products of their lifestyle". This point is evident in the above quotation of the *imbongi* from the amaMpondomise. That is why certain social and political influences have an impact on the

praise poems of every period. In other words, the *imbongi* can be seen as a tribal poet who acts as a guardian of his tribe or his community. On the one hand, he ensures the well-being of his people through the chief and on the other, he opens up communication with the spirit of the chief's ancestors. Using Jordan's words in (1973:59), "the African bard is a chronicle as well as being a poet. The chief is only the centre of the praise poem because he is the symbol of the tribe as a whole".

2.2 What status did the iimbongi have in society?

In trying to explain the status of the *imbongi* or of *izibongo*, one can start by saying that oral art has been with us since the beginning of humankind, from the very moment when our forebearers related their experiences, real or imagined to each other. Up to this day we still find *izibongo* being recited and folktales told at various occasions. In fact, nowadays they also appear in print and on tape so that they can reach future generations. Duncan Brown who has also done important research on African poetry, shares the same feelings:



Oral poetry and performance have been important features of South African society since the development of the first human communities on the subcontinent; from the songs and the stories of the Bushmen and the Khoi to the praise poems (Zulu/Xhosa: 'izibongo'; Sotho: 'lithoko') of African chiefdoms. In addition to prominent 'public' of panegyric to the leader, other forms of poetry have flourished, and continue to flourish in African societies: songs to the clan; family songs (especially at weddings and funerals); love lyrics; children's verse; work songs; lullabies; personal izibongo; religious songs; songs to animals; and songs of divination.

(Brown:1998: 3).

If we take the Xhosa people for instance, we find that each clan has a clan name or *isiduko* which is the name of the ancestral figure from which the name of a Xhosa clan is derived. The function of the *isiduko* is multi-dimensional. On the one hand, it serves as a symbol of identity among the people of the same clan because they see themselves as one family. On the other, it serves as a link between the clan and the ancestors because when the people of a particular clan conduct a traditional ceremony or a ritual, they sing praises using *iziduko*, be it at a wedding or

at the initiation of boys. As Kuse in his thesis, *The Traditional Praise Poetry of the Xhosa* (1973:3) puts it:

It is customary that everyone be known by the *isiduko* which applies to him. It is rare to come upon someone without an *isiduko*. With regard to children whose paternity is obscure in other words, an illegitimate child, it was common practice to hasten to attempt to put him in his genealogical line by conducting a ritual of the clan to which he belongs so that he should grow up knowing quite clearly what his *isiduko* is or who he is.

Up to this day, the Xhosa people still pride themselves on their *iziduko*. The importance of the *isiduko* is illustrated by the words, "...an illegitimate child...it was common practice to hasten to attempt to put him in his genealogical line...to enable him to have a sense of identity". Among the functions of the *imbongi* was to instil a sense of identity and belonging by identifying his subject of praise in his *isiduko*, tracing his roots from the forefathers. In other words, the *imbongi* served as an archiver of his tradition and this contributed to the status he acquired from society.

The above comment regarding the status of the *imbongi* is also cited in Opland's *Xhosa Oral Poetry* (1983). He argues that the Xhosa people had a tradition of poetry before they were introduced to writing for literary purposes by Christian missionaries in the early nineteenth century. This tradition still continues today. Within this tradition the most dominating figure is that of the tribal poet, or *imbongi*, who generally has the ability to compose his poetry while he is performing, on the spur of the moment. This unique ability to compose while performing is another important aspect which also enhanced the status of an *imbongi*. The *imbongi* would unexpectedly jump up during the course of an event and sing his praises. In that way he would draw the attention of the audience to the message he would like to transmit. The minute the *imbongi* starts with his opening words, eg. *Hoo-o-yini!* Everything would come to a standstill. Women who were busy cooking would leave those pots unceremoniously. On the other hand, men would take off their hats and take out their pipes immediately. All this was done to show respect for the *imbongi*.

But as Okpewho in Jones, *Oral & Written poetry* (1988:102) puts it:

For a long time, the study of traditional African literature was done by scholars who had very little feeling for the languages and customs they met. Some of them tried to understand the basic grammatical systems of the languages and even mastered the patterns of speech but this was nothing compared to the empathy of those for whom the words have meanings and implications that go beyond the ordinary patterns of sound.

Okpewho's statement seems to illustrate that traditional African literature had previously not received the respect that it deserved because it was left in the hands of people who had limited understanding of it. But despite this obstacle, the status of oral art or *izibongo* in particular remains at a high level to those who identify with them. Kuse's introductory remarks in his thesis on traditional praise poetry echoes this statement:

Xhosa poetry needs no apology. When I have read or heard it recited, I have been moved or uplifted in an authentic way by its deep and massive sentiments which strike chords in the soul.

(1973:ii)

In the above comment, Kuse highlights a very crucial aspect of *izibongo*, i.e. the aesthetic element. Some of these sentimental feelings can only be shared by the indigenous people who speak the language or people who have been in close contact with the tradition and culture of that particular language group.

In fact, despite the contending ideologies regarding the status of oral literature and oral poetry in particular, there was a growing positive perception towards this African art as the comments of Nora Chadwick in (Opland: 1998: 3-4) suggest:

It seems probable that in the near future we shall be in a better position to understand the nature of African rhythms and the essential characteristics of African poetry, since anthropologists are now turning their attention to the study of native oral poetry.

The above comment is based on the monumental work on oral tradition that Nora and Hector

Chadwick produced in (1930-40). If we look at African songs and African poetry today, we find that they play a significant role in the economic growth of the country and in promoting international communication. For instance, a number of South African artists such as Hugh Masekela, Mirriam Makeba, Juluka and praise poets such as Zolani Mkiva are known by the international world. We are therefore inclined to agree with Chadwick's comment regarding the status and the future of African oral art. It also becomes clear that although African art or African poetry (in particular) is mainly transferred orally, it has retained its status. Since the *imbongi* plays a crucial role in the transmission of oral poetry, we find that not only the status of African rhythm and oral poetry is highlighted but also the status of the *imbongi*.

If we look at Xhosa tradition, we find that the *imbongi* was a central figure. He acted as a link between the people and their chief and between the chief and his ancestors. In the first place, any dissatisfaction which people had towards their chief was referred to the chief through the praises of the *imbongi* because he had a license to speak directly to the chief. In fact, every chief had his *imbongi* who was called, "*Imbongi yakomkhulu*" (the bard at the King's place or the royal bard) who had a say in all the activities at the chief's place. The status of the *imbongi* can be seen as that of a mentor because he would guide the chief in the procedure or tradition followed in that nation. As Kuse (1973:110) puts it, "the royal bard was an especially distinguished poet. He earned his status and designation by the constant and general acclaim of the populace". A good illustration of the status of the *imbongi* is cited from Bennie's *Imibengo* in the extract of a poem rendered by chief Hintsa's *imbongi* Dumisani after the verdict of the complex lawsuit of the twins:

Hoyina! Hoyina!! Hoyina!!!
Godukani, zizwe, liphelil'ityala.
Godukani, bantu, iphelil'int'ebithethwa.
Utsho ke yena uZanzolo...
(1971:183)

Hoyina! Hoyina!! Hoyina!!!
Let us go home we nations for the case is over.
Let us go home for there is nothing more to talk about.

So says Zanzolo...
(my translation)

After the chief had given his verdict, he wrapped himself with his blanket and sat down. The audience expressed its feelings in different ways. Some men stood up, took to their horses and went home. Those who were satisfied with the verdict were praising the chief for the manner in which the whole trial was handled. But there were those who were dissatisfied with the trial accusing the chief of taking sides. In the midst of this confusion, the *imbongi* stood up and silenced the crowd with his definitive words that everything has been said and done and therefore people should go home. His words, “*Godukani, zizwe, liphelil’ityala, Godukani, bantu...*” demonstrate the power and status the *imbongi* has acquired. His status is also enhanced by the fact that he is now the mouthpiece of the chief. His repeated use of commands such as “*Godukani*” illustrate his authority.

Up to this day, the *imbongi* is still a highly respected figure in society, although his function is not only focused at the chief but also at other key figures of today such as political leaders and heroes. For instance, at certain functions or occasions the *imbongi* is accommodated on the programme. In some cases the *izibongo* are also recorded on video-cassettes, which means that the *imbongi*'s work is also widely circulated. This implies that the *imbongi* does not only acquire status locally but internationally. A good example of such an *imbongi* is that of Zolani Mkiva who was President Mandela's personal *imbongi*. He is known for his public performances at President Mandela's inauguration and at graduation ceremonies at the University of the Western Cape. He also accompanied the President on his international visits.

2.3 What characterises (Xhosa) oral poetry?

Traditional African or more specifically Xhosa poetry is unique in nature, namely that of being oral from its composition to its transmission. Because of its nature, it can also be seen as a social activity as it concerns itself with everyday activities of society. Coupled with this is the fact that the *imbongi* is communicating directly with his society or subject of praise.

What is also interesting is the special skill that the *imbongi* possesses, i.e. that of personifying inanimate objects. He will describe them with such a fine eye that they resemble human beings. A good illustration of this can be cited from Xozwa's poem, *Amanzi* in *Ingcaza kaXhosa* where he describes water:

*Ngulo nyana kaMafu umzukulwana kaMphunga-
Inzwan' enkulu ekucwenga kukodwa,
Ephilis, abahle nababi iqabul' unxano,*

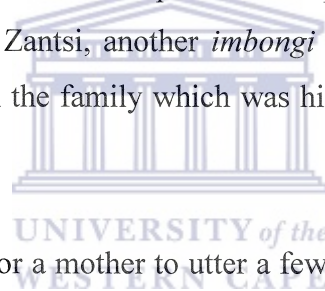
It is this son of the Clouds, grandson of Vapour-
The most handsome gentleman with exceptional quietness,
That gives life to both the beautiful and the ugly, quenching their thirst,
(1990:31)
(my translation)

The very first line draws the reader to a situation where he imagines the *imbongi* looking at this son of *Mafu* whom he is praising. This proximity is highlighted by the descriptive copulative “*ngulo*”. The wit in this poem is also reflected in the *imbongi*'s insight in tracing the “genealogy” of water as he describes it as the son of *Mafu* and grandson of Vapour. It is characteristic of the traditional *imbongi* to trace the roots of the subject he is praising. In this case the *imbongi* applies scientific knowledge in tracing the formation of water. For instance, heat from the sun creates water vapour in water from the rivers and the sea. This vapour rises and forms clouds in the sky and this is followed by rainfall. This description does not only illustrate the intellectual level at which the *imbongi* operates but also the quality of Xhosa poetry.

In addition to praising inanimate objects there is a host of other forms of oral poetry that can be identified namely, simple creations by children, biographical poems, clan poetry, praises of chiefs and other dignitaries. For the sake of clarity, each form will be dealt with separately.

2.3.1 Simple creations by children

Since poetry is one of the proudest artistic possessions to Xhosa people, even children, more especially boys, used to make their own compositions during stick-fights or when they were herding cattle. As Jordan (1973: 21) puts it, “it was the greatest ambition of every boy to be at least a public reciter, if not a composer”. In fact, every boy was expected at the very least to be able to recite his own praises, those of the family bull, those of the favourite family cow, even if composed by someone else, and was also expected to know the traditional praises of certain species of animals and birds. Any boy who lacked these accomplishments was held in contempt by the men as well as by other boys. Even today, it is common practice among boys to encourage a fight to continue by praising the boy who shows bravery. In fact, in my interview with Mkiva, he mentioned that even before he realised that he was an *imbongi*, he could simply compose praises for his peers while playing even praising them with their *iziduko*. Similarly, Bulelani Zantsi, another *imbongi* that I had interviewed, related how he used to extol the old cow in the family which was his favourite because of its character and dignity.



It is also common practice for a mother to utter a few praises when trying to encourage good behaviour in her children. For instance, if a girl or girls have been assigned a task and the job has been carried out in a satisfactory manner, the mother would express her gratitude by saying:

“Khawukhangele ke iintombi zam!
Khawubone ke amaqobokazana,
Amaqobokazana angalal’endleleni yazini kunyembelekile!

Just look at my girls!

Just look at the ladies

If they could ever sleep away from home, one should know that something went wrong.

(my translation)

When hearing these words, the girls would beam with satisfaction because the parent is praising them with a sense of pride. In other words, these words do not only form part of socialisation but also encourage self-esteem and self-confidence.

2.3.2 Clan poetry or Iziduko

Iziduko are among the key features of traditional Xhosa poetry. They play a crucial role in the social structure and culture of the Xhosa people. This is evident in the description of *iziduko* given by K.K. Ncwana in his book *Amanqakwana ngeminombo yezizwe*, “...*iziduko ezi ngamagama ooyise, nooyisemkhulu nookhokho babantu abasuka bazibize ngawo, kuba bengumnombo abaphume kuwo...*” (1953:55)

(...the *iziduko* are the names of the fathers, grandfathers and ancestors of a people after whom they name themselves because they are descendents of that genealogical line...)

(my translation)

The above description highlights two important points namely; that every clan among the Xhosa people has an *isiduko* and that there is a close connection between *iziduko* and the ancestors. Ngcangata in his book, *Khawubek' Iindlebe Mzukulwana kaPhalo* reinforces this connection, “*AmaXhosa iziduko azithatha njengekhonkco lokuqhakamshelana nezinyanya kube kaloku xa kucanyagushwa kusetyenziswa zona...*” (1993: 115)

(Xhosa people regard *iziduko* as the chain that connects them to their ancestors because, when they ask for blessings from Qamata, the message is sent through the ancestors...)

(my translation)

Since the ancestor is a highly revered figure among the Xhosa people, even before a ritual is conducted, an elder of the family will stand up and say a few words, requesting the blessings of *Qamata* through the ancestors. He will declaim the ancestors in the *iziduko* of the particular family. The rituals are usually accompanied with the slaughtering of a cow or sheep. The first sound made by the animal after the first stab brings joy to the family. They regard this sound as a sign of blessing, and that the request has been accepted by *Qamata*. A string of *iziduko* will be sung as an expression of joy. For instance, if the ritual is conducted by the *amaNgwevu* clan, the

following *iziduko* will be chanted:

*Awu! Icamagu livumile maNgwevu,
OoTshangisa, OoRhudulu,
OoZulu, OoMhlatyana.*

Oh! AmaNgwevu have been blessed,
The Tshangisas, Rhudulus,
Zulus, Mhlatyanas.
(my translation)

One will notice that the series of names in this poem has great significance as is the case with clan poetry. The sequence in which the names are arranged is such that the first name refers to the most recent forefather. In other words, the person being praised is traced from the roots, since the concept of who you are is very crucial to Xhosa people. This does not only feature in clan poetry but is also characteristic of traditional poetry. Even in the praise poetry of today's *imbongi* this feature is still evident as the following lines from Zolani Mkiva's poem suggest in (Mtuze, P.T.& Kaschula, R: 1993: 143) which he performed on 10 May 1994, in honour of Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as the first Black President of South Africa:

Yinquleqhu ukubekwa kukaMandela,
Iqadi likaJongintaba kaBhagrayi kaNkonka,
Unyana kaNosekeni;

The inauguration of Mandela keeps everybody on his toes,
The third house of chief Jongintaba of Bhagrayi of Nkonka,
The son of Nosekeni;
(my translation)

The poem was recited in recognition of Mandela's commitment and the sacrifice he had made for South Africans. The *imbongi* gives the background to Mandela by placing him in his genealogical line. From this reference to Mandela's roots, we also learn that Mandela is a child

of royal blood, the son of chief Jongintaba who is the son of chief Bhagrayi and Bhagrayi is the son of chief Nkonka. Normally, when one's genealogical line is traced, it is from the paternal side, but we notice that the *imbongi* also mentions that Mandela is the son of Nosekeni. This reference can be interpreted as a way of showing gratitude to Nosekeni for producing a son of Mandela's calibre.

From the above explanation, one can deduce that the *iziduko* have a crucial role to play in the lives of the Xhosa people. They also feature on every traditional occasion, be it a wedding or when boys are going to the initiation school. For instance, if a girl or a boy is getting married, the first thing that the family should know is the *isiduko* of his/her partner. The reason for this is that people who share the same *isiduko* are seen as brother and sister. If partners who share the same *isiduko* should marry, their marriage will not get the blessings of the ancestors because they have transgressed the custom. The result of this could be either that the couple will be unable to get children or they may give birth to retarded children.

Similarly, before a boy goes for initiation, there are certain rituals that he has to follow as required by his *isiduko*. If he ignores this process this may have detrimental results in his life. At the celebrations on his arrival from the initiation school, women will express their joy by chanting praises that refer to the boy's *isiduko*. For example, if the boy is from the Dlamini clan the praises will say:

Awu! Ubuyil'umfo wasemaZizini;
OoJama,
OoSijadu.

Oh! Hear comes the lad from amaZizi;
The Jamas,
The Sijadus.
(my translation)

The person being praised will experience a feeling of pleasure and pride. He is elated at being recognized in the style that has resonances of solidarity within the clan. In other words, the

iziduko lift up one's spirit as one experiences the feeling of belonging or a sense of identity. Calling a person by his *isiduko* is also associated with respect for that person. Even today, it does not matter how angry a person may be, if he is declaimed by his *isiduko*, he will become pacified and listen to the plea. In fact, it is common practice among the Xhosa people to address each other at social gatherings by *iziduko* or to greet one another by *iziduko*. At beer-drinking gatherings, if a stranger joins a group of men enjoying themselves with traditional beer, he may be fortunate in getting a sip if he can call the men by their *iziduko*. In fact, if the stranger in his introduction of himself happens to share the same clan name with one of the men, he will be immediately drawn into the conversation.

The impact of *iziduko* in the lives of the Xhosa people is clearly demonstrated in Jordan's *Ingqumbo yeminyanya* during a heated discussion among the amaMpondomise regarding the killing of the highly revered snake, Majola. Jongilanga, one of the prominent figures of the amaMpondomise, regards this matter as an issue for authentic amaMpondomise only. His words culminate in a strong argument between him and chief Dabula:

AmaMpondomise othuthu ngabantu abaneziduko zobuMpondomise. Ngumcimbi wabo ke lo. Buza iziduko zala madoda asesihlalweni, ukhangele ukuba mangaphi na amaMpondomise ngaphandle kweenkosi eziya.

O! Ulapho kanti, Jola! Watsho uDabula, ehleka kakhulu ngokudela.

Ndilapho, Tolo;

Ndilapho, Zulu;

Ndilapho, Dlangamandla;

Ndilapho, Ngwenye-nkomo.

Ndiyabona nam ukub'ulapho. Oko kukuthi, Jola undibong' utyibela nje, ufun' ukuba ndiqonde nam ukuba ndingaphandl' ephungulelweni.

(1980: 187-188)

Authentic Mpondomise are people whose clan names are those of

Mpondomise. This matter is their concern. Ask for the praise names of the men who are presiding over the meeting to find out which of them are *Mpondomise* except for the princes over there.

Oh! Is that your position, Jola! Said Dabula laughing disparagingly.

That is where I am, Tolo;

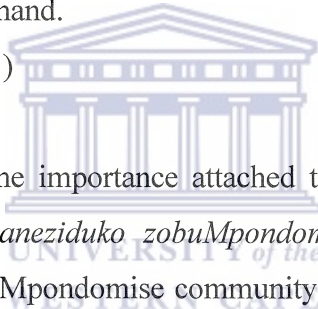
That is where I am, Zulu;

That is where I am, Dlangamandla;

That is where I am, Ngwenya-nkomo.

I too can see that, that is where you stand. That is to say, Jola, you praise me at length so that I should understand really an outsider with no clan name credentials to discuss the matter on hand.

(Translation by Kuse)



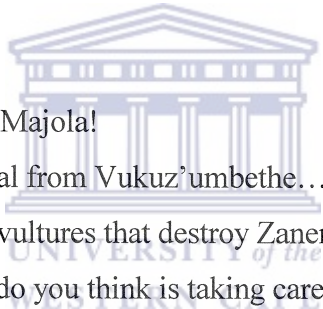
From the above argument, the importance attached to *isiduko* is quite clear as the phrases, “*AmaMpondomise othuthu, aneziduko zobuMpondomise*” illustrate. Dabula is one of the prominent figures of the amaMpondomise community as he is a chief, but his status has been jeopardized by the fact that his genealogical tree is that of the Hlubi clan. Hence Jongilanga regards him as an outsider when it comes to sensitive matters pertaining to the amaMpondomise.

2.3.3 Praises of chiefs and other dignitaries

Other important forms of praises are those of chiefs and kings which are usually referred to as eulogies. These praises may be *iziduko*, in which case they are inherited or *izibongo* in which case they have been earned. If we refer back to the tradition of the Xhosa people, we will realise that the chief and the king had a prominent role in society, namely that of being a link between the people and the ancestors. Hence, if the person who is praised is a chief or a king, by virtue of his status, his character is deemed praiseworthy. In other words, he inherits the status of his forefathers. On the other hand, a person may have made a great contribution in developing or

building the nation and because of his character and actions he earns the praises. Each and every chief had his own *imbongi* who lived in the chief's homestead and was called *imbongi yakomkhulu*. Since the main concern of this *imbongi* was to take care of the welfare of the chief and his people, this meant that the praises of chiefs would focus at moderating the chief's behaviour and maintaining a good relationship between him and his people. It is still the case even today. For instance, the *imbongi* would either appeal to the chief to intervene because his nation is neglecting its culture or its language. Another example is cited in Jordan's *Ingqumbo yeminyanya*, where the *imbongi* is addressing chief Zwelinzima.

Bayethe, Ngwanya kaMajola!
Silo sakuloVukuz'umbethe...
Yaphel'imihlambi kaZanemvula zizandawana namxhwili
Kaz'uhlel'apha nj'uthi yaluswa yintengu na!
 (1980: 33)



Bayethe, chief Majola!
 The wild animal from Vukuz'umbethe...
 Beware of the vultures that destroy Zanemvula's flock.
 I wonder who do you think is taking care of them!
 (my translation)

The above words that refer to chief Zwelinzima, the son of Zanemvula, were a plea to him to come and take his rightful place as a chief of the amaMpondomise as it is a tradition for the eldest son to be a successor of his father. At this time, chief Zwelinzima was studying at Lovedale while his notorious uncle Dingindawo had taken over the chieftainship by force. The Mpondomise people were discontent with Dingindawo's leadership because he created division among them and favoured those who followed him. The *imbongi* is now appealing to the chief to rescue his people from tyranny and reinstate unity to Zanemvula's people, hence the words, '*Yaphel'imihlambi kaZanemvula zizandawana namaxhwili; Kaz'uhlel'apha nj'uthi yaluswa yintengu na!*'

A eulogie or *isikhahlelo* is an important feature of praise poetry. It can also be referred to as a

royal salutation that used to be restricted to a particular royal personage. One will notice that in the above encounter between Zwelinzima and Mphuthumi, Mphuthumi first salutes Zwelinzima by an *isikhahlelo*, “Bayethe! Ngwanya kaMajola” before addressing the crucial matter of the chieftainship of the amaMpondomise. Although at this time Zwelinzima had not yet assumed the chieftainship, his status as the son of royal blood qualifies him to receive this respect. The *isikhahlelo* in modern days is also extended to important dignitaries such as people who have made a great contribution to society. Since in the tradition of the Xhosa people an *isikhahlelo* was only used when one addresses the chief or his son, it can also be described as a precious courtly etiquette. In the tradition of the Xhosa people if one visits “Komkhulu”(the chief’s homestead), one should introduce oneself by first uttering the *isikhahlelo* of the particular chief he is visiting. Even at the gatherings which were held at the “Komkhulu” one would find that, before a speaker can address the audience, he has to acknowledge the presence of the chief by first praising him by his *isikhahlelo* and the audience will follow after him.

This tradition is still practised today. In fact, although the Xhosa people seem to have adopted the western culture through education and from the influence of urban life, one will find that they still have high regard for their chiefs and every chief is known by his *isikhahlelo*. A good example of this is reflected in the introductory words of the *imbongi*, Mncedi Mbambo, at the Heritage Day function that was held at the University of the Western Cape in September 2000. Speakers from different sectors of society were invited to this occasion including a speaker from the Department of Arts and Culture (Western Cape region), a representative from CONTRALESA an organisation of traditional leaders, representatives from the neighbouring universities and subject advisors (Western Cape Education Department). When the chairperson was introducing chief Nonkonyana, his opening words were:

Aa! Zanemvula,

Siyabubulela kambe ubukho bomntwan’ omhle kulo msitho,

Hail! Zanemvula,

We really appreciate the presence of the child of royal blood at this occasion,

(my translation)

By first saluting the chief with his *isikhahlelo*, “Aa! Zanemvula”, this was an indication that he was acknowledging his presence at this occasion. An interesting thing is that since this occasion was held at an institution of higher learning in the year 2000, one would not expect the reverence for chiefs to be still alive. In fact, even the chief himself, although he is a well-educated man, showed his adherence to his tradition through being accompanied by his counsellors.

At this very occasion one of the dignitaries, Dr. A. B. Nyamende delivered a speech on the life history of the famous *imbongi* of the Xhosa people, S.E. K.Mqhayi. Immediately after his speech the *imbongi* Dalukuhlomla Mkangisa, flooded him with praises. He saluted him with his *iziduko*:

*Awu! Baxecele Nozulu;
Baxecele Mpafane,
Ngeqhawe lamaXhosa.*



Oh yes! Tell them Nozulu,
Tell them Mpafane;
About the hero of the Xhosa nation.
(my translation)

Since the *imbongi* jumped up immediately after the speech, one could associate this with the excitement and inspiration that the *imbongi* received after hearing of the contribution of the great *imbongi* S.E.K. Mqhayi. He expresses his appreciation of the speaker’s words by praising him through his *isikhahlelo*.

It is important to know why *isikhahlelo* is so important to the Xhosa people. An interview which I had with Zolani Kuphe, an *imbongi* from Ngqamakhwe village in the former Transkei, sheds light in this regard.

Mpolweni: *Mnumzana uKuphe khawutsho, ngokwezakho izimvo uyintoni umsebenzi wesikhahlelo?* (Mr Kuphe, just tell us, in your opinion what is the significance of *isikhahlelo*?)

Kuphe: *Ee, ndicinga ukuba isikhahlelo esi sibonisa intlonipho kula mntwan' egazi.*(I think that *isikhahlelo* is a way of showing respect for that child of the royal blood).

Okwesibini, sikwahlaba ikhwelo kumzi lowo udibeneyo apho komkhulu, mhlawumbi kuloo mbizo okanye kwintlanganiso ekhoyo. (Secondly, it is also an appeal for attention to the audience that is gathered at an *imbizo* or a meeting at the chief's homestead.

Mpolweni: *Sithini isikhahlelo senkosi yenu?* (What is the *isikhahlelo* of your chief?)

Kuphe: *Ngunkosi Vusuhlanga.*(He is chief Vusuhlanga i.e. Wake up the nation).

Mpolweni: *Ingaba kwakutheni ukuze anikwe esi sikhahlelo?* (Why do you think he has been given this name?)

Kuphe: *Okokuqala, ndicinga ukuba inkosi leya yethu isengumntu omtsha okanye oselula, oye wathatha iintambo zolawulo kuyise uJongisizwe. Kungenzeka ukuba amaphakathi athe ayinika esi sikhahlelo ngenjongo yokuba beyithuma, kananjalo beyikhuthaza ukuba izame kangangoko ukuba isigcine, isivuse isizwe sayo.* (Firstly, I think our chief is still young and has taken over the chieftainship after his father, chief Jongisizwe. It may happen that the counsellors gave him this *isikhahlelo* with the aim of delegating him and encouraging him to do his best in looking after his community and in uplifting its standard.

Okwesibini, le nkosi yethu ingena phaya kwesiya sikhundla ngethuba lorhulumente omtsha, apho kufuneka kwenziwe imisebenzi emininzi enje ngokuphuhliswa kweelali neendawo ebezisoloko zihlelelekile. Kungenzeka ukuba isikhahlelo esiya isinikwe ngenjongo yokuba ikhuthaze uluntu lwayo ngakumbi ulutsha nanjengoko nayo ingumntu omtsha. (Secondly, our chief assumed the position of chieftainship or of governance during the era of the new government, at the time when a lot needs to be done in developing the rural areas and other areas which were previously marginalized. It may happen that he was given this *isikhahlelo* with the hope that he will be a source of inspiration to his community more especially the youth as he

is also a young person).

The above discussion illustrates that the *isikhahlelo* is more than just an expression of respect for the chief but encompasses the expectations of the people from their chief. The term “*Vusuhlanga*” is a great challenge to the chief because his actions should be aimed at promoting growth and development of his people.

Apart from the above-mentioned characteristics it is important to note the importance of the way in which the poem is composed and transmitted because these features determine the effect of the message conveyed to the audience. This point brings us to the importance of **composition, performance, and transmission** in oral poetry. A crucial point about these features that form the essence of Xhosa oral poetry, is that they occur simultaneously. In other words, they are inseparable. But for the sake of clarity these features will be dealt with separately.

2.3.4 Composition

The aspect of composition in oral literature is a complex one. Many scholars of literature such as Finnegan, Parry, Lord, Opland and many others have raised many questions around this aspect namely, whether the composition of an oral piece is preceded by mental preparation. In other words, what sort of mental processes take place before the oral piece is actually presented. Other questions revolve around the issue of spontaneity. Many critics are interested to know whether oral composition is a spontaneous exercise or it is just memorisation of existing poems that the *imbongi* might have heard or seen being performed. What role is played by the existing stock of knowledge during an oral composition of a poem?

Finnegan in (Oral Poetry: 18) identifies different forms of composition. One form is described by Parry and Lord in their analysis of art of Yugoslav minstrels in the 1930s. Here the poet in a sense composes his heroic epics at the actual moment of performance, relying on a known fund of conventional “oral formulae” which he has built up from his own practice as well as from hearing other poets. As Finnegan (Oral Poetry: 18) puts it, “this kind of oral composition-in-performance is the basic criterion, in the eyes of Lord and his followers for considering the

resultant poem oral”. But as will be seen in the discussion of Xhosa oral poetry, composition takes place spontaneously. In the other form, the process of composition takes place prior to, and is largely separate from the act of performance. In this case, Finnegan refers to the example of many Eskimo, Somali or Gilbertese lyrics, where the poet labours for hours or even days over the composition of a poem, which is only later presented in a public performance by the poet or others. What is clear in this form of composition is that the actual process of composition is analytically separate from later performance. Finnegan (Oral poetry: 18) thinks “if composition is to be the criterion, the poem thus composed must be oral since the performance is oral”.

In the case of Xhosa oral poetry, there are many Xhosa people who have a gift of being able to *bonga*. A simple example could be when a person is expressing his appreciation to another person. He will start praising the person with his clan name eg. if the person comes from the *Dlamini* family, the praises would be, *Enkosi Dlamini, Jama, Sijadu, Ungadinwa nangomso!* (Thank you *Dlamini, Jama, Sijadu*, Don't get tired even tomorrow! Sometimes when the boys are playing, they will start teasing one another by creating terms that describe their fellow man in a poetic fashion eg. *Awu! Khawubethe Kwedini kaNantsi, Ntw' emilenze ingqindilili ngathi sisonka sombhako.* (Oh! Keep it up son of Somebody, The one with big firm legs like homemade bread). In other words, although the situation started as a joke, it may end up with a poem which has been created spontaneously. This talent is confirmed in Opland (1998: 4) who states that:

The Xhosa people had a tradition of oral poetry before they were introduced to writing. Within this tradition the most prominent figure is the court poet, or *imbongi* as it is usually distinguished from other *iimbongi*. He has the ability to compose his poetry while he is performing on the spur of the moment.

Another name that is given to this particular *imbongi* is, *imbongi yomthonyama*. In the modern times, this *imbongi* can also write down his poems. In my interviews I found that the term *imbongi yomthonyama* has great significance. The term *umthonyama* refers to the old cow-dung in the kraal. At the entrance of the kraal is where the head of the family was buried, as a result this place is regarded as sacred because it is seen as a place where the ancestors are lying. In my

discussion with the *iimbongi* I found that the *imbongi yomthonyama* has to go through a certain ritual to get the blessings of his ancestors and this ritual is conducted in the *enkundleni* (the area in front of the kraal). In fact, in my interview with Mkiva he explained clearly the connection between *imbongi yomthonyama* and ancestors:

Mkiva: *Kaloku ukuze ndibe yimbongi ekwaziyo ukuma enkundleni nje, ndaqala ndenzelwa umsebenzi wokwamkelwa ngabaphantsi kuba kaloku, ngabo abandinika amandla okubonga.* (Before I could be an accepted *imbongi* I had to go through a traditional ceremony in which I was introduced to my ancestors because it is them that have empowered me with the wisdom to *bonga*.)

Mkangisa confirmed this statement because during the interview he mentioned that:

Mkangisa: *Kusafuneka ndigodukile, ndiye kuthetha nabakwaGasela eNgqushwa.* (I must still go home to speak with the ones (ancestors) from the Gasela family at Peddie.

From the above extracts we notice the contribution of the ancestors to the performance of the *imbongi yomthonyama*. Hence in my interview with Zolani Khuphe he stated:

Kuphe: *Ukubonga kuyafana nokuthwasa kuba umntu othwasayo bobabini bakhokelwa zizihlele.* (Praise-singing is similar to being a traditional healer because the *imbongi* and the traditional healer are both led by their ancestral spirits in what they are doing.

This point is evident in the following extract from the interview I had with Zama Batyi:

Mpolweni: *Ungathi la mandla okwazi ukubonga uwathatha phi?* (Where would you say you got this power to *bonga*?)

Baty: *Ndingathi izihlele zam zizo ezi zindinika la mandla. Ndithi nokubandilele ndothuke ndinombongo endingawaziyo ukuba ndiwuthathaphi. Ndikhawuleze ndiwubhale ndingekawulibali.* (I can say my ancestral spirits are the ones who give me power to *bonga*, as a result. At times I will wake up with a poem which I cannot recall how it came about. I will jot it down before I forget it).

If we keep the above statements in mind, it is no surprise to see an *imbongi* at an occasion jump up and sing praises because the words come spontaneously. The talent of being able to compose a poem spontaneously is what makes an *imbongi* (*yomthonyama*) special and this is what makes Xhosa oral poetry unique. An interesting point that transpires from the above discussion is the link between oral poetry and written poetry. We notice from Batyi's explanation that the movement from oral poetry to written poetry is a smooth transition. This point is reflected in Batyi's statement, "*Ndithi nokuba ndilele ndothuke ndinombongo endingawaziyo... Ndikhawuleze ndiwubhale*" (I will wake up with a poem which I cannot recall how it came about. I will jot it down before I forget it). This means that he does not sit for hours trying to create a poem, as is the case in the above example of the Eskimo and Somali lyrics.

Another important point that transpires is that if the poem is the product of being inspired by something, it means that the *imbongi* comes up with a new composition at every performance. This point is confirmed in Finnegan (1970: 10) as she states:

Oral pieces are not composed in the study and later transmitted through the impersonal and detached medium of print, but tend to be directly involved in the occasions of their actual utterance.

Finnegan's point is evident at occasions such as weddings, funerals, and other celebrations, because it is common to see an *imbongi* jumping up unexpectedly to sing a poem. What is unique about this composition is that the *imbongi* composes his poem spontaneously after he has been inspired by something at that moment. That is why it is not wise to place an *imbongi* in a particular slot on the programme because his urge to *bonga* comes spontaneously.

The notion of inspiration is a crucial one. For instance, in my interviews with the *iimbongi* and in the responses from the questionnaires, it was a common aspect. This point is reflected in the following response from Batyi.

Mpolweni: *Imbongi izilungisela njani phambi kokuba ibonge okanye sukuba kutheni ukuze izive ifuna ukubonga?*

(How does an *imbongi* prepare for his performance or what makes him to stand up and *bonga*?)

Batyi: *Kubakho uvakalelo oluthile oluthi lubekho apha kuyo ngaphakathi okanye uchukumiseko oluthile ngenxa yemeko engaphakathi kuyo okanye into eyivileyo okanye isisusa esithile okanye umngcwabo.* (He is inspired by a feeling from inside or he is touched by something at that particular time whether it is at a function or a funeral.)

Batyi's statement highlights a crucial point that the *imbongi* composes a new poem at every occasion because his composition is determined by the particular occasion at a given time. This point addresses Opland's notion of improvisation which I will discuss in the following section. According to Opland, the *imbongi* uses the existing stock of knowledge and creates another poem. If I look at the above explanation given by Batyi, I am inclined to think that improvisation does not apply in the case of the *imbongi yomthonyama*. This point is evident if I take into account the *imbongi*'s source of inspiration i.e. the ancestral spirits. In fact, Opland (1982: Unpublished essays: 13-14) shares this view as he points out that, "inspiration the need for which indicates clearly the spontaneous nature of the compositions, is an important factor for the *imbongi*". His statement is based on his experience with the *iimbongi* that he had interviewed as he states:

During my conversation with most of the *iimbongi* I requested each one of them to sing a poem for me. But each one *imbongi* would mention that it would be difficult because nothing has stimulated his feelings.

(1998: 48)

This statement highlights another important point about composition and performance, i.e. that once the *imbongi* has been stimulated by something, composition and performance will take place simultaneously because once the *imbongi* starts singing, he will carry on without pausing except when he is taking a breath.

If I base my argument on the interviews with the *iimbongi*, I am inclined to think that the term composition is relative, because most of the *iimbongi* in my interviews mentioned that they have no control over the words they utter in a poem, it just comes spontaneously. In other words,

“composition” and performance occur simultaneously. This is one of the crucial features of Xhosa oral poetry. As Opland (1998: 4) puts it, “what is important is not just the oral performance but rather the composition during oral performance”.

However, it is important to note that not all Xhosa *iimbongi* are *iimbongi zomthonyama*. For instance, in Xhosa we do find another type of *imbongi* called, *imbongi yosiba* (a poet who mainly writes his poems). What is interesting is that, just like the *imbongi yomthonyama*, this *imbongi* is also inspired by something and he will sit down and write down his poem as it comes. Since most of these *iimbongi* are literate, the particular *imbongi* will follow a particular structure and include modern features such as rhyming and stanzas in his poem. A good example can be cited in the following extract from an interview with Nyamende.

Mpolweni: *Ingaba kukho into okanye umntu owalifumana kuye ifuthe lokubonga?* (Is there something or a person that had influenced you to *bonga*?)

Nyamende: *Ifuthe lokubonga ndalifumana esikolweni xa sisenza izicengcelezo. Kwakhona ndaphinda nadalifumana eYunivesithi apho ke sasifundiswa ngokwaxhiwa kwemibongo.* (I got the influence to sing praises from the recitations at school. At university we were also taught the structure of poetry.

Mpolweni: *Izibongo zakho uyazibhala okanye uyabonga nje kuphela?* (Do you write your poems or do you only perform them?)

Nyamende: *Mandinyaniseke nditsho ndithi, andizanga ebomini bam ndakha ndasuka nje ndabonga ndingakhange ndiplane, ndicinge. Eyam imibongo ibhalwa phantsi nangona ndiyibhala ndinombono wembongi ibonga phambi kwabantu. Ngamanye amazwi, imibongo le yam ithetha nesihlwele sabantu kodwa ndithetha ndibhala ngosiba.* (Let me be honest and say, I have never in my life just stood up and sung praises without preparing or thinking. My poems are written down although when I write them I have the imagination of an *imbongi* performing in front of the audience. In other words, my poems are addressing an imaginary audience but I speak with my pen.

Mpolweni: *Kuxa kutheni ukuze uzive ufuna ukubonga?* (What inspires you to bonga?)

Nyamende: *Sukuba ndichukunyiswe yinto eyenzekileyo okanye endiyibonileyo. Ndikhumbula mhla kwasweleka umhlobo wam omkhulu endandifunda naye nendandisebenza naye. Ndachukumiseka kakhulu sesi sehlo. Eyona nto yaba kufutshane kum yaba kukubonga, kodwa ndathi kuba andikwazi ukusuka ndishukume ndibonge, ndawubhala phantsi, ndawufunda. Ndabonga ngolo hlobo ke.* (When I am touched by something that has happened or something I have seen. I remember the time when a great friend who was once a fellow student and a colleague passed on. I was really touched by this incident. The first thing I could think of to express my feelings was a poem. But because I cannot perform in public, I wrote it down and read it. That is how I sang the poem).

From the above discussion, one can then deduce that the aspect of composition in Xhosa poetry both with the *imbongi yomthonyama* and the *imbongi yosiba* involves inspiration but the *imbongi yosiba* has a chance to re-organise his poem to follow a certain structure. Another important observation is that, since the *imbongi* is inspired by a particular thing at a given time, it is likely that he will perform a different poem at each performance. Similarly, if the poem is written down, it will be a different creation at that particular moment. The notion of a new poem at every performance is very crucial and has raised many questions to some scholars of oral poetry such as Opland. But this issue will be looked at in detail in the following section on performance.

2.3.5 Performance

In the previous section three important characteristics of composition surfaced namely, that composition is spontaneous, the *imbongi* is inspired by something to perform or to compose a poem and that composition and performance occur simultaneously. However, it is interesting to see how other scholars of Xhosa poetry view performance. Opland (1998: 5) identifies four types of *imbongi*: firstly, the *imbongi* who has the ability to compose spontaneously. Secondly, people who have memorised a few significant poems such as those of their clans, their relatives or their associates. Thirdly, the *imbongi*, originally a prominent and significant figure in the community, who to a large extent composes every poem in performance. Finally, there are literate poets who commit their poetry to paper and publish their poems in books and

newspapers. What is interesting is that Opland describes the four types of activities by the *imbongi* as general improvising and memorising. The terms improvisation and memorisation seem problematic to many critics of Xhosa literature. For instance, Finnegan (1979: 53) states that this view of memorisation and recall is still widespread. But as a scholarly theory about the basic process of oral composition, it is now under fire from many scholars, and in specialist circles analyses in terms of memorisation have become unpopular. If we refer to the discussion in 2.3.4 we notice that composition in Xhosa oral poetry is spontaneous and the content of the poem is determined by the particular situation at a given time. This point is confirmed in Neethling (2001a: 204-205) where he illustrates how the same *imbongi* delivered six different performances at graduation ceremonies which took place over a period of eight days. In response to this remarkable performance Neethling says:

How did Zolani Mkiva go about his daunting task? Realising that his basic audience would be different every night and realising that the purpose of the gathering could be defined as the same every night, i.e. sharing in the joy of the graduates being rewarded for their efforts, he might have been tempted and forgiven for producing the same basic performance every night. But true to his calling as a traditional but also dynamic *imbongi*, Mkiva renders a different performance every night, and that in itself is a great achievement.

This statement illustrates that for the *imbongi yomthonyama*, the theory of memorisation is rather problematic. As Neethling (ibid.) puts it: “The old argument of memorisation versus creativity or improvisation is, of course, then revisited. ...Every performance is a passing, unstable, never-to-be-repeated occasion.”

What is interesting is that Opland is also sceptical about the validity of this theory. This statement is reflected in his concluding remarks after his conversation with the *imbongi*, Mbutuma, “...it is clear that Mbutuma does not produce fixed, memorised *izibongo*; rather, he composes his poems in performance...” (Opland: 1998: 56)

The above quotation confirms the unique nature of an *imbongi yomthonyama* as discussed in the previous section. It also shows the distinction between the *imbongi* who performs

spontaneously and other people who have the ability to *bonga* or to recite *izibongo* which are already produced. Apart from being able to perform spontaneously, the performance itself has great significance to the audience. Since the performer is face to face with his public, he can make use of visual resources at his disposal. The importance of performance is reflected in Finnegan (1970: 2) who states that, “the significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition; for the nature of the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited”. Among the factors that enhance the significance of performance are the bodily movements, the presence of the audience, the nature of the occasion, and the variation of tone. This point is evident in the recordings of the *iimbongi* that performed on Heritage Day in September 2000 at The University of the Western Cape. During the performance of each *imbongi* the audience became moved and responses such as *Yi-Yi-Yi-Yi!!! Halala! Halala! Halala!!!* would follow. Out of excitement, a few ladies would at times come forward dancing, waving their blankets in the air. The participation of these ladies enhanced the spirit of the occasion, as a result another *imbongi* would be inspired to start singing his praises as he moved to the stage. In other words, the presence of the performer does not only have an impact on the poem being sung but plays a role in transmitting the message to the audience. This point is cited in Finnegan (1970:5) who points out that, “this visual aspect is sometimes taken even further than gestures and dramatic bodily movements and is expressed in the form of a dance, often joined by the members of audience (or chorus)”. In addition to the bodily movements, the performer would employ devices such as the use of vivid ideophones and dramatized dialogue. These techniques would leave the audience amazed or enthralled. Mqhayi, one of the renowned *iimbongi* was known for utilising these devices. This point is illustrated in an extract from an interview of Saule with Rev. Lupondwana in Saule (1989: 115):

Most impressive, Rev D.L. Lupondwana further explained, was Mqhayi’s *bonga* antics which people greatly admired. In the middle or beginning of his *isibongo*, irrespective of the occasion, people would shout “*ivili*” (the wheel), to which Mqhayi would respond by drawing a big wheel in the in the air saying:” *Ndinevili enkul’endayibonayo... Ith’ obe ngaphants’ imbeke phezulu, Le vili ithi r-r-r ukuhamba kwayo.* (I have a big wheel that I saw, It puts the one at the bottom on top as it turns; This wheel says r-r-r-when it moves).

What is interesting is that the dramatization does not only enhance the message of the poem being sung but the dialogue itself is informative. If one thinks of a wheel, as it revolves all the sides have a turn to be at the top and at some stage they touch the ground. The wheel could be interpreted as representing the world. Each one of us in this world comes across obstacles at a certain stage, but they are only for a moment, as soon as one has overcome them, he can look up to a bright future. The use of the poem “*Ivili*” can be seen as a way in which Mqhayi teaches people to be optimistic. At another level, the poem “*Ivili*” can be seen as a mechanism to teach people that life is not static, people enter this world at some stage and they pass on to another world at another time. If we observe the two examples carefully, we will find that the role of performance is more than just a simple delivery of a message to the audience. Similarly, the above poem illustrates the power and status of oral poetry. Chadwick’s comment in Finnegan (1970:121) shares the same feelings, “The praise poems of the Bantu peoples of South Africa are one of the most specialised and complex forms of poetry to be found in Africa.”

The above statement can be associated with the fact that the creation of the poem occurs spontaneously while the *imbongi* is performing. On the other hand, he employs dramatic bodily movements to inspire his audience and to keep them actively involved by either clapping hands, ululating or dancing. These features are what makes oral poetry unique.

In this chapter it became apparent that composition and performance play an important role in the transmission of oral poetry. As Finnegan (1970: 12) states:

These characteristic qualities of oral literary forms have several implications for the study of oral literature...to ignore these in an oral work is to risk missing much of the subtlety, flexibility and individual originality of its creator.

The notion of originality is crucial because from the above discussion it became clear that the *imbongi*’s performance is driven by inspiration at a particular time. In other words, the *imbongi* delivers a different poem at every performance. This development challenges the theory of memorisation and improvisation with regard to the *imbongi yomthoniyama*. Although some of the *imbongi yomthoniyama* do write their poems, as it is evident in the interview with Batyi, it

became clear that the written poem is a different creation of that particular moment. This point will be important in the discussion of the relation between orality and literacy in Chapter 5.



CHAPTER 3

WHO IS MQHAYI?

3.1 Mqhayi's life history

To talk about Mqhayi, his convictions and his contribution to Xhosa literature, is such a great challenge because one does not know where to start and where to stop. The reason for this is that his life and the impact of his works extend beyond literary bounds to the actual development of the Xhosa language. His ideals and aspirations did not focus on the development of Xhosa literature and the Xhosa language, but were also aimed at promoting a sound social fabric. This multi-faceted nature of his personality can be attributed to his background and to the kind of people who surrounded his life.

According to Herdeck (1974: 258) and Jordan (1973: 105), Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi the most famous of the Xhosa poets, was born on the banks of Tyhume, on 1 December 1875. He was the son of Ziwani, scholar of all the Bantu languages of South Africa and teacher, and the great grandson of Mqhayi the chief of the AmaCirha clan. Born near the town of Alice in the Victoria East District, Samuel was named after the Old Testament prophet, and given several Xhosa names such as, Ngxeke-ngxeke (his nickname) and Loliwe (a train).

Samuel, as he was often called, began school in Evergreen, six miles from his home in Allendale. He stayed there from 1882 to 1885. During the three years at this school he met three of the men who were destined to influence his whole life and career. These were the Rev. E. Makhiwane, the Rev. P. J. Mzimba and Mr J. Tengo Jabavu who were to become leading Xhosa personalities and writers.

At the age of nine he accompanied his father to his new home in Centane. While at Centane, Mqhayi listened closely to the warriors' tales and to the arguments of the "Great Place", the meeting area where his great uncle, Chief Nzanzana, held court. The six years that he spent at Centane helped him to acquire a lot of knowledge about the culture and history of his people. As Jordan (1973: 106) puts it:

It was there that he saw *imidudo*, *iintlombe*, *intonjane*, *imiyeyezelo*, *amadini* etc. As he relates, he used to sit spellbound, listening to *inkundla* orations. It was there, that he first listened to *izibongo* and himself began to “lisp in numbers” praising favourite oxen, other boys or himself. It was there that he began to appreciate the beauty, dignity and subtleties of Xhosa, and to acquire the amazingly wide vocabulary that even Tiyo Soga would have envied.

Occasions such as *imidudo*, *iintlombe*, and *iintonjane* have special significance for the culture and values of the Xhosa people. The *imidudo* usually take place at social gatherings that are meant to keep the community together by having time to share their daily life experiences. In other words, one can also see these gatherings as informal schools from which young people can learn a lot about their history, how to manage their households etc. At these gatherings traditional beer is usually served and each age group will sit together. In other words, values such as respect for the elders are subconsciously instilled in the young people. Songs are also part of the occasion to celebrate the happiness. Those who are inspired by the song will stand up and perform a traditional dance. Those who are performing will be praised by their clan names or *iziduko*. In the case of *iintlombe*, these are gatherings of traditional healers and they are also accompanied by special songs. At these gatherings a traditional healer who is inspired by the song will stand up holding his knobkerrie upright in the air making a special dance barefooted. Before he speaks, he will address himself with his *isiduko* tracing his genealogy. The *intonjane* takes place during the initiation of girls. Similarly, at these occasions there are special songs which refer to the preparation of girls for adulthood. Some of these songs teach the initiates how to take care of themselves as future wives. The *imiyeyezelo* usually take place to rejoice in the coming back of boys from the initiation school or at wedding ceremonies. These are special kinds of praises by women who will be ululating and making special dances to express their joy. Occasions like these are usually accompanied by praise songs. The songs are performed with such vigour that the observer is left stunned with excitement.

Basing my argument on the above explanation, it is clear that Mqhayi acquired important knowledge that served as a stepping-stone for his career. This means that the knowledge and

skills that he acquired empowered him to become a successful *imbongi* of his time. In addition to this, since these occasions are rich in culture, it means that Mqhayi gained a strong culture base during his stay at Centane and this is evident in all his works.

After his six years at Centane, Mqhayi came to attend school at Lovedale where he received training as a teacher before he went into the world. In 1897, Mqhayi taught at the West Bank location in East London. His literary career began here because he received encouragement by Dr W. Rubusana and Messrs N. C. Mhala, A. K. Soga and G. Tyhamzashe, all of them distinguished leaders of the time. He began to contribute *izibongo* (praise poems) and historical information to the periodical *Izwi labaNtu* (The Voice of the People). Later on, he became sub-editor of this paper in 1897. Then he became editor of John Tengo Jabavu's *Imvo zabaNtsundu* from 1920 to 1922, and was invited to work as a proofreader of Xhosa and English manuscripts at Lovedale Press in 1922. Instead, he began standardizing Xhosa orthography and establishing grammatical and syntactical practices with William Govan Bennie. He had to give up this job and go back to teaching where he was offered a post at his Alma Mater, Lovedale. But during these few employment years in the world, Mqhayi's views on South African history and how it should be taught in African schools had undergone such modifications that he found himself compelled either to be false to his own convictions and teach history as the authorities would have him teach it, or to give up teaching altogether. He decided on the latter. On leaving Lovedale, he went to make his home on the "summit" of *Ntab'ozuko*- Mount Helicon on Tilana's Hill in the Berlin district near King William's Town in 1925. He began his trips through the country in his impressive kaross singing praises on great traditional and state occasions. Because of the nature and quality of his work he was called "*Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele*" (The *imbongi* of the whole nation). He died on 29 July 1945 at his home.

The news of his death shocked the entire nation. Saule (1996: 70) states that, "the newspapers were inundated with poetry to lament his death". The bitterness felt by the people is also evident in Saule (1996:76) in the words of Matoti, one of the poets who expressed their feeling of loss at Mqhayi's funeral:

Waqhawuka umqadi, lwaqhawuka uphondo lwakomKhulu,

Zavakala iincwina zaxela ukhozi lwentaba ludliwa yindlala.

(Saule: 1996: 76)

The support is broken, broken is the horn of the royal house,

Moans are heard, like those of a hungry mountain eagle.

(Translation by Saule)

The term ‘support’ in the above quotation can be interpreted as the pillar. In African society, a pillar has a crucial function, it is a pole that is set in the middle of the house to give support to the whole house. This means that the life and security of the entire family is dependent on this pillar. Should anything happen to the pillar, the life of that family is doomed. Similarly, Matoti equates Mqhayi to a pillar because his whole life was centred on the development and well-being of his nation. This point will be illustrated in the following section which deals with his contribution.

3.2 Mqhayi’s literary work and its contribution to Xhosa society

That Mqhayi is one of the great heroes in Xhosa society is no surprise. His contribution to Xhosa literature is unique in the sense that he features in a variety of genres. For instance, his works include essays and articles in the journal *Izwi labaNtu*, *Umteteleli waBantu*, he was editor of the newspaper, *Imvo zabaNtsundu*, bible stories such as *U-Samson*, translations into Xhosa such as *U-Aggrey um-Afrika*, and novels such as *Ityala lamaWele* (*The Lawsuit of the Twins*) and *UDon Jadu*. He has also published widely in poetry. Some of his works in poetry books include *I-Bandla labaNtu* (The Church of the People), 1923; *Imihobe nemibongo* (Songs of Exaltation), 1927; *Umhlekezazi u-Hintsa* (Chief *Hintsa*), 1937; *Inzuzo* (Reward), 1942. As it has been indicated in the previous discussion, he has played a crucial role not only in the development of Xhosa literature but has been very instrumental in nation building. Saule (1996:24) explains this commitment clearly when he describes him as a bard and a writer who on many occasions identifies himself as the spokesperson for his society and an agent endowed with the creative faculty of transforming through art his imaginative world of desire, dream and hope into the realities of daily existence. His art by and large reflects everyday realities, views, people’s attitudes and ideas about the concepts of culture, and

politics both modern and traditional. That Mqhayi's commitment was to serve as a spokesperson of his society and his dreams and hopes for unity and nation building is true. In fact, these dreams form a golden thread through all his literary works namely in the newspapers, journals, lectures he presented, translations from English to Xhosa, essays, novels and poetry. If we trace the early beginnings of his writings in the journal *Izwi labaNtu* and the newspaper *Imvo zabaNtsundu*, his convictions are quite evident. For instance, one of his essays in *Umteteleli waBantu* (1923- 1939) reads:

Mayicace kuthi indawo yokuba asikabi siso isizwe thina sisengamacakaza ezizwana; asikabi yile nto kuthiwa "luhlanga". Le nto kuthiwa yiBritani kuthethwa ingqokelela yezizwana; ngokunjalo iJamani, nabuphina ubukumkani obubalulekileyo...Thina ke lusapho lukaNtu, umSuthu eyedwa akasiso isizwe, nomXhosa eyedwa, nomZulu, nomTswane, into eya kusenza isizwe kukuthi sidibane sihlangabezane, sibe luhlanga olunye.

(Saule: 1996: 27)

It must be clear to us that we are not yet a nation but tribes, we are not yet what is called a nation. What is called Britain means a collection of states; the same applies to Germany, and any other important kingdom...As for us the house of *Ntu*, the *Sotho* alone is not a nation, the same applies to *Xhosa* alone, and the *Zulu*, and the *Tswana*, what will make us a nation is to unite and come together as one nation.

(Translation by Saule)

Mqhayi in the above extract is trying to instil a sense of unity in his people. In the first place, this essay was written at the time when Xhosa people were still trying to rebuild their nation after the Nongqawuse cattle-killing episode of 1857. The period of Nongqawuse had left scars not only on the intellectual and literary development of the African people, but had also brought drastic political, economic and social changes affecting all groups in Southern Africa. As Jordan (1973: 77) describes it:

Xhosa chiefs had lost their political and military power. Some of their people, a section of the Ndlambe and almost the entire Gqunukhwebe, had become Christian.

From these and the “loyal Fingos” there developed not only a class of preachers and teachers, but also a kind of “police tribe”, ...Fingos and other tribal groups displaced by the internecine Mfecane Wars were pushed away from the Colony and into the “empty spaces” and “no- man’s lands”...

From the above description, one is not surprised by Mqhayi’s concerns about the risk at which the unity of his people was, more especially because even the chiefs who are regarded as the custodians of the people in the African culture, had no control over their people. In his famous novel *Ityala lamaWele*, Mqhayi seems to revive this unity through the complex dispute of the Lawsuit of the Twins. After several court cases in an attempt to resolve this dispute, a highly respected elder Khulile is called in to intervene and he advocates peace and unity by saying:

*Olu hlobo lungamawele, ebantwini apha luhlobo oluvela luqondile kwasekuveleni....
Enye into edla ngokubakho kwaaba bantu kukuvisisana okugqithileyo, into kanjalo
leyo edla ngokutsho kungangeni noyise nomthetho phakathi kwawo.*

(1914:25-26)

(Old orthography *kwaaba* used by the author)

Twins are the kind of people who among other people, are born intelligent. Another thing that distinguishes these people is an intact relationship, something that usually makes it difficult even for their father or the law to separate them.

(my translation)

From the above statement, Mqhayi through the words of Khulile expresses his dream for unity. If we take the above statement further, and relate it to the previous statements which reflected objection to the practice of tribalism, it is clear that Mqhayi’s attempt is to advocate unity. In other words, the people should refrain from the tendency of discriminating against one another since the common denominator is that they are all Africans as the words, “...*into eya kusenza isizwe kukuthi sidibane sihlangabezane, sibe luhlanga olunye*”. It is also important to note that the presence of Khulile in this case has a great significance. In the first place, according to African culture, elders are regarded as great resources for African heritage

and tradition. In other words, the role of Khulile is not only to bring about unity but he is also a symbol for nation building because he is going to share the traditional values of the Xhosa people. Mqhayi seems to reinforce his plea for unity and nation building in the same case through the words of Dumisani the *imbongi* from the royal place:

*Ngemihla yakudala, mini kwavel'iintaba,
Kwabekw' umntu waamnye wokuphath' abanye.
Kwathiwa ke loo mntu ngumntu wegazi,
Kwathiwa loo mntu yinkonyana yohlanga,
Kwathiwa loo mntu makathotyelwe luluntu...*
(1914: 30)
(Old orthography *waamnye* used by the author)

In the olden days, when only mountains were existence,

Only one person was delegated to rule others.

It was said that this person is of the royal blood

It was said that this person is the son of the nation,


It was said that this person should be respected by the people...

(my translation)

Dumisani in the above stanza was praising chief Hintsá after he had given the verdict at the court case of the twins. As we have indicated earlier, this case had been referred to different personalities according to the hierarchy of status. The chief's court was the last place since his ruling is final. Dumisani's words, "*Kwabekw' umntu waamnye wokuphath' abanye...Kwathiwa loo mntu makathotyelwe luluntu*" emphasizes this status as he states that it is the instructions from above that people should respect the chief. As I have indicated in the previous section, after *Nongqawuse's* episode the social and economic status of the Xhosa people had deteriorated. Men went to the cities to seek employment. This meant that they were no longer subjects of their chiefs but of their employers. It seems that Mqhayi in the above stanza is trying to reinstate the status of the chiefs and by so doing is building the social fabric of his people.

What is interesting about Mqhayi is that his dream for unity and nation building is not only focussing on his people but extends beyond the boundaries of his people. This point is illustrated in his novel *UDon Jadu*, which was published in 1929 where he visualizes a Eutopian State, which he calls *Mnandi* in which there is neither racialism nor isolationism. In this state as it is described in Jordan (1973: 110), immigration is encouraged, and experts of all races and shades of colour come from the four corners of the earth to make permanent home there. There is full social, economic and political equality. In other words, Mqhayi in this novel propagates unity and co-operation of all nations. The same spirit of co-operation is reflected in his poem UJohn Thengo Jabavu in *Inzuzo* (1974: 60):

*Kukhe kwakuhle wakuwela,
Oko wabuya nenkwenkwezi;
Bath'abanye yekaEdwadi;
Zath' izizwe zabelana-*



*Ath'amaXhosa yekaNtsikana;
Bath'abeSuthu yekaMshweshwe;*

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*Ath'amaZulu yekaTshaka;
Ath'amaSwazi yekaSotshangana;
Ath'amaNdebele yekaNobengula.*

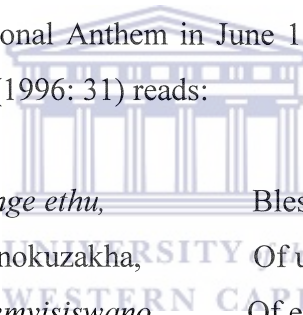
We were proud of your visit overseas,
Because you brought us **a star**;
Some said it belongs to Edward;
And the nations shared it among themselves-

AmaXhosa said it is Ntsikana's;
AbeSuthu said it is Mshweshwe's;
AmaZulu said it is Tshaka's;
AmaSwazi said it is Sotshangana's;
AmaNdebele said it is Nobengula's.

(my translation) (my emphasis)

From the above stanzas, Mqhayi is praising Thengo Jabavu who had attended a world convention in Britain. As one would expect, representatives from different countries or nations came together to address burning issues. In other words, Jabavu brought knowledge and information from this convention hence Mqhayi's use of the word "a star" because a star brings light. Since the spirit of sharing is central to the Xhosa culture or African nations in general, we notice that Jabavu did not only develop or share the knowledge with his people but with the whole nation as the words, "*Zath' izizwe zabelana*". *Ath' amaXhosa yekaNtsikana; Ath'amaNdebele yekaNobengula* suggest. In other words, every nation had a share from this "star".

In fact, Mqhayi's wish for a Greater South Africa in which all people would enjoy equal rights irrespective of their colour, nationality or creed, dates back as early as 1923-1939 in his contribution to the later National Anthem in June 1927 in *Umteteleli wabaNtu*. One of his verses as illustrated in Saule (1996: 31) reads:



Sikelel' amalinge ethu, Bless our efforts,
Awomanyano nokuzakha, Of unity and building ourselves up,
Awemfundo nemvisiswano, Of education and mutual goodwill,
Uwasikelele, And bless them,
Uwasikelele And bless them.

(Translation by Saule)

Since a national anthem serves as a bond that unites the people of the country, we can see Mqhayi as having played a crucial role in uniting the people of South Africa. In fact he can be regarded as one of the pioneers of the new democratic South Africa in which all people have equal opportunities. His literary works did not only contribute to the development of the Xhosa language as he devoted his life in translating books from other languages into Xhosa, but he had a dual responsibility of also bringing together different nations. A good illustration of this point is found in his book *UDon Jadu* where he describes the joint effort of the people of his Eutopian State *Mnandi*, in developing their country:

Aseke iimanyano zobuKristu kubafazi, kumadoda nakulutsha, azivuselela zaphila ezibe zisiwa. Amise iBhodi yoMzi, emayijonge intlalo, izakhiwo, nokumiwa komzi lo, nemvisiswano yawo, nezinye izizwe nabantu, neelwimi. Iincutshe zamazwe ngamazwe, nezeentlanga ngeentlanga ezithe zafunwa, zize neemashini zazo, zokukhawulezisa le misebenzi. Ibe sisiseko esihle kunene othe wasekeka phezu kwaso lo mzi, kwanelizwe elo liphela. Ngaphaya kwako konke oku, bazuze neyona nto idla ngokunqabela nezona zizwe zinamandla- “umanyano nemvisiswano”.

(1929: 58-59)

They established fellowship organisations for women, men and the youth, and they revived those that were on the verge of closing down. They established a Community Board which would monitor the social welfare, buildings and the environmental affairs, the harmony and a sound relationship with other nations and languages...Experts from other countries and of different nationalities that have been invited to join forces should bring their equipment to speed up the work. This was a strong foundation on which this state was built as well as the world at large.... Above all, the people of this state have gained something which is usually rare even to powerful states, - unity and harmony.

(my translation)

It is quite evident from the above quotation that Mqhayi's ideals were not only to promote unity and harmony for his people but he also advocated global participation as his words, “*Iincutshe zamazwe ngamazwe, nezeentlanga ngeentlanga...zize neemashini zazo*” illustrate. In other words, his quest for unity goes beyond South African boundaries hence the words, “*zamazwe ngamazwe*”.

One can summarise by saying that one can go on endlessly trying to unpack Mqhayi's contribution to Xhosa literature because of the tremendous role he has played. Mbebe in Qangule (1979: 26) tries to leave a picture of this hero for the next generation when he says:

Wena Ntabozuko usenzel'uzuko,

*Kub'usigcinel'imbongi enozuko,
Yen'umntakaMqhayi waseNtabozuko,
Obhale iincwadi, obhale imihobe,
Oguqul'iincwadi kwinteth' abamhlophe,
Wandise ulwazi kwinteth' esiXhosa,
Wanika uzuko kulwimi lomXhosa,
Yena liqhayiya kwizwe lamaXhosa.*

You Mount of Glory, you have created glory for us,
Because you are the resting place of a glorious poet,
He the child of Mqhayi of Mount Glory,
He who has written books and poems,
He who has translated books from European languages,-
He who has enriched the Xhosa language,
He who has lent dignity to the Xhosa language,
Verily he is the pride of the Xhosa nation.
(Translation by Qangule)

From the above stanza, Mbebe presents Mqhayi as a national hero and a literary giant who has brought glory not only to his people but also to his language hence the repetitive reference to *uzuko* (glory). I think Mbebe's observations are true because up to this day, Mqhayi's work is still given great respect because of its quality. In other words, Mqhayi's work is relevant up to this day.

3.3 The role of Mqhayi as transitional figure between oral and written traditions

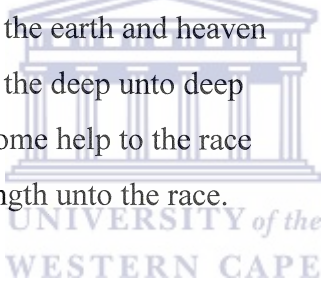
3.3.1 Mqhayi's childhood

To understand Mqhayi as a transitional figure, I think it is important to see him in the context of the period in which he lived and in the light of his contemporaries who had a great influence on his life. If we follow Mqhayi's life closely from his birth to his death, we find that his whole life is symbolic of a transition from oral tradition to written tradition. In the

first place, we find that he was born just about fifty years after the Xhosa language was reduced to print by the missionaries at a mission station on the banks of the Tyhume valley, his birthplace. This means that at the time of Mqhayi's birth the influence of Christianity had just begun and the first converts of missionaries such as Ntsikana and Tiyo Soga had already started to spread the gospel. Since this whole adventure began at Tyhume, it means that the people of this village including his parents, were among the first converts. This point is evident in Qangule (1979:3) where he quotes Mqhayi's testimony in verse form on the excitement at his home and the immediate neighbourhood on the day of his birth:

We pray for the young man
And to the "I Am" we give thanks

Therefore we expect him to be preserved;
We ask for all gifts for him;
For those of the earth and heaven
For those of the deep unto deep
And he be some help to the race
To be a strength unto the race.
Amen.



From the above prayer we notice a combination of traditional practice and the western culture. In the first place, it is customary in Xhosa culture that when a child is born, elderly women in the neighbourhood be called in to conduct the delivery. The expression of excitement would be shown by extolling the child with his *isiduko*, thanking the ancestors for their presence during the process of delivery. It seems as though the same tradition of involving the neighbourhood had taken place at Mqhayi's birth as the quotation from his testimony suggests. However, the excitement is expressed by reference to the one above whom they refer to as the "I Am".

It is interesting to note that although they are referring to God, they do not call him by name but as the "I Am", to show respect. During this period Christianity was still new to the Xhosa people and they would not even point to the sky because this was seen as disrespect for God.

Another interesting matter is that although the **prayer** was only a wish from his parents, little did they know that it would transform into reality through his character and his works. The words, “ ... he be some help to the race. And he be a strength unto the race” became part of Mqhayi’s life. This is reflected in the translated version of his autobiography, “I thank my father for taking me to Centane, for it was the means of my getting an insight into the national life of my people.” (Scott: 1976: 19-20)

The above words indicate Mqhayi’s sense of commitment to his nation as the phrase, “...insight into the national life of my people” suggests. In fact, he did not only get insight into the culture and lifestyle of his people, but made it his responsibility to ensure that the culture is preserved and maintained through the different literary genres he produced. In the preface of his famous novel *Ityala lamaWele* (1914: iv) his convictions are quite evident when he states:

Intetho nemikhwa yesiXhosa iya itshona ngokutshona ngenxa yelizwi nokhanyo olukhoyo, oluze nezizwe zaseNtshona-langa, oonyana bakaGogi noMagogi. Yindawo yomlisela nomthinjana wasemaXhoseni, ukuba ukhangele ngokucokisekileyo ukuba iya kuthi, yakutshonela iphele le ntetho nale mikhwa inesidima yakowayo, kutshonele ntoni na emveni koko. La ke ngoko ngamazwembe-zwembe okuzama ukuxhathalaza kuloo msinga uza kutshayela isizwe siphela.

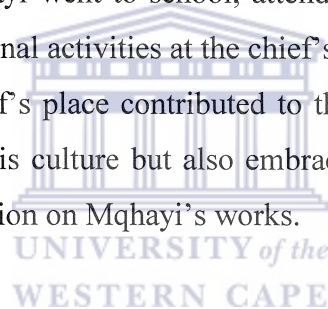
Xhosa language and its customs are gradually disappearing because of Christianity and western civilization which have been brought by the nations from the west, the sons of King George and his queen. It is the responsibility of the youth from the house of Xhosa to think carefully of the consequences of letting this language and its dignified customs to diminish. These are my endeavours to rescue the nation from being swept away by the stream.

(my translation)

In the first paragraph Mqhayi expresses his concern that western civilization is gradually replacing Xhosa culture hence his words, “*Intetho nemikhwa yesiXhosa iya itshona*”. He does not only show concern but comes up with a solution when he challenges the youth as leaders

of tomorrow to take an active role in rescuing the nation. In the last paragraph his role is quite evident as he states clearly that by producing this book *Ityala lamaWele* it is an attempt to save the nation from being assimilated by other nations. If we reflect on the words of the prayer, “ And he be some help to the race. And be a strength unto the race” we find that Mqhayi followed the footsteps of this prayer as his words, “...ngamazwembe-zwembe okuzama ukuxhathalaza kuloo msinga uza kutshayela isizwe siphela” suggest. In other words, the prayer and his book can be seen as symbolic of the transition from orality to literacy.

Another interesting point about Mqhayi’s birth is his name Loliwe. He acquired this name because trains began to run at his village at the time of his birth. In other words, until the time of his birth, the people in his village used traditional means of transport such as walking, travelling on horseback and wagons. This means that his name can be seen as symbolic of a transition from the traditional way of life to the western style. We have indicated in the previous sections that Mqhayi went to school, attended Sunday school classes but on other hand was exposed to traditional activities at the chief’s place. The knowledge that he acquired from school and at the chief’s place contributed to the well-rounded *imbongi* of his calibre who had great respect for his culture but also embraced western culture. This point will be evident in the following section on Mqhayi’s works.



An outstanding characteristic of Mqhayi’s childhood was his spirit of patriotism. Although his school years were based on Christian education, his respect for his tradition remained intact. This became evident at the time when he had to go to initiation school, as it is customary in the Xhosa culture for every boy to go through this process before he can be accepted into manhood. In his autobiography, Mqhayi explains the problems that he encountered from the missionaries to the extent that he was nearly expelled from school. To the missionaries, this practice was perceived as barbaric. Despite these restrictions, Mqhayi forced his way in respect of his culture. In fact, according to Mqhayi, both the Xhosa culture and the western should co-exist. His convictions permeate all his works as will be seen in the following chapters.

3.3.2 Mqhayi's work as a reflection of transition from oral to written tradition

In the previous sections, I have indicated that Mqhayi's birth is marked by the gradual emergence of Xhosa literature in written form. This was the period when Xhosa writers such as William Gqoba, Tiyo Soga, Tengo Jabavu and Dr Rubusana were beginning to emerge. As one would understand, these writers played an invaluable role in the development of Xhosa literature. Jordan (1973:42) acknowledges their role when he states:

The legacy of the first fifty years of Xhosa literary activity is to be respected. If some of our readers are inclined to think that we are over-indulgent when we make this remark, we have only to remind them that these first writers had no written tradition to guide them, no Homer or Sophocles, no Herodotus or Plutarch, no Dante or Pertrach, on whom to model themselves.

(spelling of Pertrach as it appears in Jordan)

From the above quotation it is clear that these writers were pioneers of Xhosa literature. For instance, Rubusana was the founder of the newspaper, *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People) which came into existence in 1898. As the name of the paper suggests, it is in this paper that Xhosa people shared their experiences with the wider community and also voiced their concerns about the prevailing laws of the time. Similarly, in the field of verse Gqoba played an important role. He is famous for his "Great Discussions", one between the Christian and the non-Christian, and the other on education. The essence of these discussions is the impact of Christianity on the traditional way of life. It is important to note that these writers were faced with great challenges. Firstly, since there was no existing literature to feed off, they had to create and recreate ideas themselves. Secondly, they had to conform to acceptable criteria and standards of publishing set by the missionaries. It was at this time that S. E. K. Mqhayi, the famous Xhosa *imbongi*, was born. During this period Xhosa publications were in the form of contributions to newspapers such as *Izwi labaNtu* and *Imvo zabaNtsundu*. He contributed to the editing of these newspapers and also wrote articles. His greatest achievement is that he was the first *imbongi* to write his poetry for publication while he continued to perform in public. We can attribute this achievement to his exposure to both the traditional practices at Centane and the education he received from the different schools he

attended. According to Opland (1983a: 95), Mqhayi succeeded in reconciling within himself the traditional ways he absorbed in Centane and the Western Christian education he received at Lovedale. As will be seen in the following discussion, this point is evident in his personality, goals and dreams as well as in his works. If we look at his personality, we find that as a natural leader, Mqhayi knew that he had a duty to perform in his society but he also had great respect for other cultures. The nature of his personality is evident in the translated version of his autobiography in (Scott: 1976: 33) where he states that, "...while I am in close touch with my own race, I am also in touch with the European races and with all denominations who worship the living God."

The above quotation confirms Mqhayi's belief that both the Xhosa culture and the European culture deserve the same respect since they both serve humankind. His views were also transferred into practice. For instance, it also transpired that Mqhayi was an acclaimed preacher and would not miss the church services at the Columbia Mission during his visit to Centane. He was not shy of the pulpit and would always ascend it in his traditional attire, a long kaross (*umnweba*), a headgear (*isidlokolo*), a spear (*idini*) and a knobkerrie (*intonga*). The idea of standing at the pulpit in traditional *imbongi* attire draws a lot of attention. One would have thought that this practice is incompatible with Christian ethics. But to Mqhayi's philosophy, it was important to allow both African (Xhosa) and western culture to develop together. This point is evident in his novel *UDon Jadu*. We find that Don Jadu in his "imaginary journey" comes across a homestead to seek help. As he was approaching the house, he was attacked by the dogs and the owner (a white man) rescued him. Together with his family and children, the man entertained Don Jadu. What is interesting, is the sympathy and the hospitality that Don Jadu received from this family as it is described by Don Jadu:

...ndiyile ndangena endlwini, ndafika lo mfo eziphethe ngeenkophe iinyembezi, ebulela uSomandla ngokusinda kwam kweziya zikhohlakali zezinja...lintlobo zezityo ezifanelekileyo ndibone ngazo sezidweliswe apha kule ndlu yokutyela....

(1929: 18)

I came into the house and found this man in tears; thanking the Almighty for saving my life from the vicious dogs...different kinds of dishes were prepared in the dining

room...

(my translation)

If we look at the period in which the novel *UDon Jadu* was written, we find that it was at the time when the laws that divided Black and White South Africans were prevalent. It was the time when the lines of demarcation that set boundaries between Black and White were clearly drawn, even at public places such as the beach. But Mqhayi, in the midst of the oppressive laws, already had visions for a democratic South Africa in which Black and White lived together peacefully. In fact, in his opinion, western values should not replace traditional Xhosa values but a situation of compromise should be created which would result in a reconciliation of traditions.

If we follow his works closely we notice that he writes about the traditional and western values, Xhosa religion and Christianity, and his heroes are both Black and White. I will look at these issues in detail in the following section.

3.3.2.1 The link between traditional and western values

A good example where Mqhayi illustrates the link between the traditional values and western values can be cited in the following stanzas which are taken from his poem *Itshawe laseBritani* (The Prince of Wales) from his anthology, *Inzuzo* (1974:71). He performed this poem for the Prince of Wales during his visit to South Africa in 1925. About the event that occasioned the declamation of the poem, Ntantala (1971: 13) in Qangule (1979: 222), writes:

When the Prince of Wales- (now the Duke of Windsor) visited South Africa in 1925, to make the African people feel that they too belonged, the white administration asked Mqhayi as national bard, to sing praises to the visiting prince, as the Africans would have done in the olden days. Mqhayi used the occasion well, for he drew for all a picture of British rule in the colonies.

In the following stanzas of the poem that Mqhayi performed, it is interesting to see how Mqhayi wittingly chooses traditional Xhosa terms to describe the Prince. Within the same

poem he blends traditional values and western values within the same poem as the following stanzas illustrate,

- II 6 *Phumani nonke nize kufanekisa!*
7 *Phumani zizwe nonke nize kufanekisa;*
8 *Sisilo sini n' esi singaziwayo?*
9 *Singajongekiyo singaqhelekiyo?*
10 *Yaz' ithi kanti yile nabulele;*
11 *Isilokaz' esikhulu seziziba;*
12 *Yaz' ithi kanti ngulo Makhanda- mahlamu*
13 *Inyok' enkul' eza ngezivuthevuthe;*
14 *Yaz' ithi kanti ngulo Gilikankqo,*
15 *Isil' esikhul' esingaziwa mngxuma.*
- III 21 *Nalo lisiz' iTshawe laseBhilitani!*
22 *Inzala yenyathikaz' uVitoliya;*
23 *Inkazan' ebuthixorha kwizwe lakwaNtu,*
- IV 33 *Yez' inkwenkw' omgquba yomthonyama!*
34 *Yez' ixhom' izindwe yaxhom' ugijo;*
35 *Yez' ifak' umzunga yafak' iphunga*
36 *Yez' itsho ngezidanga nezidabane;*
37 *Yez' itsho ngobumbejewu bobuhlalu;*
38 *Yez' itsho ngobulawu nobuqholo;*
39 *Yez' inetyeleba nezifikane...*
- V 44 *Tarhu Bhilitan' enkulu!*
45 *Bhilitan' enkul' engatshonelwa langa;*
- VI 62 *Tarhu Langaliyakhanya!*
63 *Uphuthum' inkwenkwezi yakowenu na?*
64 *Thina singumz' owab' iinkwenkwezi;*

65 *Nalo kamb 'ikhwez' inkwenkwez'akowenu.*

66 *Sibambana ngeSilimela thina,*

67 *Yona nkwenkwezi yokubal' iminyaka,*

68 *Iminyaka yobudoda, yobudoda!*

(Mqhayi: 1974: 71)

- II
- 6 Go out, all of you and identify him;
7 Go out, all the nations, and identify;
8 What kind of creature is this unknown monster?
9 Never before seen, unfamiliar to all?
10 Perhaps he may turn out to be *Nabulele*;
11 Monster of the deep pools;
12 Old Fivehead,-
13 The snake with five heads, who comes as a whirlwind.
14 Or it may be *Gilikankqo*,-
15 The monster whose lair no man knows.
- III
- 21 Here comes the Prince of Britain!
22 Offspring of the female buffalo, Victoria
23 Young woman who is a god in the land of Blacks,
- 1V
- 33 Here comes the boy of the raw dung, the old dung of royal descent!
34 Here he comes in plumes and in feathers;
35 Here he comes decked in finery, wearing the grass of initiates;
36 Here he comes beautifully attired,
37 Resplendent and bejewelled;
38 Here he comes in scent and fragrance;
39 Here he comes in mint and grass necklaces...
- V
- 44 Hail, Great Britain
45 Great Britain on whom the sun never sets;

- VI 62 Hail, Light- that- shines!
 63 Have you come to fetch your star?
 64 We are a nation that divides stars amongst us;
 65 Yonder is the morning star- star of your people.
 66 But we bind ourselves together with the Pleiades
 67 The stars we count our years by, (the years of our manhood),
 68 The years of manhood, (the years) of manhood!
 (Translation by Qangule)

In the first place, we should remember that Mqhayi is praising the then Prince of Wales, a man of British descent. But if we look closely at his praises, we find that he constantly applies Xhosa traditional symbols of status in his description of the Prince. In other words, he makes reference to traditional culture in describing a British subject because he regards the two cultures as related to one another. This is illustrated in line 33: *Yez' inkwenkw' omgquba yomthonyama!* This line refers to a person of Xhosa origin whose roots are in Africa. It also carries with it the respect that this person acquires because of his status. In the Xhosa culture it is usually people from the royal family, i.e. the chiefs and the kings that are given this status. In other words, the bard equates the status of the Prince to that of chiefs and kings. This point confirms Mqhayi's convictions that traditional culture and western culture can co-exist, as it is reflected in his book, *UDon Jadu* in which the people of his imaginary city (*Mnandi*) who are Black and White, live happily together. In his description of the Prince's attire, the bard clothes him in traditional dress of the chiefs and the initiates as well as in the royal outfit as the following lines illustrate: "*Yez' ixhom' izindwe yaxhom' ugijo; Yez' ifak' umzunga yafak' iphunga; yez' itsho ngesidanga nesidabane*". (Here he comes in plumes and feathers; Here he comes decked in finery, wearing the grass of initiates; Here he comes beautifully attired). The clothing, *izindwe* and *ugijo* form part of the chief's attire. On the other hand, the *isidanga* is part of a western outfit because it refers to the gown used at graduation ceremonies. Again the Prince is dressed in *iphunga*, the attire that is made of grass which is worn by the Xhosa initiates. Even in describing the perfume that the Prince is wearing, Mqhayi refers to the traditional Xhosa fragrance from the tree bark such as *umthombothi*.

In stanza V1, Mqhayi employs the same style of linking traditional and western symbols. He refers to the Morning Star which he associates with the English culture, then he refers to the Pleiades which have significance for the Xhosa culture. For instance, in stanza V1 he asks, “*Uphuthum’ inkwenkwezi yakowenu na? Nalo kamb’ ikhwezi inkwenkwez’ akowenu. Sibambana ngeSilimela thina, Yona nkwenkwez’ okubala iminyaka, Iminyaka yobudoda, yobudoda!*” The term *ikhwezi* refers to the Morning star. According to Qangule (1979:223), “the English people are associated with the Morning star which is a symbol of diligence and wisdom.” Another interpretation which I received from some of my colleagues in the English Department at the University of the Western Cape is that the Morning star is really the planet Venus. It is also called the Evening star because it appears on the horizon, mornings and evenings. Venus is the goddess of love and Venus, the planet in astrology rules over the constellation Taurus, which stands for sensuality, material possession, loyalty and determination. When I observe the terms that describe the Morning star namely: diligence, goddess, rules over the constellation, I find that they tie in well with Mqhayi’s description of the Prince, e.g. “*Inkazan’ ebuthixorha...*”(Young woman who is a god...) and “*Bhilitan’ eNkul’ engatshonelwa langa*” (Great Britain on whom the sun never shines). In the same breath he speaks of *Isilimela* (The Pleiades). The Xhosa people are associated with the Pleiades and they regard them as symbols of steadfastness, of perseverance, of manhood and of maturity. In the first place, according to Xhosa culture, boys used to go to initiation school in June. This is the time of the appearance of these Pleiades. Secondly, initiation among the Xhosa people is associated with perseverance because of the challenges of the process of initiation. As a result, when the boys have graduated from the initiation school, this is seen as a great victory.

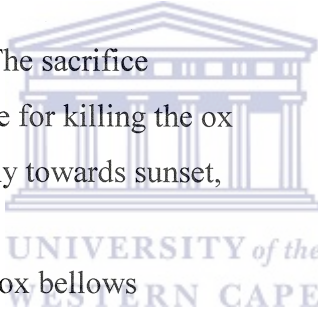
We also notice that when the bard describes the Prince he chooses items which are of traditional origin as well as those from the western culture. For instance, he speaks of *umthombothi* (traditional Xhosa fragrance) and *isidanga* (graduation gown). This is a good technique to draw the attention of the audience to his belief that traditional culture and western culture do co-exist. Mqhayi’s view about the co-existence of traditional and western values is also evident in the following stanzas from his two poems, *Aa! Sifuba-sibanzi* in *Imibengo* (1971: 190) and *Idini* in (Qangule: 1979: 81). In both poems he speaks of the sacrificial ceremony.

Idini

- 1 *Ixesha lokuhlalywa kwenkomo*
- 2 *Likholisa ukuba sekujikeleni kwelanga....*

- 13 *Ibhonga nje ke inkomo leyo*
- 14 *kukhona umzi uphithizelayo,*
- 15 *ungxolayo, unqulayo*
- 16 *kuba isikhalo eso besifuneka kakade....*
- 17 *kulilwe kuvuywa kuba ngesikhalo esiya,*
- 18 *kukuxela ukuba inkomo*
- 19 *yamkelekile kwabadala.*

The sacrifice

- 1 The time for killing the ox
 - 2 Is usually towards sunset,
- 
- 13 As the ox bellows
 - 14 the crowd of people is moving to and fro,
 - 15 everyone is talking, everyone is worshipping,
 - 16 the bellowing fulfils their wishes...
 - 17 people cry with joy because the bellowing
 - 18 signifies that the offering
 - 19 has been accepted by the ancestral spirits.

(Translation by Qangule)

In the above stanzas the *imbongi* presents us to the procedure followed in the *idini* (the sacrificial ceremony), which is accompanied by the slaughtering of a cow. The bellowing of the cow signifies the sacredness of the ceremony because Xhosa people believe that the bellowing shows that the offering is blessed by the ancestors. This point is illustrated by the

words, “*Kuba isikhalo besifuneka kakade...kukuxela ukuba inkomo yamkelekile kwabadala*” In other words; this cow is a symbol of blessings. Similarly, the poem, *Aa! Sifuba-sibanzi* refers to Jesus Christ, and the *imbongi* sees Jesus as a symbol of sacrifice. The following stanzas are a good illustration,

Aa! Sifuba-sibanzi!
Ngayo le nyang’ oMnga sinenkonzo ebanzi...

Lo Kumkan’ uzayo unguMbingeleli,
Yinkomo yedini, noMenzeleleli.
Uz’epheth’ igazi lokwenz’ intlawulelo,
“Lingekho igazi, alukh’ uxolelo.”

Hail! The Broad-chested one!

In this month of December we have a worldwide ceremony...

This King who is coming is a priest,
He is the sacrificial beast and a Saviour.
His blood will be sacrificed for our salvation,
“Without blood there is no remission of sin.”

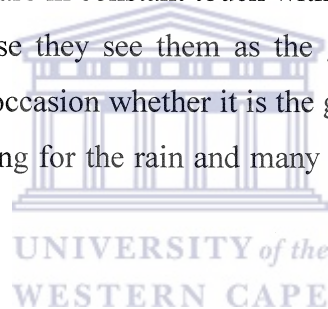
(Translation by Qangule)

The lines quoted in the above stanzas bring us to the comparison made by Mqhayi between the traditional sacrificial ceremony or the ritual (the spilling of blood for the ancestors) and the spilling of Christ’s blood on Mount Calvary. In this poem, Mqhayi sees Jesus as the sacrificial cow as it is reflected in the lines, “*Lo Kumkani uzayo ngumbingeleli, Yinkomo yedini noMenzeleleli*” According to Christianity, peoples’ sins were washed in the blood of Jesus. In other words, the death of Jesus was a blessing because through his death, people’s sins were forgiven. If we look at the interpretation of the two poems, we find that in both the traditional and the Christian ritual the common denominator is a sacrificial ceremony which is accompanied by blessings. This point brings us to the interesting observation of the bard in establishing the connection between the traditional and Christian values. Connected to this

are the links that Mqhayi found between Xhosa religion and Christianity as will be discussed in the following section.

3.3.2.2 Xhosa religion and Christianity

Before we discuss Xhosa religion, I think it is proper to first look at the philosophy of African religion in general. This will enable us to get a clear picture of the concept of religion from an African perspective. Using Mbiti (1975: 13) we can perceive African religion as an essential part of the way of life of all African people. Its influence covers all of life, from before the birth of a person to long after he has died. For instance, it is common practice among the Xhosa people that when a child is born, a certain ritual is conducted to welcome the child to the family. This ritual is accompanied by the slaughtering of a sheep or a goat as a form of inviting the presence of the ancestors to bless the occasion. It is also a known belief among the African people that they are in constant touch with the spirit of their ancestors whom they have high regard for because they see them as the go-betweens to Qamata. For example, whenever they celebrate an occasion whether it is the giving of name to a child, circumcision, marriage, a funeral, or praying for the rain and many others, the belief is that their ancestors are present.



Mbiti highlights five essential aspects which constitute African religion. The first one is beliefs which show the way people think about the universe and their attitudes towards life. The second aspect is ceremonies and festivals which include dance, songs, and what people eat and celebrate. Thirdly, we have religious objects which include shrines, sacred hills or mountains and objects like rivers. Fourthly we have values and morals and lastly religious officials who are usually the elders of the community. In almost all the works of African writers, one will find that these aspects are present. A good example can be cited in Jolobe (1971: 21):

UCAMNGCO NGENGQUBA (Memories about the kraal)

Eli gquba ngumnquba wokuzingxengxezela

Ngemini yeshwangusha siphalaze igazi,

Sisindwa lunakano lokungenakubonwa.
Ithuku loqubudo alifanga kwinzala.
Isiseko somoya nenjongo sizingile.

Sinikele ngolwendo intombi yale nkundla
Kumfo wasezizweni. Kweli gquba kwatyinwa...

Ukuphuma kogwece lukhalim'uhlaselo
Kugotywe iminqonqo kweli gquba kucelwa
Intelezi enzima yokuphuma komkhosi,...

This kraal is a place of worship and of asking for blessings
In days of misfortune, blood is shed.
Remembering the invisible spirits
The conscience of worship continues for generations.
The foundation of faith prevails.

Through marriage a girl from this homestead is handed over to a lad from
other cities.
At this kraal the marriage was sealed...

When the soldiers went out to war
We knelt down at this kraal,
Asking for the protection of the soldiers...

In the above stanzas Jolobe is meditating about a kraal, which has great significance for Xhosa people. In fact they regard it as a shrine or a sacred place because it is the place where the father and greatgrandfathers of the family were buried. In other words, it is where the ancestors are lying. As Jolobe puts it, “*Eli gquba ngumnquba wokuzingxengxezela*”, because whenever things go wrong in the family, a ceremony for asking for blessings is conducted at this kraal. Similarly, to the Xhosa people, a marriage is complete only when it has the blessings of the ancestors, hence Jolobe states that, “*Sinikele ngolwendo intombi yale*

nkundla...Kweli gquba kwatyinwa .

We also notice that before the soldiers leave, prayers are held at this kraal to wish them well and to pray for victory. This point is illustrated in “*Ukuphuma kogwece lukhalim’uhlasele, Kugotywe iminqonqo kweli gquba...* In the above stanzas Jolobe highlights an important point about African religion, namely the close connection between traditional values and worship. As Mbiti (1975: 9) puts it, “we can therefore, conclude that (African) religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of life, while at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well”. Another important aspect of African religion is the concept of *Ubuntu*. In fact, one can rightly say that this concept is at the centre of African religion or it can be seen as the driving force behind African religion. At this point, there is no clear-cut definition or theory that describes *Ubuntu*. In order to guide our discussion, let us look at Cowley’s description in Saule (1996: 82):

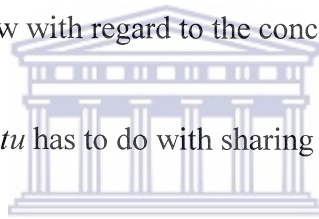
Ubuntu (Botho in Sotho, Vhuthu in Venda etc...) manifests itself through various visible human acts in different social situations. In short, the quality of Ubuntu is manifested in every human act which has community building as its objective orientation. Any act that destroys the community, any anti-social behaviour cannot, in any way be described as Ubuntu.

Cowley’s description brings out an important point: that *Ubuntu* is culturally-based because an act of *Ubuntu* complies with the norms and values of society. Another crucial feature of *Ubuntu* is that it has patriotic connotations hence Cowley’s notion of community building. In other words, *Ubuntu* is more than just an attribute of an individual but it promotes good human relations. This feature of *Ubuntu* is also reflected in Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s views (Prozensky: Sunday Independent: 1996) in Saule (1996: 83) when he states that:

Ubuntu means the essence of being human... It speaks about humanness, gentleness, hospitality, putting yourself out on behalf of others...It recognizes that any humanity is bound up with yours...willingness to accept others as they are and being thankful for them.

The above statement highlights two important points about *Ubuntu* namely, unconditional love and care for others and the interdependence among human beings. In fact, traditional African societies could realise the notion of good human relations because they were knit together by a social fabric which encouraged a collective behavioural pattern. Saule (1996:84) further stresses this point as he states that if we base our argument on the description given above, we agree on the point that good human relations and the belief in the Almighty are the main pillars of *Ubuntu*. What is interesting is that a person who adheres to the *Ubuntu* code of conduct will not of necessity receive any compensation from society, but will be rewarded by the Maker. This means that from an African perspective, *Ubuntu* has strong connections with Christianity because the bible says, “blessed is the hand that gives”. The view of the connection between *Ubuntu* with Christianity is evident in other language groups. For instance, in my conversation with Alet van Huyssteen (a colleague in our department) regarding the concept of *Ubuntu*, she responded as follows:

Mpolweni: What is your view with regard to the concept *Ubuntu*?



Van Huyssteen: I think *Ubuntu* has to do with sharing and caring for one another.

Mpolweni: Does it have a specific significance in your culture?

WESTERN CAPE

Van Huyssteen: My personal opinion is that it does not exist in my culture but is a key concept to the African people. I come from an Afrikaans background and the kind of socialization I have received is, “I give, what do I get in return?”. In my society, everyone should take care of himself and this is contrary to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*. But to some extent, we do practise *Ubuntu* in the form of charity. For instance, in church we do community work and reach out to the needy. However this is done voluntarily, only if one has enough to share.

A similar view of *Ubuntu* is shared by Mr Ainslie, as is illustrated in the following response:

Mpolweni: How would you describe *Ubuntu*?

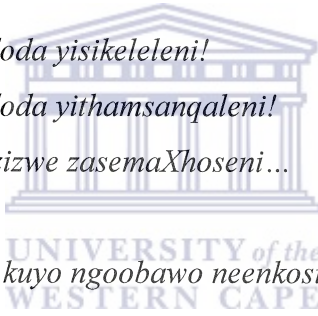
Ainslie: *Ubuntu* is the philosophy of life for Black people. It goes with the belief, “I am

because of man". *Ubuntu* involves kindness, sharing, and caring.

Mpolweni: Is it possible to practise *Ubuntu* outside of a religion?

Ainslie: Yes, because whether you are a Christian or atheist you can share, love, care for others. However, in church ministers do show care and understanding to their congregations.

What is interesting about the above discussion is that, although both views associate *Ubuntu* with African culture, they acknowledge the link between *Ubuntu* and Christianity. Let me make a further observation regarding the connection between African religion (or Xhosa religion in particular) and Christianity using Mqhayi's work as a point of reference. As one would understand, Xhosa religion is a component of African religion. On the other hand, African religion is based on the belief in ancestral spirits and in the notion of *Ubuntu*. This point is illustrated in the following stanzas from Mqhayi's poem *Intaba kaNdoda*, in his book, *Ityala lamaWele* written in praise of a little mountain peak near King William's Town:



Le ntaba kaNdoda yisikeleleni!
Le ntaba kaNdoda yithamsanqaleni!
Nditsho kuni, zizwe zasemaXhoseni...
Kwaqutyudwa kuyo ngoobawo neenkosi...
Kusalelwe khona zezo ngangalala...
(1914: 78)

This mountain should be blessed!

This mountain should be worshipped!

I refer to you, Xhosa nations...

Our forefathers prayed at this mountain...

Those great heroes are still lying here...

(my translation)

In the above stanzas, Mqhayi reminds his people of the significance of this mountain as his words, “ *Le ntaba.... yisikeleleni! Le ntaba yithamsanqaleni!* suggest. He seems impatient

when his people show no respect for this mountain yet even the forefathers used to worship at this mountain when he states emphatically, “ *Nditsho kuni, zizwe zasemaXhoseni* “... “*Kwaqutyudwa kuyo ngoobawo neenkosi*”. These lines also reflect an important point about Xhosa religion and *Ubuntu*. As Saule (1996: 88) puts it:

Traditional religious forms of worship and customs of which the kings and chiefs were the custodians were the very roots of *Ubuntu* which recognizes the hierarchical moral structure that any society maintains.

With the above quotation in mind, it is no surprise to see Mqhayi in this mood because as a patriot he had great respect for traditional values. For him, to see his people denigrating their own values meant degeneration of the nation and as a statesman, he saw it as his responsibility to call them to order. We will remember that the poem was written after the advent of the missionaries. At this time, most Xhosa people were already assimilated by Christianity and as a result, they regarded the traditional values and rituals as heathen practices.

Mqhayi was among the few who believed that Xhosa religion and Christianity are interrelated. Although Mqhayi was one of the advocates of Xhosa values, he was also mindful of the fact that traditions, much as they are valuable, should adjust to fall in step with the values of the present society. In fact, Mqhayi saw a connection between Xhosa religion and western religion since all humanity comes from the same Creator. This is no surprise because as Jordan (1973: 107) puts it, “Mqhayi was nurtured in Christian culture and in the primitive culture of his own people... Christianity was for him not ‘an escape from the city of Destruction’ but ‘a mode of life’”. Mqhayi’s standpoint is evident in his autobiography *UmQhayi waseNtabozuko* (1964:13), as the following extract from Qangule illustrates, “...while I am in close contact with my own race, I am also in touch with the European races, and with all religious denominations that worship the living God.”

The above stanza shows that as much as Mqhayi had great respect for the values and customs of his culture, he was mindful of the fact that other cultures deserve respect. He made no distinction between Xhosa religion and Christianity because they are both accountable to

God. In fact, according to Saule (1996:55), Mqhayi's concept of Christianity is far reaching as it transcends the church to embrace the nation as a whole. To him Christianity means reconciliation of the church, the government and the nation. So strong was this view that he articulates it in almost all his works as will be seen in the following discussion. Let us look at the following stanzas from Mqhayi's poem *Ukuphela kwetyala* in Satyo (1990: 6):

*Ngemihla yakudala, mini kwavel' iintaba,
Kwabekw'umntu wamnye wokuphath' abanye.*

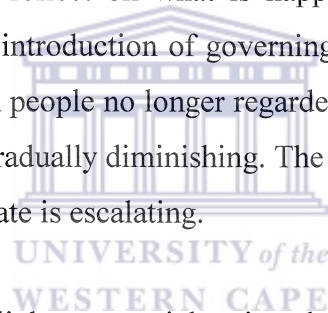
*Kwathiwa ke loo mntu ngumntu wegazi,
Kwathiwa loo mntu yinkonyana yohlanga.
Kwathiwa loo mntu makathotyelwe luluntu;
Aze athi yen'athobele uQamata;
Apho kuya kuvel' imithetho nezimiselo
Aya kuth' akuzigwenxa kungalungelelani,
Kube zizophithiphithi nokuphambana koluntu,
Ibe nguqulukubhede ukuphambana komhlaba.*

In the olden days, when mountains began to emerge,
One person was nominated to rule others.

It was said that this person is of the royal blood,
It was said that this person is the calf of the nation.
It was said that this person should be obeyed by the nation;
And that he be should obedient to God;
From whom laws and regulations come,
Should he flout them, doom will follow.
Confusion will rule and fighting will break out.
The whole world will be ungovernable.
(my translation)

The above stanzas reflect Mqhayi's view of the hierarchical structure in the channel of

communication between God and man. It is interesting to note that he regards God whom the Xhosa people call *Qamata* as the superior power. A similar situation exists from a Christian perspective because God is seen as a supernatural power that governs everything on earth. Mqhayi further connects the power of chiefs with the power of God as he states that it is a command from the Almighty that they should govern the people. This point is evident in the lines, “ *Kwabekw’umntu wamnye wokuphath’abanye.... Kwathiwa loo mntu makathotyelwe luluntu.*” This chain of communication between God, the chiefs and the people has great significance for the life and culture of the Xhosa people. According to Xhosa tradition, chiefs are given special respect because they are seen as the mediators between the people and the ancestors and the ancestors will then convey the message to Qamata (God). It is for this reason that Mqhayi preaches loyalty to chiefs because they are regarded as the custodians of the norms and values of the nation. Hence he warns that if the people disobey this command, the nation will be in a state of confusion as the line, “ *Ibe zizophithiphithi ukuphambana komhlaba*” suggests. If we reflect on what is happening today, we do witness Mqhayi’s prophecy because since the introduction of governing bodies, the powers of the chiefs were ignored. As a result, African people no longer regarded their norms and customs as important and the spirit of *Ubuntu* is gradually diminishing. The notion of respect for others is a thing of the past. Instead, the crime rate is escalating.



The above discussion highlights a crucial point about Mqhayi’s view of religion. It was Mqhayi’s belief that religion should not only prepare the soul for the new life after death, but also to prepare the individual for better living at the present moment hence the close connection between biblical beliefs and traditional beliefs. A good example can be cited in the following stanzas from the poem, *Umnyaka omtsha*: 1915 which is based on a scripture reading from Exodus: 15: 26:

*Mandiphinde ntombi kabawo,-
Ndithi kuwe, “lahla!”
Nakuwe nyana kabawo,
Ndithi kuwe, “lahla!..”*

NdinguYehova igqirha lakho

Vumani! Siyavuma!!

Vumani! Siyavuma!!

Ndaza ndabona mabandla kaHam!

Ndaza ndabona lusapho lukaKhushe!

Ndaza ndabona kubanjw' ilishwa,-

Kubanjw' ilishwa kulahlw' ithamsanqa!...

(1974:31)

The New Year: 1915

Let me tell you again daughter of my father,

I say to you, “ throw away ”

And to you son of my father,

I say to you, “ throw away ...”

I am Jehovah your diviner.

Agree! We agree!!

Agree! We agree!!

Never have I seen before, you people of Ham

Never have I seen before, you family of Khushe!

Never have I seen before, people choosing a misfortune,

Choosing a misfortune, throwing away a blessing!...

(my translation)

We will notice that the poem *Umnyaka omtsha* is based on a biblical verse in Exodus. Mqhayi is trying to educate people about the greatness of God (*Qamata*) by using a language they are familiar with. For instance, he says, “ *NdinguYehova igqirha lakho. Vumani! Siyavuma!!*” In this line, God seems to be speaking directly with man as the word, “*NdinguYehova*” refers to the first person. The word, *igqirha* refers to the person whom the Xhosa people usually consult when they are sick or when something strange has happened. In

the process of identifying the problem, the *igqirha* would utter the words, *Vumani!* And his patients would reply, “*Siyavuma!*” to show their satisfaction with the diagnosis. We will remember that these practices were contrary to Christian beliefs as they were regarded as heathenism. Mqhayi shares the same feelings as he emphatically commands, *Ndithi kuwe, “lahla”* because he sees these practices as a misfortune to the nation. If we reflect on the poem we find that the year 1929 was not a good one in terms of harvest, people were dying of hunger. Mqhayi attributes this misfortune to the waywardness of his people especially their adherence to witchcraft and diviners. This point is illustrated by his expression of shock at these practices as he states, “*Ndaza ndabona kubanjw’ ilishwa, Kubanjw’ ilishwa kulahlw’ ithamsanqa*”. Mqhayi equates the practice of believing in traditional healers as choosing a misfortune instead of a blessing. In fact, he seems to suggest that this does not comply with Xhosa religion or African religion in general as his words, “*Ndaza ndabona lusapho lukaKhushe!*” imply. According to the information I received from the Xhosa-speaking people that I have spoken to, the term *Khushe* refers to the forefather of all the African people. Hence they see themselves as one family. He lived in central Africa but as the family developed, people spread all over Africa. Since *Khushe* is seen as the ancestor of the African people, he is greatly revered by these people. Mqhayi’s reference to the name *Khushe* is trying to draw the attention of his people to refrain from their practices. In other words, Mqhayi tries every means available to change the people’s way of life and manner of thinking.

Of interest is the manner with which he adopts the method of merging Xhosa religion and Christianity as is reflected in *NdinguYehova* (I am Jehovah) and *igqirha lakho* (your diviner). It is clear that according to Mqhayi a link between Xhosa religion and Christian values is inevitable as the above discussion indicates. What is interesting is that the values which some people see as contradicting, i.e. African and western values, Mqhayi would still find a relationship. The following poems are a good example:

UKUKHUTSHWA KWESUTHU EKHOLEJINI (from Joshua: 5: 9)

*Mna namhlanje andithethi nto,
Mna namhlanje ndamulekile...*

*Namhlanje sikhuph'amagorha,
Int'ezingangangcazeliyo.
Yizani neemela needosha;
Niqhube neebhokhwe neegusha.
Yizani nezipho ngezipho,
Yizani neengubo nezityo...*

*Mandize kuwe nto kaDalo:-
Rholo rhol'elikhulu laseKholejini...
Ukhe wabika n'emaziko?
Ukuthi kuphum'abafundisi?
Makuziwe neekhala nemithika
Kuphathw'amaculo nemiqulu...
(Mqhayi: 1974: 78)*

Today I am not saying anything,
Today I am left dumb...

Today we are releasing brave men,
The ones who do not shake.
Bring the knives and firelighters;
Together with goats and sheep.
Bring loads of presents,
Bring blankets and different kinds of dishes...

Let me come to you son of *Dalo*:-
Great dignitary from the College...
Did you spread the news?
That ministers will be graduating?
Collars and gowns should be brought here
Together with hymn- books and bibles?
(my translation)

The title of this poem *Ukukhutshwa kwesuthu ekholejini* (The graduation of initiates from the college) refers to a Xhosa ritual in which boys attain manhood through circumcision. As one would understand, this is a great occasion which is celebrated by the whole community because it is seen as a victory. The occasion is usually celebrated through songs, praises and presentation of gifts. The status of this occasion is reflected in Mqhayi's words, “ *Mna namhlanje andithethi nto, Mna namhlanje ndamulekile, Namhlanje sikhuph'amagorha*”. In other words, he cannot find words that can describe the extent of the occasion because it is one of the highly respected rituals for the Xhosa people. Hence when he refers to the initiates, he speaks of *amagorha*. In other words, they are seen as heroes. Mqhayi takes us through the proceedings of the occasion and he shows us how the people express their joy for the safe return of the initiates as the words, “ *Yizani neemela needosha. Niqhube neebhokhwe neegusha...Yizani nezipho ngezipho...*” suggest. It is customary that this occasion is celebrated by the slaughtering of sheep and goats and the initiates are presented with gifts hence Mqhayi calls out for sheep, goats, blankets etc.

It is interesting to see how Mqhayi connects the title of the same poem with the graduation celebration of church ministers. In the same breath, Mqhayi presents the occasion as the graduation celebration of ministers from the college. The proceedings are illustrated in the lines, “ *Makuziwe neekhala nemithika. Kuphathw' amaculo nemiqulu*”. In this instance, joy and happiness are expressed by the singing of hymns and the reading of verses from the bible hence the presence of *amaculo nemithika*. If we look at the two scenarios, we find that they reflect two things about Mqhayi's personality. Firstly, that Mqhayi was a religious man. Secondly, that Mqhayi had great respect for both Xhosa religion and Christianity. In fact, as we have indicated in the previous discussion, it was his belief that Xhosa religion and Christianity should work together. As Jordan (1973:114) puts it, “Mqhayi's deep-seated religion is illustrated in the closing lines of his poem *Intaba kaNdoda* as it is indicated in the following stanzas”:

Would I had tongues, O Mount of my home
 O footstool of the God of my fathers,
 Thou, whose brow, facing the setting sun,

Is smitten by the rays of the closing day.
 So would I, protected, sing thy praise...
 And kneel in humble prayer by thee,
 Who art the stepping-stone between me and my God.
 Still shall the aliens stare not understanding,
 While, praying, on this slope I build a ladder,
 And scale the vast fatiguing heights, to kiss
 The feet of God the Father- Creator, Most High.

The first two lines illustrate the glory that Mqhayi attaches to this mountain as he sees it as the "...footstool of the God of my fathers". It is at the foot of this mountain that great Xhosa chiefs and heroes were buried hence it is seen as a sacred place. It is also Mqhayi's belief that by worshipping at this mountain, he will be connected to his God. It was the belief of the Xhosa people that their ancestors are lying at this mountain and therefore, by holding their prayers at this mountain, they will be connected to their God (*Qamata*). Similarly, it is also at this mountain that Mqhayi is connected to God the Creator as he states, "...to kiss the feet of God the Father, Creator, Most High. The above example shows that Mqhayi's way of worship was not discriminatory, instead, it transcended denominations and nations because to him all humankind is accountable to one person, God the Creator.

The above discussion illustrates that Mqhayi was a "true" Christian. One of the central features of a Christian is to be forgiving. Mqhayi's works demonstrate that he possessed this quality as it is evident in the following extract from Umteteli Wabantu (27 January 1927) in Saule (1996: 94):

Lo mntu bethu makavelelwe,
Alilel'athandazelwe;
Ulikhoboka lombanjwa,
Ubotshwe wabhijwabhijwa, ...

This person should be pitied,
 Cried for, prayed for;

He is a slave and prisoner
He is chained tightly around,
(my translation)

The above extract is taken from a poem that refers to the unfair and non-*Ubuntu* treatment that the Xhosa people suffered from the colonists. It is interesting to note the spirit of *Ubuntu* which embraces tolerance and forgiveness as the words, “*makavelwe*” (should be pitied), “*athandazelwe*” (prayed for) indicate. The same words also reflect strong religious sentiments because in the bible it is said, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us”. Mqhayi’s convictions regarding the relationship between Xhosa religion and Christianity were held until his death as the following section will illustrate.

However, it is important to note that Mqhayi’s convictions about Christianity does not mean that he blindly accepted Christianity. He was critical of the manner in which the missionaries introduced Christianity. For instance, as the *imbongi* of the nation, he was invited by the then governor of the Cape to perform a poem in praise of the Prince of Wales who arrived in 1925. In his performance, he was critical of the values brought by the missionaries which were in contradiction with African values. The following extract from the written version of this poem illustrates this point:

Hay'kodw' iBritani eNkulu,-
Yeza nebhote neBhayibhile;
Yeza nomfundis' exhag' ijoni;
(Mqhayi: 1974: 73)

Nay, the mighty Great Britain!
Here she comes with bottle and Bible;
Here she comes with a missionary escorted by a soldier;
(Translation by Qangule)

It has been indicated in the previous section that Mqhayi was a devoted Christian. To Mqhayi, Christianity goes hand in hand with nation-building and respect for one’s customs. The above

stanza highlights practices that are contrary to his beliefs as the following lines indicate, “*Yeza nebhottle neBhayibhile, Yeza nomfundisi exhag’ ijoni*”. The *ibhottle* which refers to liquor and the soldier are contrary to nation-building. Hence Mqhayi expresses his discontent because they have brought destruction to the Xhosa nation or the African nation in general. For instance, today we witness many broken homes and orphans who are victims of liquor. The notion of *Ubuntu* needs to be revived because we see a degeneration of the social fabric. In other words, what Mqhayi is saying is that people should be broad-minded and be able to identify aspects of Christianity that can contribute to nation-building. As Saule (1996: 129) puts it, “images of *Ubuntu*, the Bible and nation building in Mqhayi’s work form a golden thread which makes his literary contribution to be more than just material for reading”.

3.3.2.3 Mqhayi’s death

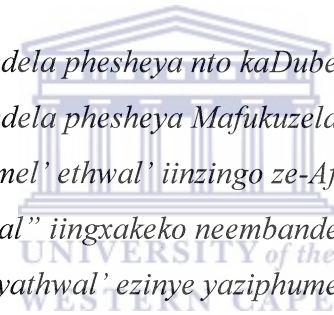
As it is indicated in the previous section, Mqhayi’s life is symbolic of a transition between oral tradition and written tradition. This is reflected in his personality, his thoughts, his attire and his work. One can simply describe him as a man for all seasons. He was a preacher, and he was a teacher. He was a councillor (of *Chief Silimela*), and he was an *Imbongi Yesizwe jikelele*. In other words, while Mqhayi was deeply rooted in the tradition of his people, he was also committed to Christian or western values. Mqhayi confirms this point in his autobiography, *UMqhayi waseNtabozuko* as it is reflected in Qangule (1979: 121),

- 1 *Engqondweni yam ndedwa, ndandiqonda*
- 2 *ukuba ndiya kuba*
- 3 *ngumsebenzi kweli lizwe lakowethu...*
- 4 *umsebenzi kwizinto zelizwi;*
- 5 *kwezentlalo yasemakhaya;*
- 6 *kwezombuso;*
- 7 *nakwezemfundo.*

- 1 In my opinion I felt that
- 2 I was going to be
- 3 a worker for my own people in my country,

- 4 a worker for the gospel;
- 5 for social services;
- 6 in politics;
- 7 and in educational matters.

The above quotation illustrates that Mqhayi had a balanced personality because he embraced both his tradition and that of western culture. As a traditional *imbongi*, he played a significant role in encouraging respect for the customs and values of his people. On the other hand, as a preacher and a teacher, he promoted respect for the word of God. This conviction regarding his people and God permeated his works. For instance, in his book *Inzuzo* we find a poem, *UMAFUKUZELA (UDR J.L. DUBE)*. In this poem, Mqhayi praises John Dube who devoted his entire life to the wellbeing of the entire African nation. The following stanza illustrates this point,



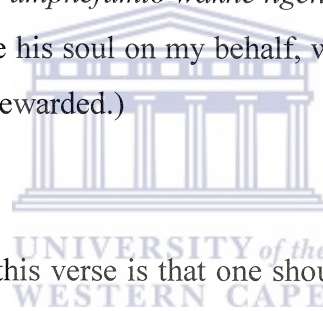
Phindela phesheya nto kaDube!
Phindela phesheya Mafukuzela!
Nkamel' ethwal' iinzingo ze-Afrika;
Ithwal'' iingxakeko neembandezelo zayo,
Ikhe yathwal' ezinye yaziphumeza;
Yathwal'' ezinye, ezinye, kwanezinye;
 (1974: 62)

Go back overseas son of Dube!
 Go back Mafukuzela!
 Camel that carries the burdens of Africa;
 It carries its responsibilities and hardships,
 It has carried some of its burdens successfully,
 And again carried some and others and many more;
 (my translation)

The above stanza describes Dube's patriotic character because he dedicated his energy to his people. The line, "Yinkamel' ethwal' iinzingo ze-Afrika" demonstrates this point. A camel is known for its tolerance, patience, and its loyalty to the master. Although it carries a hump which keeps water for its survival, it also carries its master's possessions, walking tirelessly on sand in the desert. Dube had the same qualities and these qualities are characteristic of *Ubuntu*. He was the first President of the ANC and devoted his time to the welfare of South Africans. According to the African culture, a leader should uphold the values of society. He is expected to serve the interest of the people and regard his interests as secondary and this is characteristic of *Ubuntu*. On many occasions he went abroad to represent South African people. In fact, even the title of the poem, *UMafukuzela* confirms Dube's commitment. The term *Umafukuzela* refers to a heavily-loaded person, carrying luggage in both hands and on his back. This shows that Dube was a dedicated citizen. The poem is based on a verse from (Matthew:10:39) which reads, "Lowo uwufumeneyo umphefumlo wakhe wolahlekelwa nguwo, nalowo uwulahlileyo umphefumlo wakhe ngenxa yam, uya kuwufumana."

(One who is prepared to lose his soul on my behalf, will gain it, and the one who has lost his soul because of me, will be rewarded.)

(my translation)



The underlying message of this verse is that one should devote one's life to God because he will be rewarded as the line "...nalowo uwulahlileyo umphefumlo wakhe ngenxa yam uya kuwufumana, indicates. If we keep in mind Mqhayi's statement, "Engqondweni yam ndedwa....", we are inclined to think that Dube's qualities apply to Mqhayi. The following lines from Ngcwabe's poem in (Mtuzze & Kaschula: 1993: 55) demonstrate this point:

IMBONGI YESIZWE

Aa! Mzima!...

Gxalaba – libanzi, mathwalana nesizwe emqolo!

IMBONGI OF THE NATION

Hail! Mzima!

Broad-shouldered one that carries the nation on his back!

Ngcwabe addresses Mqhayi with his *isiduko* to show respect to him as a national *imbongi* and to acknowledge his contribution to the entire nation. As it is indicated in the above line, “...*mathwalana nesizwe*”, Mqhayi devoted his life to matters that concerned the nation. His role as a traditional *imbongi*, a teacher, preacher, councillor, a writer, an editor and a translator confirm this point. As a traditional *imbongi* and a councillor, he advocated respect for the customs and values of the Xhosa people. On the other hand, as a teacher and a preacher he was influential in teaching people about western values. It is interesting to note that Mqhayi’s commitment to link the two worlds, i.e. the traditional world and the western world, were quite vivid until his death. In the first place, his death came as a shock not only to South African people but even outside the borders of South Africa because His influence stretched across cultural boundaries. The following stanza from a poem by Lettie Tayadzerhwa from Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in (Qangule 1979: 12) illustrates this point:

In *Mbembesi* we quarrel over you.
 We are jealous of you, we claim you,
 We are proud of you and your work.

The above stanza confirms the fact that, Mqhayi through his pen and mouth crossed the borders of South Africa. As his name suggests, *Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele*, Mqhayi was widely respected, hence Tayadzerhwa’s words, “...we claim you, we are proud of you and your work.” These lines reveal an interesting point about his personality. Mqhayi saw no boundaries and this is reflected even after his death as the following stanza from Jolobe’s poem in (Mtuzze & Kaschula: 1993: 41) demonstrates:

Anivanga na ukuba ihambile imbongi yesizwe?
Anazi na imke ngenqwel’ egoqoz’ emafini?
Kunamhla seyimana isalatha inqwal’ iwisa,
Ithe wambu umnweba wemisebenzi encamisa
Iphethe intshuntshe nomqayi wokholo.

Have you not heard that the bard of the nation has left?

Have you not heard that he has left by the cart that soars high up in the clouds?

Presently he is pointing and nodding in praise

Dressed in his kaross of his wonderful duties

Carrying the spear and knobkerrie.

(Qangule: 1979:14)

In the first two lines Jolobe seems to remind the audience that the great bard of the nation is no more as the phrases, ...*ihambile*, ...*imke ngenqwel' egoqoz' emafini*, suggest. *Inqwel' egoqoz' emafini* is the imaginary cart that the amaXhosa believe is sent by God to fetch the soul of the dead person. In other words, these words suggest that Mqhayi has gone to heaven. Ironically, the next three lines seem to suggest that the bard continues with his duties of praising, as the words, ...*seyimana isalatha, ithe wambu umnweba, iphethe intshuntshe nomnqayi wokholo*. These words reflect Mqhayi performing praises, dressed in his traditional attire, carrying the traditional weapons. In other words, although Mqhayi is not physically with us, spiritually he is still performing the duties of an *imbongi* in heaven. These lines highlight an important point about the interaction between traditional values and religious or western values. In fact, it has always been Mqhayi's belief that traditional values and western values should co-exist as it is indicated above. Yali-manisi in Qangule (1979: 15), in his poem on Mqhayi's death, confirms this link:

Zibikele' izizwe neentlanga,

Bikelan' iinkosi neenkokheli,

Nith' imbongi yesizw' inyuselwe,

Ukuya kubongel' uSomandla.

Report to the various nations and tribes,

Report to the various chiefs and leaders,

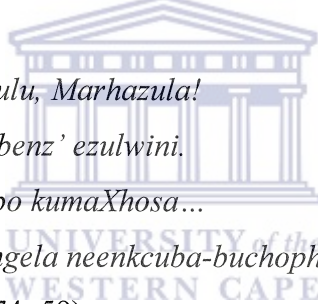
That the national bard has been elevated

To the position of declaiming praises for

the Almighty.

(Qangule: 1979: 15)

The first two lines refer to the custom of the Xhosa people of sending messengers to inform the community when somebody has passed away. The phrases, “*Zibikelen’ izizwe, Bikelan’ iinkosi*” confirm this point. The third and fourth lines bring us to heaven and reflect Mqhayi singing praises for the Almighty as the line, “*Ukuya kubongel’ uSomandla*” illustrate. What is interesting about this stanza is the smooth transition from traditional values (in which the chiefs take precedence) to heavenly values in which the Almighty is in power as this is illustrated by the term, “*unyuselwe*”. This point has a significant role in the personality and beliefs of Mqhayi because to him the past, the present and the future are related. On the other hand, this link can be interpreted as being significant of the link between orality and literacy in which reference to *iinkosi* is symbolic of oral tradition and the reference to the Almighty represents western values. In fact, Mqhayi himself confirms this relationship. For instance, the following stanza is from Mqhayi’s poem, *UMFI UGIL. TYAMZASHE* in *Inzuzo* (1974:59) in which Mqhayi laments the death of Tyamzashe:



Hamba Rhudulu, Marhazula!
UTHix’ uyasebenz’ ezulwini.
Ufun’ amacebo kumaXhosa...
Ufun’ iingcungela neenkuba-buchopho;
 (Mqhayi: 1974: 59)

Go *Rhudulu, Marhazula!*
 God is busy in heaven.
 He is seeking advice from the Xhosa people;
 He is looking for experts and intellects;
 (my translation)

The first line introduces a Xhosa custom, that of addressing a person with his *isiduko*. Mqhayi is declaiming Tyamzashe with his *isiduko* (clan name) *Rhudulu*. It is an age-old practice among the Xhosa people to greet, praise one another with an *isiduko* or to address each other in an *isiduko* when people are in a conversation. This has great significance to the person being declaimed because it shows respect. We notice that Mqhayi has retained this tradition

in his written poem, *Umfi UGil. Tyamzashe* even though he is addressing the deceased person as the term, *Umfi* (The late), suggests. The use of an *isiduko* in a written poem plays a crucial role in highlighting the link between orality and literacy. What is also interesting is that the name *Rhudulu* is preceded by the command, *Hamba* which suggests that Mqhayi is in close contact or is speaking to *Rhudulu* but we understand that this is impossible because the poem was written after Tyamzashe's death. In other words, the terms *Hamba* and *Rhudulu* in a written poem symbolize the relationship between orality and literacy. In the second line, Mqhayi seems to console the people by referring to the bible and he regards the death of Tyamzashe as the work of God whom he claims is seeking men of Tyamzashe's calibre. This point is reflected in the lines, "*UTHix'uyasebenz'...Ufun' amacebo*". The word *UTHixo* is the name which Xhosa Christians use to refer to God. It also symbolizes written tradition because Christianity came after the advent of missionaries who brought education and Christianity. The introduction of oral tradition as the *isiduko Rhudulu* in the first line followed by written tradition, "*UTHix' uyasebenza*" in the same poem further enhance the link between orality and literacy. This interplay between the traditional values and western values that is displayed by Mqhayi in the above stanza is symbolic of his lifestyle because he lived the life of both a traditional *imbongi* and a Christian. This point is evident in the following stanza from Mbebe's poem on Mqhayi's death in (Qangule: 1979: 26):

1. *Wena Ntabozuko usenzel' uzuko,*
2. *Kub' usigcinel' imbong' enozuko,*
3. *Yen' umntakaMqhayi waseNtabozuko,*
4. *Obhale iincwadi, obhale imihobe,*
5. *Oguqul' iincwadi kwinteth' abamhlophe,-*
6. *Wandise ulwazi kwinteth' esiXhosa...*
7. *Yena liqhayiya kwizwe lamaXhosa.*

1. You Mount of Glory you have created glory for us,
2. Because you are the resting place of a glorious poet,
3. He the child of Mqhayi of Mount glory,
4. He who has written books and poems,
5. He who has translated books from European languages

6. He who has enriched the Xhosa language
 7. Verily he is the pride of the Xhosa nation.
- (Qangule: 1979: 26)

In the first line, Mbebe is praising *Ntabozuko* as a highly respected hillock which is found in Berlin between King William's Town and East London. It is on this hillock that the home of the great Xhosa *imbongi*, S. E. K. Mqhayi is situated. It also became the resting place of the *Imbongi Yesizwe jikelele* whom Mbebe refers to as *Imbongi enozuko* (a glorious poet). Hence it acquired the name *Ntabozuko* (Mount of Glory). In other words, to the Xhosa people, this hillock is more than just a hill but a shrine. Since Mqhayi was a traditional *imbongi*, it also means that the name *Ntabozuko* is symbolic of oral tradition or orality. On the other hand, we have learnt in sections 3.1 and 3.2 that Mqhayi was exposed to missionary education and he became a teacher and a preacher. He is known for his contribution as a poet, novelist, editor, journalist, biographer, essayist and a translator. This means that, Mqhayi also features in written literature. This point is evident in the above stanza in lines 4 and 5, *Obhale iincwadi, obhale imibongo, Oguqul' iincwadi...* In other words, lines 1 and 2, and lines 4 and 5 reflect Mqhayi as symbolic of the link between orality and literacy.

If we base our argument on the above discussion, we can conclude that the life that Mqhayi lived reflects an inevitable link between oral tradition and written tradition. In other words, as it has been indicated in the above examples, Mqhayi lived beyond cultural boundaries. Even his grave confirms this point as it is illustrated in Saule (1996: 53):

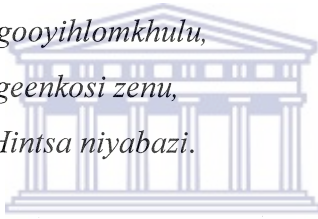
Mqhayi's grave is marked by an impressive and imposing stone, symbolizing the kind of life he lived, which cuts across cultural lines. It is clear evidence that although he was a traditionalist, he had accepted western standards and values, something with which, in his writings, he tries to persuade his people to reconcile with.

In my observation of the above description of Mqhayi's grave, I find that on the one hand, it lies at the foot of a hillock which is symbolic of oral tradition since the Xhosa people regarded this hillock as a shrine. On the other hand, the grave is marked by a tombstone that

represents western tradition. In other words, this scenario represents Mqhayi's ideals that traditional culture and western culture can live side by side.

It is interesting to see that Mqhayi's aspirations are beginning to receive recognition in the new dispensation that upholds a multicultural society. For instance, nowadays we do find an *imbongi* performing at a graduation ceremony or in parliament. This means that the African (oral and written) traditions are given a platform to grow together with the western tradition. This development can also be seen as the fulfilment of the teachings and ideals of icons such as S. E. K. Mqhayi. The presence of their work will ensure that their teachings will remain in the hearts and minds of generations to come. This point is evident in the following stanza from Tayadzerhwa's poem in Qangule (1979: 25) on Mqhayi's death:

*Ndithi mn' ilifa nishiywe nalo,
Ziyindlela iincwadi zembongi..
Inichazele ngooyihlomkhulu,
Inityhilele ngeenkosi zenu,
Ntsikana noHintsisa niyabazi.*



You've been left a fine heritage,
The poet's books are a beacon.
Teaching you your traditions,
And of your ancient kings,
Now Ntsikana and Hintsisa you know.
(Translation by F. S. M. Mncube)

In the above stanza, Tayadzerhwa highlights an interesting point that reflects Mqhayi's convictions about the relationship between oral tradition and written literature. For instance, he refers to Mqhayi's written works, "*Ziyindlela iincwadi zembongi*". This line is followed by reference to Xhosa tradition as illustrated in, "*Inichazele ngooyihlomkhulu*". We will remember that it is common practice for the *imbongi* that when he is praising somebody, he will refer to the person's genealogy. In other words, even at Mqhayi's death, his commitment to reconcile oral tradition and written tradition is evident.

It seems as though Tayadzerhwa is trying to say that even though Mqhayi is out of sight, his work will remain a legacy to the people of South Africa as these lines indicate, “*Ndithi mn’ ilifa nishiywe nalo*”. These lines also imply that Mqhayi will remain the icon of the Xhosa nation. This is evident in the celebrations that are held annually among the Xhosa speaking communities in memory of this great *imbongi*. In fact, I agree with Qangule (1979: 262), that a statue of S. E. K. L. N. Mqhayi at any of the following places in South Africa – a federal theological seminary, a centre of higher learning, a parliament building- would be appropriate recognition of the contribution of this religious, civic, educational and literary giant.



CHAPTER 4

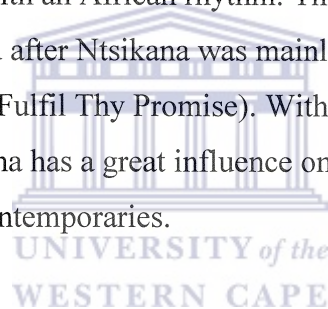
MQHAYI AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES

4.1 Introduction

During Mqhayi's period there were many figures that contributed in the development of Xhosa literature as well as Xhosa poetry. Since the thesis cannot cover all of them, I will only mention a few namely: Gqoba, Solilo, Rubusana and Jolobe. The life and contribution of Gqoba and Rubusana as described in Jordan (1973: 39-40) is as follows: William Gqoba a waggon-maker by trade, became editor of *Isigidimi SamaXhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger), a periodical that succeeded *Indaba* in 1870. Gqoba collected a large number of Xhosa proverbial and idiomatic expressions, and excellent prose. He also wrote some history, confining himself to specific episodes like the scattering of the tribes in the Shaka era and the Nongqawuse cattle-killing episode of 1856-1857; and some verse, including two didactic poems, one on Paganism versus Christianity, 850 lines, and the other on Education. Some of his writings appeared in *Isigidimi*. The rest appeared eighteen years after his death in an anthology of prose and poetry, *Zemk' Inkomo Magwalandini!* (Preserve your heritage!), collected and edited by W. B. Rubusana and published in 1906. Rubusana was closely associated with *Izwi Labantu*. He was the founder member and the first editor of this paper, and much of the material in his anthology originally appeared in this periodical. The life history and the contribution of John Solilo as described in Satyo (1983: 17) can be summarised as follows: Solilo has contributed in prose. He has produced a novel entitled *Izala*. He is known for his poetry which is mainly for school children. His poems include: *Abakrokri*, *Mthandi Wesizwe*, *Amatshivela*. Another distinguished person who has made a great mark to Xhosa literature is J. J. R. Jolobe. His publications as described in Satyo (1983:117) include: *Amathunzi obomi* (drama), *Elundini Lothukela*, *UZagula* (novels), *Umyezo*, *Ilitha* (poetry) and he has translated many books. Together with Mqhayi, these writers can be seen as icons in Xhosa literature.

To have an insight on the role played by these writers in Xhosa literature, it is important to have some background as to the developments and conditions that prevailed during their

period. This will help the reader to understand how these factors affected the works of the writers and poets of this period. The period during which Mqhayi and his contemporaries lived is an interesting one. It is the period that comes after the period of Ntsikana's followers such as Tiyo Soga. Although Ntsikana is not one of Mqhayi's contemporaries I think it is important to give a brief introduction about him as a pioneer in oral poetry. His footsteps have a great impact on the lives of amaXhosa as well as that of the *iimbongi* that came after him. The Xhosa people had high regard for Ntsikana as is reflected in Jordan (1973: 44), "He was a great composer, singer and dancer...The names of Adam, Dafeti (David) and the coming of Mesiyasi (Messiah) were first heard from Ntsikana". One will remember that Ntsikana was the first traditional *imbongi* to become the Christian convert. After he had converted to Christianity he spread the gospel and gained many followers among them was chief Ngqika. Ntsikana's conversion can be seen as the first breakthrough between traditional and western values. This point is evident in his famous hymn *UloThixo Mkhulu* (Though Great God) which he sung with an African rhythm. This hymn is sung up to this day. The work of writers that emerged after Ntsikana was mainly didactic as is evident in Tiyo Soga's hymn *Lizalis' idinga lakho* (Fulfil Thy Promise). With this background in mind, we are inclined to agree that Ntsikana has a great influence on the *iimbongi* that came after him including Mqhayi and his contemporaries.



Among the highlights of Mqhayi's period are the changes in government policies which had an impact on the socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of society. There was for instance, the introduction of the Union government in 1910 which brought changes with regard to participation of Blacks in politics. According to Saule (1989: 66), a survey of the history of votes shows that as early as 1836, the Blacks in the Cape colony had been enjoying a system that encouraged involvement in the politics of the day. This system provided them a platform to express their political views and aspirations. Events however, took a dramatic turn at the beginning of the twentieth century in 1910 when the Union government came into power. Within the Union government, Blacks were excluded and their participation limited.

What was the significance of these changes for the artists and their work? These changes had a great influence on the writers more especially the *iimbongi* with regard to the subject of

praise and the themes. Since the main subjects of praise for the *imbongi* were the chiefs, traditional occasions and rituals, it means that the *imbongi* now had to include the burning issues of the day. In other words, the *imbongi* was not limited to traditional issues but he had to adjust to the changes over the period and his praises would accommodate themes that dealt with relevant issues of the time. For instance, see Mqhayi' s comments in his essay, *Ivoti eKoloni* in (*Umteteli*: 1920), in Saule (1989: 75) regarding the constitution of the Union government, “*Imivuzo mayibekwe kumgangatho wokuba umntu osebenzayo abe nokuphila ngentsebenzo yakhe*”. (The earnings should be at a level that would enable any working person to live on it).

As it is manifested in the above extract, Mqhayi is expressing his concern regarding the conditions under which the people lived. In other words, he serves as their mouthpiece. This role of being the custodian of the nation is typical of the traditional *imbongi* except that the concerns would be directed to the chief whereas, in the modern times, they are referred to the government of the day.

While the *imbongi* and other artists were engaged in addressing current issues, Ntsikana's disciples were continuing with their work of spreading the gospel, and as a result, most of the work of this period was mainly didactic. For instance, if we look at the work of John Solilo, one of Mqhayi's contemporaries, we find a poem entitled, *Amatshivela* (Loafers) in Bennie (1971:125). The main theme of his poem is to encourage honesty and diligence as the following stanzas illustrate:

*Amatshivela mathathu elizweni,
Ngu-Asindim! Andazi! Andikhathali!
Kwimizi ngemizi ayabonwa;
Kwimizi ngemizi ayaziwa....*

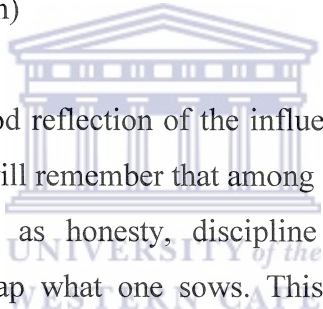
*Esona sono sikhulu,
Kweyab' ivangeli enkulu,
Kukubhaqwa, kubonwe, kubanjwe;
Baqale ukuvuma ityala,*

*Inguquko ikude lee kubo,
Intshabalalo lelabo iqasho...*

There are three loafers in the world,
They are, It's not me! I don't know! I don't care!
In many homes they are seen;
In many homes they are known...

The major sin, according to their gospel,
Is to be found red-handed, seen, caught;
Only then will they accept responsibility,
To repent is something far from their thoughts,
Theirs is to perish....

(my translation)



The above stanzas are a good reflection of the influence of Christianity on the works of the writers of this period. One will remember that among other things, the aim of the missionaries was to teach values such as honesty, discipline and diligence because according to Christianity, one should reap what one sows. This point is evident in Monica Wilson's statement in (Wilson & Perrot: 1973:5):

From the inception of Lovedale, pupils had engaged in agriculture and carpentry, wagon making and blacksmithing. The policy was that everyone, not only those in the trade school, should use their hands and the object is not the value of their labour, but the principle that Christianity and idleness are not compatible.

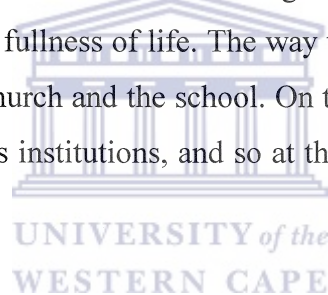
Similarly, objection to idleness forms part of traditional values because according to the Xhosa tradition, everyone in the household has a specific role. For instance, a man is the head of the family and he is expected to see to the well being of his family. Women take care of the home and the fields. The girls help their mothers and the boys are the shepherds. The values that are reflected in Wilson's statement correspond with those of Xhosa tradition. If we look

at the title of the poem *Amatshivela* (Loafers), we find that Solilo shares the same view regarding idleness. For instance, he complains about three loafers whom he names *Asindim*, *Andazi* and *Andikhathali* who are found in every home. To Solilo, these loafers are misfits in society because they are dishonest, as the lines, “*Esona sono sikhulu kweyab’ ivangeli enkulu, kukubhaqwa, kubonwe, kubanjwe. Baqale ukuvuma ityala*”, indicate. (The major sin according to their gospel is to be found red-handed, then they will accept responsibility). Solilo feels that their punishment is to be removed from society as the lines, *Intshabalalo lelabo iqasho* (Theirs is to perish) indicate. This view corresponds with that of Christianity because according to the bible, sinners will be punished. Another important point is the way in which the loafers are perceived by the rest of society as the line, *Inguquko ikude lee kubo* suggests. This implies a bridge between Christians and pagans but this point will be discussed later in section 4.2.

If we look at Mqhayi’s comment on *Ivoti eKoloni* we find that it reflects a new legal system which is led by the government whereas in the case of the traditional system, the people were answerable to their chief. Mqhayi’s comment can also be seen as statement that protects the rights of the chief and his people from the new laws. In the case of Solilo’s poem we notice that it reflects the spread of gospel and its values. It means that during Mqhayi’s period, while some writers strived for survival because their people, their chiefs and their customs were facing the challenges of the new laws, the spread of the missionary work continued. On the one hand, chiefs were gradually losing control over their people because of the new form of governance. On the other hand, since the new laws replaced the traditional customs, people were gradually losing respect for their values. In addition to the influence of the new laws, Mqhayi’s period comes after the historic event in the history of amaXhosa: the cattle-killing episode in 1857. This period is marked by the disastrous episode of *Nongqawuse* whose prophecies influenced people to destroy their cattle, their fowls and their crops and left their fields untilled. As one would understand, the killing of the livestock had a great impact on the customs and values of the Xhosa people because these cattle, sheep and goats are used as sacrificial animals in the process of conducting certain rituals. The absence of these animals meant that the customs could not be carried out and gradually, the people lost respect for their customs and their values. The chiefs were also the victims of this disaster because they had no control over their people. On the other hand, men had to seek work in the cities. In other

words, families were separated from one another and this impacted negatively on the discipline of children. According to the Xhosa tradition, inculcation of discipline in children is a collective endeavour by the parents. But the introduction of a migrant labour system meant that the father had no control over the discipline of his children because the mother was now the head of the family. This resulted in the fragmentation of the family unit which led to the breakdown of the social fabric. It was against such a background that Mqhayi and his contemporaries were moved to write about issues of their time. As will be seen in the following discussion in section 4.2, although subjects of praise and the themes of this period were addressing the problems of this period, it is interesting to see that the style of oral tradition and the terms that were used by traditional *iimbongi* are still reflected in modern poems. One can also see this period as a period of confusion for the African convert. As Jordan (1973: 63) puts it:

The Christian African found a new meaning in life. He fully accepted the new culture with its promise of a fullness of life. The way to the promised life went by way of the baptismal font, the church and the school. On the other hand, these were incompatible with tribal life and its institutions, and so at this period the Christian African is at the crossroads.



How did these factors impact on traditional life, the customs, values and the way of thinking? How are these conditions reflected in the works of the poets and other writers? What are the implications of these factors on the notion of orality and literacy? This chapter will look at these questions.

According to Jordan (1973:41), the period immediately succeeding that of Ntsikana's disciples may be regarded as one of literary stabilization amongst the Xhosa-speaking South Africans. It must be remembered that this was a transitional period in every detail of the people's lives. While the missionary carried on his work as preacher and teacher, the soldier carried on with his mission of conquest. While the missionary preached peace on earth and goodwill towards men, the wars of dispossession were working towards the climax. As one would understand, the factors that have been highlighted by Jordan in the above discussion had an impact on poets and other writers because the thoughts and actions of an artist are

determined by the socio-cultural and socio-political conditions of the period during which he lives. Since Christianity had already made strides, it was only natural that most of the artists should devote their writing to what they considered the most serious things of life. For instance, Tiyo Soga, one of the early writers who himself was an ordained minister of religion, is known for his famous hymn:

LIZALIS'' IDINGA LAKHO (Fulfil Thy Promise).

Lizalis' idinga lakho,

Thixo Nkosi yenyanyiso.

Zonk' iintlanga, zonk' izizwe;

Mazizuze usindiso....

(Methodist church hymnbook: 1926:116)

FULFIL THY PROMISE

Fulfil Thy Promise,

God, the King of Truth,

All the tribes, all the nations;

Shall receive salvation from you...

(My translation)

The above stanza reflects Soga's commitment to the Word of God. For instance, he sees God as the Saviour of mankind as the lines, *Zonk' iintlanga, zonk' izizwe; Mazizuze usindiso* illustrate. As Jordan (1973: 39) puts it, "this hymn was composed when the author landed on African soil in 1857, on his return from Scotland". It was later transformed into written form and published in the hymnbook of the Methodist church in 1926. Up to this day, it is a popular hymn that is sung in different chants. The fact that Soga first rendered this hymn orally and that it is now documented in hymnbooks is significant in illustrating the link between orality and literacy. It is also important to note that although the writers and poets of

this period were also influenced by Christianity as they themselves were Christian converts, they had not ignored their roots. As Jordan (1973: 53) states, “writers did not abandon the traditional style in their expression, nor did they cast aside their folklore. New experiments in versification began to appear, but the traditional forms asserted themselves all the time”. This point will be illustrated in the following discussion of Mqhayi and his contemporaries. I will look at how the socio-cultural and socio-political conditions of this period influenced their work.

4.2 Mqhayi and some of his contemporaries

In the above discussion, I have indicated that during Mqhayi’s period, African converts were at a crossroad because on the one hand they had identified themselves with Christian values while on the other, as Africans, they were expected to practise their customs by their fellow Africans. In other words, while the African Christian was gradually adopting western culture, he was constantly reminded of his roots by his fellow men. This point has a great significance for the orality - literacy debate because it highlights the fact that there was no gap between the oral tradition and the literary tradition. Gqoba in his poem, *Ingxoxo enkulu yomginwa noMkristu* (Great Discussions) confirms this point. One of the discussions is between a Christian and the non-Christian. The participants are *Zwelizayo* (World-to-come) and *Phakadelikhoyo* (Present-world). As it is stated in Rubusana and Satyo (2002: 19), the two men were having a conversation near the kraal about the social issues such as religion, education and politics, but the discussion developed into an argument because the two had different interpretations of life. Present-world became excited and stood up praising the earth and its pleasures and richness of life as the following lines indicate:

*Umhlab’ uyolile, uvus’okudala,
Ziintlombe, oomigidi...
Kusilw’ imithayi, kuselw’ indlolothi.*
(Rubusana & Satyo: 2002:19)

The world is full of happiness, it reminds us of the past,
There are traditional occasions, celebrations...

Barrels of traditional beer are prepared...
Drinking of African beer is an ongoing phenomenon
(My translation)

The above lines indicate that Present-world lives a traditional style as the terms, *ziintlombe*, *oomigidi*, illustrate. It is customary that these occasions be accompanied by traditional beer and traditional songs and praises as a sign of happiness, hence the phrase, *kusilw' imithayi*. On the other hand, to World-to-come, these occasions and celebrations are seen as taboo because as a Christian, they represent heathen practices to him. For instance, his reply to Present-world is:

Wod' umke na gxebe, ufel' esonweni?
Mfondini wakw' ethu du lenze iguqu,
Nganeno kwengcwaba kuzanyelw' izulu.
(Rubusana & Satyo: 2002: 23)

Will you live this world and die a sinner?
My brother, the time has come to reform,
Before one gets to the grave he should prepare himself for heaven.
(my translation)

Without doubt, World-to come objects to Present-world's practices. He sees him swimming in a pool of sin as he boasts about the joy he derives from traditional practices. Instead, World-to-come warns him that he is in danger of not getting to heaven as he says, *Nganeno kwengcwaba kuzanyelw' izulu*. The above discussion indicates the imaginary bridge that was beginning to emerge between orality and western values because the change from traditional values to modern values was going to be a gradual process. This point is confirmed by World-to-come's words, *Mfondini wakw' ethu du lenze iguqu*. In other words, World-to-come encourages Present-world to prepare himself for the world to come (i.e. heaven) and forget about the earthly joys. What is interesting about the above discussion, is that although we find a strong influence of Christianity or western values on traditional culture, as it is reflected in the words of World-to-come, we also notice that oral tradition continues to operate as the

words of Present-world indicate, *Ziintlombe, Kusilw' imithayi*. This illustrates an overlap between western tradition and oral tradition. This overlap is also evident in World-to-come's words, *...du lenze iguqu*. This phrase was traditionally used in spoken language and its equivalent in modern days is, *Khawud' uguquke*. But we notice that Gqoba has retained the traditional form although this discussion now appears in written form. Similarly, the imaginary bridge that emerges from a movement from oral tradition to modern tradition implies that there is a link between oral tradition and modern tradition. In other words, since the discussion was initially a conversation that was later reduced to print, Gqoba is trying to reflect an ongoing relationship between orality and written literature. As Rubusana has stated in the introduction, the original words of the speaker have been retained although the discussion has been transformed into written form. This also reinforces the connection between oral tradition and modern tradition. For instance, in this written version we find archaic Xhosa words such as, *kuselw' indlolothi* and *iguqu* which have been carried over to the present generation. The word, *indlolothi* refers to traditional beer which today is known as *umqombothi* and *iguqu* means change or reform. Today, the word *iguqu* is written as *inguqu*. The above discussion also highlights a crucial point regarding the question of whether written poetry or written literature is merely orality in written form. In the first place, in the above discussion we have noticed that there is an overlap between orality and written literature or written poetry because modern poetry has developed from orality. For instance, as it is stated in Rubusana and Satyo (2002:19), the above discussion was communicated orally but it was later published in 1906. Although it appears in written form, we notice that original Xhosa words such as, *iguqu* and *indlolothi* which are no longer used, still appear in the written form. This shows that the written version has developed from the oral form.

Another interesting thing about the above discussion is the style in which it is written. As it appears, it looks like a modern poem because it has stanzas but traditional poems had no stanzas because during performance, the *imbongi* would just extol his subject until he gets to the end. This point is evident in Mqhayi's poem, *Imiyolelo yowe-1931 Umnyaka* (The prophecy about the year 1931), in *Imibengo* (1971:128) in which he praises the year 1931 and makes prophecies about the coming year 1932. (Appendix 2)

We also notice that the discussion involves a link between two cultures, the traditional

culture which is reflected in the words *ziintlombe* and *imithayi* and modern culture which is reflected in the word, *izulu* which is associated with God. These examples illustrate that although western culture and Christianity as expressed in writing, had already taken strides during this period, some artists or poets in particular, had not abandoned orality or oral culture. As Jordan (1973: 65) puts it, writers did not abandon the traditional style in their expression, nor did they cast aside their folklore. This point is evident in the discussion as it unfolds. For instance, World-to come tries to convince Present-world by relating a folktale as the following verses indicate:

*Kwathi ke kaloku, kutshiwo yintsomi,
Kwakukho nkazana, isel' ingumfazi...*

*Satsho ngelizwana, elisitshothwana,
Lemveku yosana, lunguntamekwana...*

*Intetho yosana
Dicoye! Ndicoye! Dicoye! Wha mama!*
(Rubusana & Satyo: 2002: 27)

Once upon a time, so says the tale,
There was a young lady, who was already married...

It said in a small voice, which was a bit hoarse,
This child, who was still a toddler...

The speech of the child
Dicoye! Ndicoye! Dicoye! Please mother!
(my translation)

There are three important issues about the above folktale, namely the person who relates the

folktale, its structure and the content of the folktale. In the first place, a folktale is part of oral tradition or oral literature. On the other hand, World-to-come who relates the folktale represents the modern tradition because he is a “Christian”. This point has great significance for the link between orality and literacy. In other words, Gqoba has deliberately used World-to-come to symbolize the link between the oral tradition and the written tradition. Secondly, we notice that the folktale is written in stanzas in the form of verse. Thirdly, characters in folktales are usually animals that acquire human qualities but have speech defects. Similarly, although the folktale appears in written form, the speech of the child is retained. For instance, he says, *Dicoye, Ndicoye*, words which reflect the speech defects of the original characters of a folktale i.e. animals such as the wolf and the jackal. These examples indicate that oral tradition or oral literature has been carried over to written literature. Put differently, this confirms the claim that written literature has developed from oral literature and therefore the link between the two is inevitable.

A similar view regarding the relation between oral and written literature is shared by Jolobe in his poem *Ubaw' Dlula*. This poem tells us about a traditional old man, father *Dlula*, who marries his son to a girl who comes from a literate background. What is interesting is the manner in which Jolobe brings in the connection between oral tradition and modern tradition as the following stanzas illustrate,

*Ingwevu enguDlula yazekela unyana,
Intombi enxibayo kwezasesikolweni.
Lwamnandi olo daba lokuza komtshakazi,
Noko kwendiselana nabantu bokukhanya.*

*Yafika loo nzwakazi noduli lwenkcubeko,
Olwathi mhla lumkayo kwakhalwa ngoGoodbye.
Lathi kanti ixhego libambile lagcina.
Nasekwaluphaleni kufundeka okutsha...*

*Ukususela loo mhla lalikhumsha ixhego,
Likhala ngoGoodbye ukubulis' abantu;*

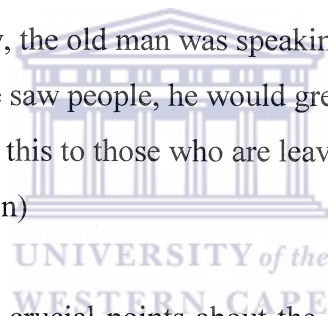
Litsho kwabahambayo, litsho kwabafikayo...

(Jolobe: 1971: 12)

An old man called *Dlula* found a wife for his son,
A girl from an educated family.
The news of the coming of the bride was received with great joy,
So was the relationship that was to be established with the elite.

This beauty arrived in the company of civilized people,
Who when they left uttered words such as, Goodbye.
It so happened that the old man was listening and for him this was
vocabulary.
Even at old age, one can learn something new.

Since that day, the old man was speaking English,
Every time he saw people, he would greet them, Goodbye;
He would say this to those who are leaving and those who are coming...
(my translation)



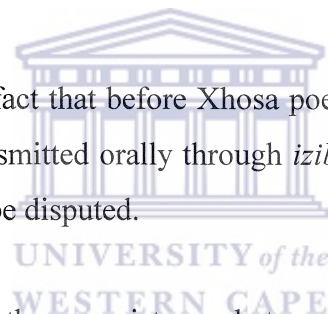
The above stanzas highlight crucial points about the orality-literacy relationship. In the first place, we find the influence of Christianity or western tradition on the oral tradition or Xhosa culture. Secondly, we find the co-existence of oral tradition and modern tradition. These points will be illustrated in the following examples. In the first line we are introduced to the Xhosa tradition of choosing a life partner for one's child as it is illustrated in *Ingwevu enguDlula yazekela unyana*. Interestingly enough, this line is followed by a line that introduces us to the bride who comes from an elite family as the line, "*Intombi enxibayo kwezasesikolweni*", suggests. The juxtaposition of the first and the second lines can be viewed as Jolobe's strategy to illustrate that oral tradition and modern tradition can co-exist. Since the marriage between father *Dlula*'s son who comes from a traditional background and the girl from an elite background is received warmly, this can be seen as symbolic of how Jolobe views the marriage between oral tradition and modern tradition. This point is confirmed in the lines, "*Lwamnandi olo daba lokuza komtshakazi, Noko kwendiselana*

nabantu bokukhanya".

Another interesting point is that the influence of the elite family is received in a positive way. This is reflected in the way the old man, father Dlula, brags about the word 'Goodbye' which he uses indiscriminately. The use of the word 'Goodbye' in a Xhosa poem can be viewed as being symbolic of the influence of modern literature on oral literature. While Xhosa written literature developed from oral literature, the growth of oral literature had been influenced by modern literature. This implies that the two influence each other. But as Peter Amuka in (Kaschula: 2001: 128) puts it:

Whatever knowledge people possess, its origin lies in orality. Human beings are either "literate" or "orate", if not both, for whatever they derive from written sources has to be oralised for it to make sense. No literary form exists until it is seen, heard or read.

If we take into account the fact that before Xhosa poetry or African literature in general was reduced to print, it was transmitted orally through *izibongo*, songs and folktales. This means that Amuka's claim cannot be disputed.



The above view regarding the co-existence between orality and literacy is confirmed in Mqhayi. In fact, I have indicated in chapter 3 that to Mqhayi, the relationship between orality and literacy is not only evident in his work but in his personality. For instance, it is stated in Chapter 3 that Mqhayi would preach at the pulpit dressed in his traditional *imbongi* attire. This illustrates that to Mqhayi, oral tradition and modern tradition are intertwined. This point is cited in Saule (1989:124) who asserts that, "To Mqhayi, the new culture was in no way incompatible with traditional African culture. If anything, the two were complementary and he saw in their fusion an emergence of a new culture".

A good example of the above statement is evident in Mqhayi's poem, *Ukutshona kukaMendi* (The wreck of the ship Mendi). According to Mtuze and Kaschula (1993:28), Mqhayi performed this poem after the news about the death of 615 African recruits who were travelling in the ship Mendi on their way to assist Britain at the war in 1917. The ship

wrecked on the English Channel. This poem was first published in 1927 but the following version has been extracted from the 1988 publication. What is interesting in this poem is the technique that Mqhayi applied to blend oral and written tradition by making reference to both traditional and western culture in an attempt to console the nation.

UKUTSHONA KUKAMENDI

1. *Ewe, le nto kakade yinto yaloo nto.*

Thina, nto zaziyo, asothukanga nto;

Sibona kamhlophe, sithi bekumelwe;

Sitheth' engqondweni, sithi kufanelwe;

Xa bekungenjalo bekungayi kulunga.

Ngoko ke, SoTase! Kwaqal' ukulunga!

Le nqanaw' uMendi, namhla yendisile,

Nal' igazi lethu lisikhonzisile!...

2. *Asinithenganga ngazo izicengo,*

Asinithenganga ngayo imibengo;

Bekungenganzuzo zimakhwezi-khwezi,

Bekungenganzuzo zingangeenkwenkwezi.

Sikwatsho nakuni, bafel' e-Afrika,

KwelaseJamani yaseMpumalanga,

NelaseJamani yaseNtshonalanga.

Bekungembek' eninayo kuKumkani,

Bekungentobeko yenu kwiBritani.

3. *Ngesibinge ngantoni na ke kade?*

Idini lomzi liyintoni na ke kade?

Asingomathol' amaduna omzi na?

Asizizithandwa zesizwe kade na?

Ngoku kuthetha ke siyendelisela,

Sibhekis' ezantsi, sihlahla indlela.

AsinguHabheli na idini lomhlaba?

AsinguMesiya na elasezulwini?

- 4 *Thuthuzelekani ngoko, zinkedama!*
Thuthuzelekani ngoko, bafazana!
Kuf' omnye kade mini kwakhiw' omnye;
Kukhonza mnye kade 'ze kuphil' abanye;
Ngala mazwi sithi, thuthuzelekani,
Ngokwenjenje kwethu sithi, yakhekani.
Lithatheni eli qhalo labadala,
Kuba bathi: " Akuhlanga lungehlanga!"

- 5 *Awu! Zaf' iint' ezinkulu ze-Afrika!*
Isindiwe le nqanawa, 'de yazika,
Kwaf' amakhalipha, amafa-nankosi,
Agazi lithetha kwiNkosi yeeNkosi.
Ukufa kwawo kunomvuzo nomvuka.
Ndinga ndingema nawo ngomhla wokuvuka.
Ndingqambe njengomnye osebenzileyo,
Ndikhanye njengomso oqaqambileyo.

Makube njalo!

(Mtuze and Kaschula: 1993: 28)

THE WRECK OF THE SHIP MENDI

1. Yes, it is like that.

We, the ones who know, are not surprised;

We understand that it is something that should have happened;

Our reasoning power tells us that it was necessary;

Had it not happened, things would have gone wrong.

Therefore, *SoTase!* Things are now in order!

The ship *Mendi* today has created marriage ties,

And our blood is evidence of our commitment!

2. It was not for the sake of being bribed;
It was not for the sake of being hired;
You did not expect any colourful rewards,
You did not expect any exotic rewards.
We also refer to those who died in Africa,
To those who died in East Germany,
And to those who died in West Germany.
It was because of your respect for the King,
It was for the sake of loyalty to Britain.

- 3 What else could we have contributed ?
Who else is the offering of a home?
Is it not the male calves of the home?
Is it not the heroes of the nation?
By these words, we are trying to console you,
We are digging deep, trying to find the way forward.
Is it not Abel who is the offering on earth?
Is it not Messiah, the one from heaven?

4. Wipe those tears, you orphans!
Wipe those tears, young ladies!
The minute one dies, another one is born;
There's always one person who will be sacrificed for the nation;
With those words, we say, wipe those tears,
By so doing, we say be developed.
Remember the old proverb of our forefathers,
Who say: "It has not happened what has not happened!"

5. Oh! The great Africans have died!
The load was so heavy for the ship that it eventually sank,

And the brave died together with the *indunas*,
Whose blood speaks to the King of Kings.
Their death has a reward and results,
I wish I could stand with them on resurrection day
And be counted among those who have served the Lord,
And shine like the shining star,
Let it be!
(my translation)

As stated in the introduction of this poem that Mqhayi laments the death of African soldiers who sacrificed their lives when Britain requested volunteers from the African people to assist her at war. In the same breath, Mqhayi is trying to calm the nation by making reference to oral tradition as it is illustrated in the following discussion. For instance, in the first stanza, we find the lines, “*Ewe, le nto kakade yinto yaloo nto. Thina nto zaziyo asothukanga nto*”. (Yes, it is like that. We, the ones who know, are not surprised) These words imply that the death of these soldiers is no surprise because it is the belief of the Xhosa people there is bound to be casualties in a war. For instance, there is an old saying or Xhosa proverb, *Ingwaba lendoda lisecaleni kwendlela* (The grave of a man is along the road). This proverb emerged from the fact that the Xhosa people used to travel long distances on foot and if the man dies on the way he would be buried there. Mqhayi’s reference to oral tradition is confirmed by the words, *Ngoko ke, SoTase! Kwaqal’ ukulunga!* The name SoTase refers to chief Maqoma’s father (chief Maqoma’s name was Tase). As if Mqhayi wants to confirm that what he said is true, he alludes to the chief. This reference to the chief reflects Xhosa tradition because the chiefs were seen as the custodians of the people and nothing could be done without their consent. In other words, it also reflects respect for the chiefs, as it is a tradition among the Xhosa people.

Similarly, in the fourth stanza, Mqhayi appeals to the people to calm down by using a Xhosa proverb in the lines, “*Akuhlanga lungehlanga!*” (It has not happened what has not happened). The meaning of these words is that the bereaved family should accept what has happened and acknowledge that what has happened is not happening for the first time, and that it happens to all families. In other words, they are meant to comfort the people. It is a tradition among the Xhosa people that before saying anything, the comforter would utter these words. What is

interesting is that these words are popular even in modern times. What does this tell us about orality and literacy and about Mqhayi and his poem? It illustrates that as modern poetry develops, it carries with it the baggage of orality. In other words, it reflects the status and influence of orality on written poetry or modern poetry. This point is confirmed by the fact that although this poem was performed in 1917, we find that in this publication which appeared about seventy one years later, traces of oral tradition have been retained.

Another crucial point that transpires from the above poem is that, while Mqhayi highlights the influence of orality on literacy, he also stresses the relation between the two. For instance, we find that within the same stanza Mqhayi alludes to oral tradition as well as modern culture as it is indicated in the third stanza, in lines 2,3, 7 and 8: “*Idini lomzi liyintoni na kade? Asingomathol’ amaduna omzi na? AsinguHabheli na idini lomhlaba? AsinguMesiya na elasezulwini?*” (Who else is the offering of a home? Is it not the male calves of a home? Is it not Abel who is the offering on earth? Is it not Messiah the one from heaven?). According to the Xhosa tradition, sacrificial ceremonies are accompanied by the slaughtering of male cattle. Lines 7 and 8 also refer to the sacrificial ceremony but from a western perspective. This point is illustrated by the reference to Abel, the son of Adam and Eve in *AsinguHabheli...?* and *AsinguMesiya...?* As the bible states, Jesus sacrificed his life so that people on earth could be pardoned from their sins. In other words, in this stanza, Mqhayi introduces us to both oral tradition and written traditions.

Similarly, we notice a special bond that Mqhayi reflects between orality and literacy, in stanza 1, in the lines, *Le nqanaw’ uMendi, namhla yendisile, Nal’ igazi lethu lisikhonzisile!* (This ship today has created marriage ties, And our blood is evidence of our commitment!). In other words, Mqhayi sees the victims of the tragedy of Mendi as heroes who sacrificed their lives in order to create a bond between Britain and the Xhosa people or between Xhosa culture and western culture. What is interesting is that the link that Mqhayi highlights in these lines transcends the boundaries of Africa because it is a bond between Africa and Britain as is evident in stanza 2 lines 8 and 9: *Bekungembek’ eninayo kuKumkani; Bekungentobeko yenu kwiBritani.* (It was because of your respect for the King. It was for the sake of your loyalty to Britain). The king that he is referring to is the then Governor of Britain, King George V. The fact that Mqhayi’s perception of orality extends the boundaries of Africa makes him unique

from his contemporaries. What is also interesting is that his perception of the link between orality and literacy goes beyond this world. For instance, in the third stanza in lines 7 and 8 he asks, *AsinguHabheli na idini lomhlaba? AsinguMesiya na elasezulwini?* (Is it not Abel who is the offering on earth? Is it not Messiah, the one from heaven?). These lines illustrate a link between heaven and earth. In other words, to Mqhayi, what happens in this world continues in the next world. If we put this view in the context of an *imbongi*, it means that he will continue with his praises even if he has moved to the next world. What does this imply for the link between oral poetry and written poetry? It means that oral poetry and written poetry are on a continuum. This point is confirmed by the poets who performed praises at Mqhayi's funeral as indicated in Qangule (1979: 15 and 16). Consider the following extract in Qangule (1979: 15):

*Zibikelen' izizwe neentlanga,
Bikelan' iinkosi neenkokheli,
Nith' imbongi yesizw' inyuselwe,
Ukuya kubongel' uSomandla.*

Report to the various nations and tribes,
Report to the various chiefs and leaders,
That the national bard has been elevated
To the position of declaiming praises for the Almighty.

(Translation by Qangule)

In the above stanza, Yali-Manisi confirms Mqhayi's conviction that poetry is an ongoing process, hence even after Mqhayi's death, Yali-Manisi sees him continuing with his duty of an *imbongi* in heaven as the lines, *Nith' imbongi yesizw' inyuselwe, Ukuya kubongel' uSomandla*. (That the bard has been elevated; To the position of declaiming praises for the Almighty). I will not dwell on this point of the existence of orality and literacy on a continuum as it will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. It is important to acknowledge the fact that since oral poetry precedes modern poetry and written poetry developed from oral poetry, we are inclined to agree with Mqhayi's conviction that the two exist on a continuum and are inseparable.

If we observe the above point carefully, we will find that it is true. For instance, whatever knowledge we have today is based on the information we have acquired from our past and our predecessors. As Amuka (in Kaschula: 2001: 128) puts it, “people’s expression of meaning, identity and other forms of knowledge are rooted in orality”. We will notice that Amuka’s statement also confirms the status of orality and its influence on written poetry. If we observe the following stanzas from Mqhayi (1974: 71-72), we will find that they reflect Amuka’s claim. In the following stanzas, Mqhayi is declaiming the Prince of Wales, a person of British descent, but in his description, he communicates the impression of the prince by making reference to traditional oral forms as will be seen in the following stanzas:

*AA! ZWELIYAZUZA
ITSHAWE LASEBRITANI*

- I. *Ngumzimbuyaqhum’ elokubuliswa;
Ngumzimbuyavuth’ elomteketiso;
NguZweliyazuz’ elibizwa ngasemva;
NguTshawuzimiban’ elibizwa yimbongi;*
- II *Phumani nonke nize kufanekisa!
Phumani zizwe nonke nize kufanekisa!
Sisilo sini n’ esi singaziwayo?
Singajongekiyo singaqhelekiyo?
Yaz’ ithi kanti yile nabulele;
Isilokaz’ esikhulu seziziba
Yaz’ ithi kanti ngulo Makhanda-mahlanu,
Inyok’ enkul’ eza ngezivuthevuthe;
Yaz’ ithi kanti ngulo Gilikankqo,
Isil’ esikhul’ esingaziwa mngxuma.
Lent’ umzimb’ uyaqhuma ngathi liziko;
Lent’ umzimb’ uyavutha ngathi lidangatye;
Lent’ iqhuqhumb’ iintlantsi ngathi nguSindiya-ndiya;
Le nt’ itshawuz’ imibane ngathi sisibhakabhaka;*

Sinnika.

III *Nalo lisiz' iTshawe leBhilitani!*

Inzala yenyathikaz' uVitoliya;
Inkazan' ebuthixorha kwizwe lakwaNtu,
Ebumoyarha, butolarha, bugqirharha.
Nants' isiz' ikwekwe kaJoji wesihlanu;
Yez' emadodeni ikwekw' akomkhulu,
Umdak' oliso litshawuz' imibane;
Lith lakukujezul' ung' ungaphanyaza;
Umdak' osabuphotyo-butyatho;
Unganganabomi wakuwondela;
Kok' ithole lerhamncw' alondeleki-
Nabakhe balinga bajub' isiduli.

IV *Yez' inkwenkw' omgquba yomthonyama!*

Yez' ixhom' izindwe yaxhom' ugijo;
Yez' ifak' umnzunga yafak' iphunga;
Yez' itsho ngezidanga nezidabane;
Yez' itsho ngobumbejewu bobuhlalu;
Yez' inobulawu nobuqholo;
Yez' inetyeleba nezifikane;
Yez' inomtho nomthombothi;
Yeza ngobungwe nobungwenyama;
Yeza bugcolocho bochoko-chokozo!
Sinnika Lawundini!

V *Tarhu Bhilitan' enkulu!*

Bhilitan' enkul' engatshonelwa langa;
Siya kumthini na lo mntwan' okumkani;
Siya kumthini na lo mntwan' omhlekaazi;
Khaniphendule nani zintaba zezwe lethu!

Nani milambo yakowethu khanithethe!
Maz' aselwandle khanimthule kambe,
Mthuleni maz' aselwandle!
Sikhe simbone, simjonge, simlozele;...

VI *Tarhu Langaliyakhanya!*

Uphuthum' inkwenkwezi yakowenu na?
Thina singumz' owab' inkwenkwezi;
Nalo kamb' ikhwez' inkwenkwez' akowenu.
Sibambana ngesilimela thina,
Yona nkwenkwezi yokubal' iminyaka,-
Iminyaka yobudoda, yobudoda!

VIII *Tarhu bawo, sive yiphi na?*

Gqithela phambili Thole lesilo!...
Makadl' ubom' ukumkani!
Ndee ntsho- ntshobololo!!
Ngokwalaa nkwenkwezi yayinomsila!!!
(Mqhayi: 1974: 71)

HAIL! ZWELIYAZUZA
THE PRINCE OF WALES

I *Body-That –Smokes is the name I greet you by;*
Burning-Body is your pet name;
Scourge –of-the-Nation you are called in private;
The praise –singer calls you Flasher – of –Lightning;
Honour to you!

II *Go out all of you, go out and identify him*
Go out, all the nations, and identify!
What kind of creature is this unknown monster?

Never before seen, unfamiliar to all?
Perhaps he may turn out to be *Nabulele*;
Monster of the deep pools;
Or *Makhanda-mahlanu*,
The snake with five heads, who comes as a whirlwind.
Or it may be *Gilikankqo*,
The monster whose lair no man knows.
Its body burns like a hearth;
Its body burns like a flame;
It spits sparks as if it were a steam-engine;
It flashes lightning like the heavens;
Honour to you!

III Here comes the Prince of Britain!
Offspring of the female buffalo, Victoria,
Young woman who is a god in the land of Blacks,
Spirit-like, priest of war, wizard,
Here comes the boy son of George V;
Of the Royal house, a boy coming to men,-
Dung-coloured one eye flashes lightning;
If it touches you with a glance, it will blind you;
The dung-coloured one, who it is impossible to describe;
Indeed it is difficult to scan him;
There is no one that can gaze at the calf of the wild beast;
And those who once tried collapsed unconscious.

IV Here comes the boy of the raw dung, the old dung of royal descent!
Here he comes in plumes and in feathers;
Here he comes decked in finery, wearing the grass of initiates;
Here he comes beautifully attired,
Resplendent and bejewelled;
Here he comes in scent and fragrance;

Here he comes in mint and grass necklaces;
Here he comes smelling of the sacred tambuti tree;
Here he comes with the virtue of the leopard, the lion;
Here he comes in raiment and fine robes;
Honour to you, Philistine indeed!

V Hail, Great Britain!

Great Britain on whom the sun never sets;
What shall we do with this princely child?
What shall we do with this child of the king?
Give answer, you mountains of our land!
And you, rivers of our home, speak out!
Bring him down, waves of the sea!
Waves of the sea, bring him down,
So that we may see him and study him intently;

VI Hail, Light –that-shines!

Have you come to fetch your star?
We are a nation that divides stars amongst us;
Yonder is the morning star- star of your people.
But we bind ourselves together with the Pleiades-
The stars we count our years by, the years of our manhood,
The years of manhood, the years of manhood!

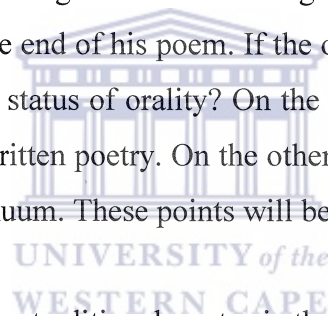
VIII Forgive me, O Father, but which of these must we accept?

Pass on, calf of the beast!,...
Long live the king!
I disappear, I disappear!!
Like the shooting star we once saw!!!.

(Translation by R. Kavanagh & Z. S. Qangule)

As indicated in chapter three, the above stanzas are taken from a poem which was initially

performed by Mqhayi in 1925 in praise of the Prince of Wales. What is interesting is that although the above stanzas have been extracted from the written version of this poem which was published in 1974, we notice that they resemble oral forms of poetry both in style and in content as will be seen in the following discussion. In the first stanza, we notice that the *imbongi* introduces the prince with his *isikhahlelo*, *AA! Zweliyazuza*. The style of introducing the subject of praise with an *isikhahlelo* is the traditional way that was used by *imbongi* when they addressed the chiefs. A good example is cited in Opland (Twelve essays: 136 & 151) from the recordings of Mqhayi's performances with which he praised Chief Silimela and Chief Sandile. He salutes each chief with his *isikhahlelo*, *A! Silimela!* and *A! Velile!* respectively. The use of an *isikhahlelo* was intended to show respect. An interesting thing about the use of *isikhahlelo* in the above situation is that although the subject of praise is not a chief but a dignitary from the western culture, Mqhayi still applies the traditional oral forms. Similarly, the *imbongi* has used closing oral formulas in ending the poem namely, *Ndee ntsho-ntshobololo!!* Closing formulas were significant techniques used by the *imbongi* to suggest to his audience the end of his poem. If the oral forms of poetry have been retained, what does this imply for the status of orality? On the one hand, one can say that it illustrates the influence of orality on written poetry. On the other hand, it confirms the claim that orality and literacy exist on a continuum. These points will be addressed in the following chapter.



Another popular device of the traditional poetry is the use of repetition. Among other things, this device was meant to emphasize a point. We notice that throughout this poem, Mqhayi has applied this device. For instance, in the first stanza the *imbongi* introduces the prince to the people and portrays his magnanimity by a repetition of pictorial and sensory images as it is reflected in the lines, *Ngumzimb' uyaqhum' ...Ngumzimb' uyavuth'...* (Body-That-Smokes...Burning-Body...) This repetition is noticed in other stanzas. For instance, in the second stanza, after the *imbongi* has given a physical description of the prince, he calls out for the people to come and identify him in the lines, *Phumani nonke nize kufanekisa! Phumani zizwe nonke nize kufanekisa!* (Go out, all of you, go out and identify him! Go out, all nations, and identify!). As if the *imbongi* has seen an unusual figure, he repeatedly calls out for the people to witness what he has seen as the words, *Phumani nonke...Phumani zizwe nonke...* illustrate. He is not only calling out to his audience but also appeals to other nations. A similar situation is found in the fourth stanza. In this stanza the bard describes the attire of

the prince with a series of descriptions as he says, *Yez' inkwenkw' omgquba...Yez' ixhom' izindwe...Yez' ifak' umzunga*. (Here comes the boy of the raw dung...Here he comes in plumes.... Here he comes decked in finery...). The description of the prince, by identifying every item of his attire, has an important significance because it reflects the proximity of the *imbongi* to his subject of praise. In other words, it illustrates that the poem was composed during performance. This point is illustrated by the fact that the *imbongi* describes even the perfumes and jewellery that the prince is wearing as it is reflected in the fourth stanza in the lines 37-40, *Yez' itsho ngobumbejewu bobuhlalu; Yez' inobulawu nobuqholo; Yez' inetyeleba nezifikane; Yez' inomtho nomthombothi*. (Resplendent and bejewelled; Here he comes in scent and fragrance; Here he comes in mint and grass necklaces; Here he comes smelling of the sacred tambuti tree). If we observe these lines, we notice that they give an impression of a live performance and this is characteristic of oral poetry.

What is interesting is that although the poem appears in print, it has retained the spirit of a live performance. In addition to this, the repetition of descriptives enables the reader to create a mental picture of the prince in his attire. These examples show the power of orality as well as the influence of oral poetry on written poetry. Kaschula's quotation of Ong in the journal, *Research in African Literatures* (1997: 179) confirms the power of orality when he states that, "oral cultures indeed produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth". Since the oral nature of this poem is retained despite the fact that it appears in written form, this confirms the relation between orality and literacy. Another crucial characteristic of orality is the presence of folklore items. We notice that in this poem, Mqhayi as a traditional *imbongi* has retained this characteristic in this poem and this could be attributed to the fact that to Mqhayi, orality and literacy go hand in hand. This point is evident in the fact that Mqhayi was the first *imbongi* to write his own poems. If we look at the second stanza, we find that the *imbongi* likens the prince to all the mysterious animals found in folklore as it is reflected in lines 5, 6 and 7: *Yaz' ithi kanti yile nabulele; Isilokaz' esikhulu seziziba; Yaz' ithi kanti ngulo Makhanda-mahlanu; Inyok' enkul' eza ngezivuthevuthe*. (Perhaps he may turn out to be *Nabulele*; Monster of the deep pools; Or Five-headed snake. The snake with five heads which comes as a whirlwind). The significance of folklore in this situation is to arouse the curiosity of his audience and to ensure that they listen with a critical mind. This point can be confirmed by the fact that the creatures that the *imbongi* has used

namely, the *Nabulele* and *Makhanda-mahlanu* are usually associated with danger and fear in folklore. Since folklore is part of oral tradition, its inclusion can be seen as evidence of the link between orality and literacy.

We can thus conclude that orality permeates the content of this poem. For instance, we also notice that the *imbongi* has used *izikhahlelo*, proverbs and compound words in his description of the prince as it is reflected in the following examples from the first stanza: *Ngumzimb' uyaqhum'...Ngumzimb'uyavuth'...NguZweliyazuz'...*(Body-That-Smokes...Burning—Body...Scourge-of-the-nation). The *imbongi* introduces the prince and his character to the audience by declaiming him with *isikhahlelo*. *Isikhahlelo* is an important feature in traditional poetry and it was associated mainly with chiefs as it is evident in the recordings of Mqhayi's performances in Opland (Twelve Essays: 137) when he praises chief Sandile as *Yimbishi-mbishi, yingqishi-ngqishi, Ngumabhinqel' ezantsi*. (He is big and stout, his step is heavy, He girds his garment like a skirt...(Translated by Opland). As Qangule (1979: 40) puts it, the eulogie or *isikhahlelo* "is the central feature of praise poetry. The idea of *isikhahlelo* is premised on the hero whose praises are recited". His character and his qualities are deemed praiseworthy. His actions are regarded as meritorious. This point is evident in Mqhayi (1914: 30-31) in his praises of Chief Hintsa, the King of the Xhosa people. He declaims him as:

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<i>Uhlwathi lowo kaGcaleka;</i>	(The sweet one from Gcaleka)
<i>UMBheka-ntshiyini bath' uqumbile;</i>	(Brows they see and conclude he is angry)
<i>Uhlwath' olumadolo lukakhala;</i>	(Sweet one with big knees [son] of Khala)
<i>USoraroba;</i>	(He is the Father of Raroba)
<i>Inkunz' abayikhuz' ukuhlab' ingekahlabi;</i>	(The bull whose horns they fear even before it has touched them).
	(my translation)

In the above lines Mqhayi gives a picture of the qualities of chief Hintsa as the eulogies, *Uhlwathi... Umbheka-ntshiyini...Inkunz'...*(The sweet one...Brows they see...The bull...) suggest. A crucial feature about these eulogies is that they also reflect the fine eye and the creativity of the *imbongi*. For instance, he makes reference to the eyebrows and the knees of the chief and he creates compound words which are non-existent in Xhosa. In other words,

orality or oral poetry plays an important role in the development of the Xhosa language. This point highlights the status of orality or specifically, oral poetry. The significance of these features of oral poetry namely, eulogies, repetition, compound words, is that they reflect the uniqueness of oral poetry. From these eulogies we can deduce that chief Hintsa was a respectable man as the eulogies *UMbheka-ntshiyini bath' uqumbile; Inkunz' abayikhuz' ukuhlab' ingekahlabi* (Brows they see and conclude he is angry; The bull whose horns they fear even before it has touched them) indicate. This is no surprise because according to the Xhosa tradition, a chief is a born leader who has been nominated by Qamata (God) to take care of the people.

If we refer to the praises of the Prince of Wales, what is interesting is that although the hero in this case comes from western culture, the elements of praise poetry are evident. This point confirms the impact of oral poetry on written poetry. For instance, the *imbongi* has used eulogies and compound words to describe the prince, *Ngumzimb' uyaqhum'... Ngumzimb' uyavuth'... NguZweliyazuz'... NguTshawuz' imiban'...* One can attribute the use of traditional oral forms in this context as reflecting Mqhayi's convictions that traditional culture and western culture are compatible.

There are two important observations that need to be highlighted from the above discussion, namely, the subject of praise and the nature of oral poetry. We notice that although the above poem was performed in 1925, the written version has features which are characteristic of oral poetry. This point is illustrated in the use of eulogies, repetition, compound words, the opening formulas and the closing formulas. These features demonstrate the influence of orality on written poetry. But if we look at the content of the poem, we find that there is a shift in the context and the subject of praise. Initially, the main subject of praise for the *imbongi* was a chief. But as I have indicated in the above discussion, because of socio-political changes, the role of the chiefs was replaced by the government officials. This point is evident in the above poem: the *imbongi* is praising a government official. For instance, in the third stanza in lines 1 and 2, *Nalo lisiz' iTshawe leBhilitani! Inzala yenyathikaz' uVitoliya;* (Here comes the Prince of Britain! Offspring of the female buffalo, Victoria!). In this situation the subject of praise is a prince of British descent who came as an official to visit South Africa. The *imbongi* has created *izikhahlelo* which are peculiar to his subject. This

point illustrates that oral poetry is not static but changes according to the situation and according to the subject of praise.

In the above discussion, it became apparent that Mqhayi and his contemporaries wrote about issues that pertained to socio-political changes that prevailed during their time for example, issues that relate to Christianity and wars of dispossession. Nonetheless, I have noticed that these factors did not divorce them from their traditional values because in their poems they constantly referred to oral tradition. In other words, it became clear that oral forms of poetry permeate modern poetry. This point plays a crucial role in demonstrating the influence of oral poetry on modern poetry.

What transpired from the above discussion is that, there is a close link between orality and literacy or oral poetry and written poetry and that the two exist on a continuum. Another crucial point that emerged is that written poetry has developed from oral poetry. Is written poetry merely oral poetry in written form? This issue will be addressed in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 5

MQHAYI AND MODERN IIMBONGI: A REFLECTION OF ORALITY AND LITERACY

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter my intention is to address the questions that transpired from the previous chapter with regard to the relation that exists between orality and literacy and between oral poetry and written poetry. In the previous chapter, it became apparent that oral poetry and written poetry are linked. It also became evident that written poetry developed from oral poetry and that oral poetry forms the foundation for written poetry. Does this mean that written poetry is just oral poetry in written form, as some critics in the discussion in Chapter 1 have claimed? In order to address these questions, I will refer to Mqhayi's work and that of some modern *iimbongi*. My argument will also be based on the responses from the questionnaires and the interviews that I held with these *iimbongi*. The discussion will lay emphasis on the subject of praise, the structure of the poem and the situation or context in which the poem was produced.

5.2 The influence of Mqhayi on modern iimbongi

Since Mqhayi is one of the pioneers who have played a prominent role in the development of Xhosa literature, it is possible that his work has had a great impact on some modern *iimbongi*. Of importance is the fact that he was not only a traditional *imbongi* who performed in public but was a crossover *imbongi* who also produced his work in print. This point has crucial implications for orality and literacy. It means that Mqhayi's written work had carried over oral tradition because his vocabulary was based on existing knowledge from oral tradition. He made references to folklore and idiomatic expressions in his performances as illustrated in his poem where he praises the Prince of Wales. Similarly, modern *iimbongi* have been influenced by oral tradition because they refer to past experiences and they derive their vocabulary from existing knowledge. It means that the work of modern *iimbongi* is in one

way or another influenced by that of traditional *iimbongi* such as Mqhayi. This point is evident in the responses that I received from the interviews and the questionnaires in which the *iimbongi* acknowledge the influence of Mqhayi, both in his character and in his work. In my interview with Mbambo with regard to Mqhayi's influence on his work, I received the following response:

Mpolweni: *Apha kwaXhosa kukho imbongi ebizwa ngokuba ngu S. E. K. Mqhayi, ingaba wazi ntoni ngayo?*

(In the Xhosa tradition there is an *imbongi* with the name of S. E. K. Mqhayi, what do you know about him?)

Mbambo: *NguMkrestu lo. Kodwa ke, engengoMkrestu ocociweyo aph' engqondweni ukuz' alahl' amasiko akhe, athathe amasiko asezizweni. NguMkrestu oyaziyo ukuba uQamata ukhona, uyalawula, kodwa ke ukuze siye kuQamata masingayi nje nanjanina, masingene ngeenkosi zethu. Yiyo le nto enolaa bekelelo lwenyanda xa ethetha athi, 'Iintombi mazihloniph' amakhwenkwe, amakhwenkwe ahloniph' oonina, bona bahloniph' ooyise, ooyise bahloniph' izibonda, izibonda zihloniph' iinkosi zona zihloniph' uQamata'. Isiko lokwaluka lisekho nje, kungenxa yakhe.* (He is a Christian. But he is not the kind of Christian who has been brainwashed to neglect his customs and embrace the customs of other nations. He is a Christian who is aware of the presence of *Qamata* (God), and that He reigns above everything else. The path to Him goes through the chiefs. That is why he refers to the chain of communication as follows, 'The girls should respect the boys who should respect the mothers, and they should respect their husbands, the husbands respect the headmen, and they should respect the chiefs who in return should respect *Qamata*'. The fact that the custom of circumcision still exists is because of him.)

Mpolweni: *Ingaba likho ifuthe olifumene kuMqhayi okanye kwizibongo zakhe?*

(Would you say that Mqhayi has influenced you through his character or his work?)

Mbambo: *Kakhulu! Kakhulu! Kwizibongo zakhe. Ndifumene lukhulu kuba ukuze ndibhale isihobe esithi, 'Ukubeka ilitye kuSomgxada', ndasibhala eso sihobe ngefuthe lembongi yomthonyama, ndifuthelwe nguMqhayi, kuba yintetho yakhe othi uyiv' aph' emqolweni*

okanye evesini, uv' okokuba, Tyhini! Kukho izandi apha ezilandelelanayo, imiqolo iyafaniselana. UMqhayi yen' ebeza kuthi, 'Mpofundini esayiva ngomfutho mhla kwawa uMendi. Isenjenjenje le mof' ayigidi; Kukho ntw' ikhoyo kwizinto zomhlab' ezindidi-ndidi. UMbambo ke yena uthi, 'Lukhoz' olumaphikw' angqangqasholo'

(Mbambo: Absolutely, absolutely, more especially in his poems. I have learnt a lot from him, for instance, the fact that I was inspired to write the poem, '*Ukubeka ilitye kuSomgxada*' (To place a stone at Somgxada), I wrote this poem because of the influence of the traditional *imbongi*, I was inspired by Mqhayi, because it is his style that one will recognize from the lines or from the stanza that, Oh! Yes! There is alliteration and assonance. Mqhayi would say, 'Dark-beauty whose puff we heard on the day when the *Mendi* sank. By so doing; this Dark-beauty is not doing it for fun; It is because of certain things among the different kinds of earthly issues. Mbambo would say, 'he is an eagle with thick strong wings'

From the above discussion it is clear that Mbambo does not doubt Mqhayi's contribution to his work. Even from his expression I could see that he was speaking about a person whom he had great respect for as he emphatically stated, '*NguMkrestu lo'. 'Ukuze ndibhale isibongo esithi uSomgxada...*' (He is a Christian. The fact that I was inspired to write the poem, To place a stone at *Somgxada...*). In other words, from reading Mqhayi's poems, Mbambo was inspired by the style and the rhythm of the poem as he refers to the lines and the stanzas which are characteristic of Mqhayi's poems. An interesting illustration of Mqhayi's contribution to Mbambo's life was also evident when during the course of the discussion, Mbambo simply switched over and sang a few lines in praise of Mqhayi saying, '*UMqhayi yen' ebeza kuthi, Mpofundini esayiva mhla kwawa uMendi*'... (Mqhayi would say ", Dark-beauty, whose puff we heard on the day when the *Mendi* sank). He uttered these words proudly as though he regards Mqhayi as a hero. This point is evident when he made reference to Mqhayi's role in promoting Xhosa tradition as he asserted, '*Isiko lokwaluka lisekho nje, kungenxa yakhe*'. (The fact that the custom of circumcision still exists is because of him).

One will remember that Mqhayi is one of the few Christian converts who adhered to their customs despite the influence of the missionaries. For instance, in Chapter 2, I indicated that Mqhayi opted for circumcision despite the objection of the missionaries to this custom, hence

Mbambo's claim regarding the retention of the tradition. This claim highlights a crucial point about Mqhayi's role and it also illustrates that he was not only exemplary through his work but he also served as a nation-builder by promoting respect for the customs. This point is cited in Mbambo's statement, '*NguMkrestu oyaziyo ukuba uQamata ukhona uyalawula, kodwa ke, ukuze siye kuQamata masingayi nje nanjani, masingene ngeenkosi zethu*'. Since the notion of customs and *Qamata* has important significance for Xhosa tradition, Mbambo's statement confirms that Mqhayi's work contributed in ensuring that oral tradition is carried over to modern tradition. In other words, Mqhayi's work has influenced modern *iimbongi* and this influence means that oral tradition continues to exist. The influence of Mqhayi is also cited in the following extract from my interview with Batyi. This is an aspiring *imbongi* who performs in public and has started writing his poems. This is how he explained Mqhayi's influence:

Mpolweni: Apha kwaXhosa kukho *imbongi* ebizwa ngokuba ngu S. E. K. Mqhayi, ingaba wazi ntoni ngayo? (In the Xhosa tradition there is an *imbongi* with the name of S. E. K. Mqhayi, what do you know about him?)

Baty: *Ndazi lukhulu ngayo. Ibisaziwa ngokuba yiMbongi yeSizwe kwaye ibilugade kakhulu uhlanga olumnyama. Nditsho kuba namhla kwatshon' inqanawa uMendi yathuthuzela. Ibhalile nencwadi enemfundiso ngakumbi kumasiko nezithethe zakwaNtu, Ityala lamaWele. Izibongile iinkosi nezikumkani.* (I know a great deal about him. He was known as the *Imbongi* of the nation and he was protective of the Black nation. I say this because even at the time of the wreck of *Mendi*, he comforted the nation. He has also written a book that is very informative more especially with regard to customs and values, the book entitled, *Ityala lamaWele* (The Lawsuit of twins). He has praised the chiefs and the great kings.

Mpolweni: *Ingaba likho ifuthe olifumene kuMqhayi okanye kwizibongo zakhe?*
(Would you say that Mqhayi has influenced you through his character or his work?)

Baty: *Likho kakhulu ifuthe endalifumana kule mbongi kuba ngelixa endandingekaziqapheli ukuba nam ndiyimbongi, ndisekumabanga asezantsi ngoko, nandithanda ukucengeceleza izibongo zayo.* (I have been influenced greatly by this *imbongi* because at the time I was still

at Primary school, I used to enjoy reciting his poems.)

From the above discussion, it is evident that the footprints of Mqhayi have left a mark in the minds of modern *iimbongi*. This point is evident in the performances of the *iimbongi* who were present at the celebrations in memory of Mqhayi which were held at the University of the Western Cape in July 2001. The month of July is a memorable month among the Xhosa people because it is the day on which the Xhosa legend, Mqhayi died on 29 July 1945. Since he was an *imbongi* of the nation, it has become a tradition more especially in the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape to hold celebrations on this day in memory of Mqhayi. The occasion that was held in 2001 was marked by the performances of *iimbongi* who joined in the celebration of both the life and the contribution of Mqhayi. These *iimbongi* stole the stage because they came one after another chanting praises with their knobkerries pointing forward and sideways while some members of the audience participated by clapping hands and others ululating. After the speech of the guest speaker who presented the life history and the contribution of Mqhayi in the development of Xhosa literature, one of the *iimbongi* who was inspired by the speech jumped up and declaimed praises in honour of Mqhayi as the following extract from the recordings suggests, “*Uzuwukhumbule umhla wokugqibela wenyanga yekhala; Uzuwukhumbule umhla wokuzalwa kwenkwenkwe kaBhomoyi...*” (You should remember the last day of July; You should remember the birthday of the son of Bhomoyi...) The *imbongi*'s words illustrate an appeal to the audience to acknowledge Mqhayi's contribution and to celebrate his life. The emphasis on *Uzuwukhumbule umhla wokugqibela* (the last “day”) and *Uzuwukhumbule umhla wokuzalwa* (the “birthday”) confirms this point. What is interesting is that before the first *imbongi* had taken his seat another one came up and shared the same feelings as is demonstrated in the following extract from the recordings:

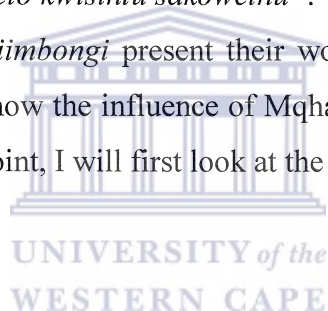
Kunamhlanje nje sihlangene ngendedeb' enkulu
Kunamhlanje nje sizidl' igugu ngento kaBhomoyi
Qhawendini lesizwe!
Ngangalalandini enegalelo kumhobe wesizwe
Ngangalalandini enegalelo kwisintu sakowethu
Ndithetha ngoMqhayi waseNtabozuko.

Today we are gathered in honour of the great dignitary
 Today we pride of the son of Bhomoyi
 The great hero of the nation!
 Honourable one who has made a contribution to the national anthem
 Honourable one who has made a contribution to the Xhosa language
 I speak of Mqhayi from the Mount of Glory.
 (my translation)

In the above extract the *imbongi* stresses the honour that Mqhayi acquired and he speaks as though Mqhayi is still alive. This is illustrated by the *imbongi*'s use of vocative, *Qhawendini lesizwe*. In other words, the influence of Mqhayi is still fresh in the mind, for instance, the *imbongi* continues to highlight some of the contributions of Mqhayi in the lines "... *enegalelo kumhobe wesizwe; ...enegalelo kwisintu sakowethu*".

Since some of the modern *iimbongi* present their work both orally and in written form, it would be interesting to see how the influence of Mqhayi's work is reflected in their work. In my attempt to address this point, I will first look at the subject of praise.

5.2 The subject of praise



In the above discussion I have highlighted that an *imbongi*'s praises are centred round the existing conditions of his time, and this is true of Mqhayi's period. In the first place, since he was known as *Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele* (The *imbongi* of the whole nation), he had a huge role of being the eye of the nation while he served as the custodian of Xhosa tradition: a tradition that places the status of the chief at the centre. In fact, as Saule (1989: 113) puts it, "Mqhayi was closely connected with the Royal house in his capacity as Chief Makinana's councillor and his personal *imbongi*". As a traditional *imbongi*, most of his subjects were the chiefs as the following extract from the recordings of his praises of chief Makinana illustrates:

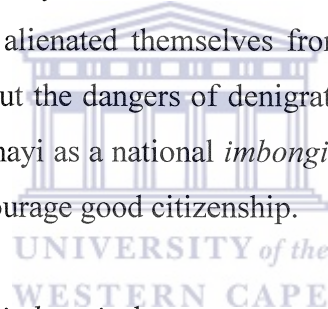
A! Silimela!
AmaNdlamb' amatsha

Hay' amaNdlamb' amatsha
Inkos' am ngumntakaNdluzodaka
Yindod' ezalwa ngabantw' ababini
Izalwa nguMakinana noNopasi...
UNopasi yintombi kaMon' umhlophe kaNtshunqe
Umhlophe kaNtshunqe kwaBomvana
Isilimela yinkwenkwez' enkulu yakwaPhalo...
 (Opland: 1977: 151)

Hail! Silimela!
 The new Ndlambe
 Oh, the new Ndlambe!
 My chief is the son of Ndluzodaka.
 He is a man born of two people,
 He is born of Makinana and Nopasi.
 Nopasi is the daughter of Moni, the light-skinned so of Ntshunqe.
 The light-skinned son of Ntshunqe of Bomvanaland.
 The Pleiades is an important constellation amongst the tribes of Phalo...
 (Translation by Opland)

In the above lines, Mqhayi introduces us to chief Makinana whom he salutes as *A! Silimela!* As a traditional *imbongi*, we notice that Mqhayi is clear about the genealogy of his subject as it is illustrated in the lines, *Inkos' am ngumntakaNdluzodaka, Izalwa nguMakinana noNopasi, UNopasi yintombi kaMon' umhlophe kaNtshunqe, Umhlophe kaNtshunqe kwaBomvana*. (My chief is the son of *Ndluzodaka*, He is born of Makinana and Nopasi, Nopasi is the daughter of Moni, the light-skinned son of Ntshunqe, The light-skinned son of Ntshunqe of Bomvanaland). In other words, in the above lines, Mqhayi introduces the reader to the history of his chief by tracing his family tree. This was normal practice for *iimbongi* as custodians of tradition. This point is also indicated in the line, *Isilimela yinkwenkwez' enkulu yakwaPhalo*. (The Pleiades is an important constellation amongst the tribes of Phalo). The reference to *Isilimela* touches on the highly respected custom of the Xhosa culture: the custom of circumcision. This shows that Mqhayi, as a traditional *imbongi* advocates respect

for the culture. His reference to Phalo, one of the Phalo forefathers of the Xhosa people, is also indicative of Mqhayi's respect for his tradition. Phalo is the name of one of the early ancestors of the Xhosa people whom the Xhosa people always refer to when they trace their genealogy. For instance, it is common among the Xhosa people to address each other as *Mzi kaPhalo* (House of Phalo) and more especially when there is a burning issue that needs collective participation. It is interesting how Mqhayi's qualities as a traditional *imbongi* are revealed in this poem. For instance, according to Xhosa tradition, the chiefs are closely related to the ancestors since the people's communication with Qamata (God) goes through the chiefs and the chiefs pass on the message to the ancestors who in return communicate directly with Qamata. In other words, if we observe this poem carefully, we notice that although Mqhayi's subject of praise is the chief, he is also perpetuating respect for the culture and the religion of his people. This point confirms the function of a traditional *imbongi*, that of being the custodian of the whole nation. We will remember that during Mqhayi's period the consequences of missionary influence and the Nongqawuse episode were visible and some African converts had alienated themselves from Xhosa customs. The *imbongi* had a duty to warn the people about the dangers of denigrating their own culture. Hence one finds that in the above poem, Mqhayi as a national *imbongi* has used this platform well not only to declaim the chief but to encourage good citizenship.

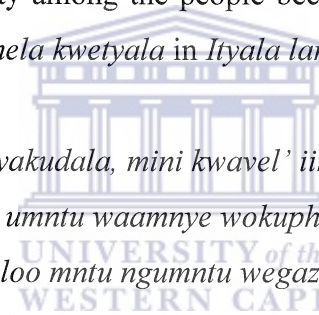


In the same breath, modern *iimbongi* advocate respect for the culture because they regard it as an appropriate root for reviving unity. A good example can be cited in the following extract from the recordings of Mkangisa who was among the *iimbongi* that performed at the Heritage Day function that was held at the University of the Western Cape in September 2000. He performed just after the speech of Chief Nonkonyana who was one of the dignitaries at this occasion. In his opening words the *imbongi* said:

AA! Zanemvula
Intw' amehlw' angqukuva okwesheleni
Intw' encumo lugos' okukaBhlankethe
Thetha sive, Mntwan' egazi
Nqand' abantwana bakho bangemki nelizwe...

Hail! Zanemvula
 The one with round eyes like a shilling
 The one with a crooked smile like Blanket
 Speak so that we can understand, Child of the royal blood
 Save your children from getting astray...
 (my translation)

In the first place, the nature of the occasion was to encourage unity and a sense of identity. One of the ways to achieve this objective is through respect for one's tradition or one's culture. The speech of the chief was in line with this view. In response to the motivational speech of the chief, we notice that the *imbongi* first salutes the chief with his *isikhahlelo*, *AA! Zanemvula*, as it is a tradition when one addresses a chief. In other words, the *imbongi* is setting an example that a chief is a respected figure of the community. At the same time, the *imbongi* is encouraging unity among the people because as Mqhayi puts it in the following stanza from his poem *Ukuphela kwetyala in Ityala lamaWele* (1914: 30-31)



*Ngemihla yakudala, mini kwavel' iintaba,
 Kwabekw' umntu waamnye wokuphath' abanye.
 Kwathiwa loo mntu ngumntu wegazi,
 Kwathiwa loo mntu makathotyelwe luluntu;
 Aze athi yen' athobele uQamata;*

In the olden days, when mountains began to appear,
 Only one person was given power to govern others
 It was said that he is the person of the Royal blood
 It was said that the people should obey him;
 And he should obey Qamata;

In the above stanza Mqhayi is highlighting the chain of unity and of communication that was a tradition among the Xhosa people: that the chief has been assigned by Qamata to serve as a guardian of his people. It is the same tradition that the *imbongi* in the above discussion is promoting as his words, "*Nqand' abantwana bakho bangemki nelizwe*" (Save your children

from getting astray) suggest. However, one will remember that at the time of this occasion: in the twentieth century, the position of chiefs had taken a shift. For instance, at this occasion, the chief was an invited guest whereas in the past, gatherings which concern social issues, were held at the chief's place and the chief would be the central figure. In other words, although in some cases the subject of praise may be a chief, the context in which he is praised has changed. If one observes the conditions today, one will find that unlike in the past when everything had to get the approval of the chief, today the chiefs have limited control over the people. The system of governance is such that people are the subjects of the government and government officials are members of different political organisations who have been elected by their constituencies through a system of voting. What does this imply for the subject of praise? It means that there is a shift in the main subject of praise from the chiefs to government officials and political leaders. This point is confirmed in Kaschula (2001: xiv) who states that:

Unlike the performances of the past, which were essentially concerned with events in and around the kingdom, the thematic content of oral poetry has been broadened in order to reflect the important issues of the day, be they religious, political or social.

A good illustration of the above statement is cited in the following lines from Mkiva's poem, *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* in (Mtuzze and Kaschula: 1993: 142). Mkiva performed the poem on 10 May 1994 at the inauguration of President Mandela as the first Black president of South Africa. The poem was later published in Mtuzze and Kaschula's book, *Izibongo zomthonyama*:

Yaqhawuk' imbeleko! Yaqhawuk' imbeleko!
Zaqhawuk' iiankile zentiyo nengcinezelo
Ubekiwe uMongameli wenene nenyanyiso weli loMdibaniso,
Kuba kaloku ngumaxhalanga-ndidleni,
 (1993: 142)

The umbilical cord has snapped! The umbilical cord has snapped!
 The rafters of hatred and oppression have snapped

The real President of the country has been ordained,
Because he is Vultures – devour - me.
(My translation)

As one will understand, the main subject of this poem is ex-President Mandela. The inauguration was a historic event in the history of South Africa and the *imbongi* was inspired by the jubilation and celebration of this day and as a result, he jumped up with excitement and extolled Mandela. The words that have been used by the *imbongi* are an indication of this point which for instance, are suggested by the lines, “*Yaqhawuk’ imbeleko! Yaqhawuk’ imbeleko! Zaqhawuk’ iiankile zentiyo nengcinezelo*”, (The umbilical cord has snapped! The umbilical cord has snapped! The rafters of hatred and oppression have snapped). The *imbongi* makes a symbolic reference to the end of oppressive years and the beginning of a new era through the words, *Yaqhawuk’ imbeleko*. When the umbilical cord snaps, it marks the birth of a child whose whole life was dependent on his mother. He is now going to be independent and will look for means of survival. Similarly, since Black people were subjected to the laws of oppression, this event marks the birth of freedom. What is interesting is that, although the *imbongi*’s subject of praise is the president, we notice that he refers the audience to the history of South Africa as the line, “*Zaqhawuk’ iiankile zentiyo nengcinezelo*” indicates. Since the rafters of oppression have snapped, the *imbongi* reminds the audience of their past when they were subjected to discriminatory laws. The style of making reference to the history is characteristic of traditional poetry as I have indicated in Mqhayi’s poems in Chapter 4. We also notice that the *imbongi* uses compound words in his description of Mandela as it is reflected in *ngumaxhalanga-ndidleni* (Vultures-devour-me). What is interesting is that this compound word is also a metaphor that refers to a person who makes a sacrifice no matter what the consequences will be. This is true of Mandela because he sacrificed part of his life and was prepared to stay in jail for twenty-seven years for the freedom of his people. The use of metaphoric language and compound words that are characteristic of oral tradition confirms the influence of orality on modern poetry. Similarly, in Chapter 4, Mqhayi in his description of the Prince of Wales, used metaphors such as *Isilokaz’ esikhulu seziziba* (Monster of the deep pools). This metaphor is derived from *iintsomi* (folktales). In *iintsomi*, the Monster of the deep pools is usually a character that is associated with mystery and danger. In other words, since the Prince was a visiting dignitary

whom the people were not familiar with, Mqhayi was sceptical of his visit. If we observe the above examples of written poems, we notice that in both cases the influence of oral tradition is evident. This confirms the notion of orality as the stepping-stone of written poetry. On the other hand, it illustrates the link between Mqhayi and modern *iimbongi* as the following extracts from Mqhayi's poem *Ukutshona kukaMendi* in Mtuze and Kaschula (1993: 28) and Shasha's *Ukuzika kukaMendi* (1992a: 50) demonstrate:

UKUTSHONA KUKAMENDI

*Ewe, le nto kakade yinto yaloo nto,
Thina, nto zaziyo, asothukanga nto.
Sibona, kamlhlophe, sithi bekumelwe;
Sitheth' engqondweni, sithi kufanelewe
Xa bekungenjalo bekungayi kulunga...
Thuthuzelekani ngoko, zinkedama;
Thuthuzelekani ngoko, bafazana!
Kuf' omnye kakade, mini kwakhiw' omnye;*
(Mtuze and Kaschula: 1993: 28)

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WESTERN CAPE
THE WRECK OF THE SHIP MENDI

Yes, it is like that,
We, the ones who know, are not surprised.
We understand that it is something that should have happened;
Our reasoning power tells us that it was necessary;
Had it not happened, things would have gone wrong...
Wipe those tears, you orphans;
Wipe those tears, young women!
The minute one dies, another is born;
(My translation)

UKUZIKA KUKAMENDI

*Ihlil' intlekele kwabomgquba,
Ababethwelwe yinqanaw' uMendi,
Phakathi kweNgilane neFransi,
UMendi untlithwe yeny' inqanawa,*

*Bekuyini na kakade
Ukuze kuzik' abakuthi bodwa?
Ngabo bodwa n' amakhakha
Okukhusel' iKumkani yeBrithani?
(Shasha: 1992: 50)*

THE WRECK OF THE SHIP *MENDI*

A tragedy occurred to the Black people,
Who were carried by the ship *Mendi*,
Between England and France,
Mendi collided with another ship,

Why is it that,
Only our people were the ones who died?
Are they the only shields
To protect the King of Britain?
(My translation)

The two poems above both refer to the subject *Mendi*, a ship that was carrying African recruits who were going to help Britain during the First World war (in 1917), but the ship collided with another ship in the English channel and sank. As a traditional *imbongi*, after hearing the news, Mqhayi was inspired to perform the poem *Ukutshona kukaMendi* to express his feelings and to comfort the nation. This point is evident in Mtuze and Kaschula (1993: 28)

who state that, “*Zithe zakuvakala ezo ndaba zilusizi...yangqukruleka into kaMqhayi ithuthuzela kabuhlungu...*”(After the sad news had been released...the son of Mqhayi was touched and sang a poem to comfort the people. He later produced this poem in written form in 1927 as it is indicated in Mtuze and Kaschula (1993: 28). It is interesting to find that about seventy-five years after the tragedy of *Mendi*, Shasha, one of modern *iimbongi*, writes a poem on the same subject *Mendi*, in memory of the fallen heroes. Shasha’s inspiration to produce this poem can be attributed to two possible factors: He could have learnt about the story of the tragedy of *Mendi*, or he could have been inspired by Mqhayi’s poem *Ukutshona kukaMendi*. However, it is interesting to see how the two *iimbongi* approach this incident. In section 4.2, I have indicated that Mqhayi’s approach to this tragedy is that of reconciliation because he appeals to the nation to see this tragedy as a sacrifice made by the recruits. The lines, “*Thuthuzelekani ngoko, zinkedama! Thuthuzelekani ngoko, bafazana! Kuf’ omnye kade mini kwakhiw’ omnye*”; (Wipe those tears, you orphans! Wipe those tears, young women! The minute one dies, another is born) demonstrate this point. Another important observation regarding this poem is the style in which Mqhayi presented his poem: that of comforting those who have lost loved ones. The words, “*Thuthuzelekani ngoko*” (Wipe those tears) are a good illustration of this point. One can attribute Mqhayi’s approach to the fact that, at the time of the tragedy, the whole nation was mourning. Hence he saw this approach as a matter of urgency. We also notice that Mqhayi speaks in direct speech as it is indicated in the lines, “*Thuthuzelekani ngoko, zinkedama! Thuthuzelekani ngoko, bafazana!*” (Wipe those tears, you orphans! Wipe those tears young women!). In other words, they are in direct speech, a crucial feature of oral poetry.

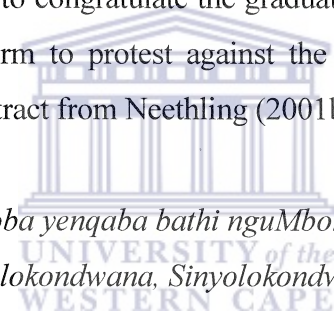
If we look at Shasha’s poem we notice that he has adopted a different approach, that of protest. This point is evident in his questions, “*Bekuyini na kade, Ukuze kuzik’ abakuthi bodwa? Ngabo bodwa n’ amakhakha?*” (Why is it that, Only our people were the ones who died? Are they the only shields?). Without doubt, the *iimbongi*’s words reflect a feeling of dissatisfaction. To Shasha, this tragedy seems deliberate because according to his perception, the recruits were used as shields rather than assistants. His question, “*Ngabo bodwa n’ amakhakha?*” confirms this point. Another interesting observation is the style in which Shasha approached his poem. He seems to relate a story as he states, “*Ihlil’ intlekele kwabomgquba, Ababethwelwe yinqanaw’ uMendi*”. (A tragedy occurred to the Black people, Who were carried by the ship *Mendi*). This

style is an important feature that distinguishes oral poetry from written poetry. What does this imply for our subject, the subject of praise? Although Mqhayi and Shasha are referring to the same subject, i.e. the tragedy of the ship *Mendi*, their approach to the events of this tragedy is different. There are two factors that can account for these differences namely, the period during which each poem was written and the fact that the two poems are the products of two different artists. In the above discussion I have indicated that Mqhayi's version is a product of a live performance that was composed after the news of this tragedy of *Mendi* in 1917 and the poem was produced in print in 1927. The traces of its orality are still vivid as I have indicated above, where Mqhayi uses direct speech as it is reflected in his words, "*Ngala mazwi sithi, thuthuzelekani*". (With these words we say, wipe those tears). The use of direct speech plays an important role because it creates an atmosphere of immediacy and intimacy. In other words, we see Mqhayi as one of those who are affected directly as his words, *Sibona kamhlophe, sithi bekumelwe*, (We understand that it is something that should have happened), illustrate. This point is stressed by Mqhayi's use of the first person plural, *sithi* (we say).

If we look at Shasha's version, we notice that since the poem was published seventy-five years after the incident of the *Mendi*, this is evident in the style of the *imbongi* as he seems to be telling a story. Another important observation is that the prevailing conditions during the poet's period have an influence on his work. I associate the approach of Shasha in his poem to the prevailing conditions of his time. The book was published two years after one of the highlights in the history of South Africa took place. The year 1990 is marked by the historic event of the release of political prisoners and the return of political activists from exile. If we place Shasha's period and that of other modern *iimbongi* in context, we will find that this period is marked by three historic events. The first one is the protest against pass-law. According to this law, Black people had to carry identity documents that entitled them to move only within the area in which the person is registered. Any movement outside the stipulated area without permission would lead the person to jail. In other words, the law restricted free movement. The protest against this law came to a climax in 1960 and 1961 when the Black people burned their passes and when Black women marched to the Union buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws. The second event is marked by the 1976 uprisings when Black students stood up in resistance to the language medium in schools. The third one is the formation of Workers' organisation whose objective was to protect the rights of workers in the 1980s. The common denominator of these

events is the protest against discriminatory laws. After 1990, the politics of South Africa took a turn with the arrival of political activists from exile and the release of political prisoners. These events took a slight shift in 1994 with the birth of the first democratic government that entitled all the people of South Africa to enjoy equal rights including the right to vote. With this background in mind, it is not surprising to see that Shasha has taken a different stance from that of Mqhayi with regard to the disaster of *Mendi*.

The impact of the politics of the day is also evident in one of Mkiva's performances, *UMbombayi* (A person or thing that is associated with tricks or false impressions). This poem was recorded by Neethling at one of the graduation ceremonies of the University of the Western Cape in 1995 and was later published in the journal *Social Dynamics* (27: 2: 2001b). The subject of praise, *Mbombayi* can be interpreted in many ways. On the one hand, it refers to the homeland system, on the other, to the homeland leaders. Although the main focus of the *imbongi*'s performance was to congratulate the graduates, we notice that the *imbongi* also used this opportunity as a platform to protest against the homeland system and its leaders as is reflected in the following extract from Neethling (2001b: 42):



*Yinqoba yenqaba bathi nguMbombayi
Sinyolokondwana, Sinyolokondwana
Zis'ibhayi lam
Ilanga liyandishiya
Kukud'eBhakubha.... Sivakel' isikhalo sabantwana be-Afrika
Bemchila bemhesha uMbombayi
Besithi, chosi ndaba zolwimi...
Mbombayi ungunca-a-a-atsha
Mbombayi unguncothoza
Mbombayi ungunyhek' enkulu yaphesheya kweNciba
Mbombayi uyindubule yaseMaba-a-a-tho
Wena wathi usinik' imfundo kanti uxel' impundulu
Wena wathi uza nozimele-geqe kanti uxel' uzifele geqe
Kuba kaloku wazibiza ngokuba uyiParamount chief
kanti uyiparamount thief...*

*Ndithetha ngoMbombayi kodwa namhlanje uMbombayi ubhubhile
Yiyo loo nto sisithi bye bye Mbombayi...*

It is a problematic system they call Mbombayi
Sinyolokondwana, Sinyolokondwana [A mythical character]
Bring my blanket
It is getting late and it is far to Bhakubha
The cry of the children of Africa was heard
Expressing displeasure and shunning uMbombayi
Saying let us hear all the lies
Mbombayi you are a traitor
Mbombayi you are a spy
Mbombayi you are the thick-lipped one from the Transkei
Mbombayi you are the long necked one from the Ciskei
Mbombayi you are the frog (with big eyes) from *Maba-a-a-tho*
You who said you are giving us education but you meant witchcraft
You who said you bring independence, only to mean self- destruction
Because he called himself a Paramount chief only to mean a
paramount thief
I speak of Mbombayi, but today Mbombayi is dead
That is why we say, bye bye Mbombayi...
(Translation by Neethling)

If we place the above poem in context, we will remember that it was performed at an institution which at the time of its inception had among its missions an aim to give an opportunity to students who come from the historically disadvantaged communities, access to higher learning. The *imbongi* is expressing a word of appreciation and encouragement to these students who were exposed to Bantu Education: an education system which was regarded as inferior. In other words, the *imbongi* is making a statement that these students have managed to transcend the limitations of “ inferior education” which they have gone through. In the same breath, the *imbongi* takes us back to the history of South Africa, during the period of the homeland system. The emergence of the homeland system which was designed to segregate Black people

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The term “literature” is a complex one. Its complexity stems from its nature, because it is a creation of man, who in turn, is a member of a particular society. As we all know, each society or community has a particular worldview which is reflected in its culture that includes inter alia, beliefs, norms and values. The combination of these factors has a crucial role in influencing the artist in his content, theme and transmission of his creative work, be it a novel, short story, poem or any other genre.

Since literature is an aspect of culture, it is possible that literature may have different meanings to different people depending on the cultural background from which one stems. Because of these contending ideologies regarding the term “literature”, there are currently various debates around orality and literacy. I have been inspired by these debates to embark on this study.

In some societies, when we speak of literature, we refer to the written text which is structured in a particular fashion, depending on the literary genre being produced. In other societies, literature goes beyond the "word" and includes aesthetic aspects such as performance which for example, may involve singing, dancing, clapping of hands etc. All these factors are important in enhancing meaning of the art form. Understanding of meaning in interpreting texts is quite crucial as it can enhance one's understanding of that particular culture or society. One gets a more global picture of the language and the culture concerned.

In emphasizing this relationship between literature and society, Jordan in *Towards an African Literature* (1973:viii) points out that:

If literature reflects the society which produced it, then understanding the social forces at work in that society is vital to appreciating that society's literature.

according to language groups and developed education institutions which were structured for specific language groups. This system was rejected by the Black community because among other things, it was seen as a perpetuation of inferior education as its institutions were poorly resourced. Hence the homeland leaders were very unpopular. As Neethling (ibid: 53) puts it, “...the cry of the people of Africa has been noted ...people have started to see through the system and have recognised all the problems connected with it”. This point is reflected in the lines, “*Sivakel’ isikhalo sabantwana be-Afrika, Bemchila bemhesha uMbombayi, Mbombayi ungungeca-a – atsha, Mbombayi ungungechoza, Kuba kaloku wazibiza ngoba uyiparamount chief kanti uyiparamount thief*”. The first two lines refer to the endless riots and protests of people and students from the different homelands when they were expressing their rejection of the introduction of homelands. The words, “*bemchila, bemhesha*”, (as if they were chasing away an evil spirit) confirm this point. We also note that the *imbongi* equates *uMbombayi* with the *isinyolokondwana*. *Isinyolokondwana* is a character that is usually found in *iintsomi* (Xhosa folktales). As Neethling (ibid: 53) relates:

In the folktale, a number of girls go to the river. They leave their clothes on the riverbank and an *isinyolokondwana* – a mythical character from the *intsomi* tradition - takes the clothes. Each girl in turn, through this refrain (*Sinyolokondwana, Sinyolokondwana zis’ ibhayi lam*) asks the *isinyolokondwana* to return their clothes, it is getting late and they still have to travel far.

From the above explanation, one can describe an *isinyolokondwana* as a thief and an evil person because he stole the girl’s clothes and refused to return them as the girl’s plea “*Sinyolokondwana Sinyolokondwana zis’ ibhayi lam*” suggests. Hence Neethling’s description of an *isinyolokondwana* as, “a cheating and deceptive character” (ibid: 53). If we return to the *imbongi*’s comparison of *uMbombayi* with an *isinyolokondwana*, we can conclude that the *imbongi* sees the homeland system as a system that has robbed the Black people by promising them independence which they never enjoyed instead, only the homeland leaders benefited from it. Neethling (ibid: 53) confirms this view as he states that, ...he (the *imbongi*) is also suggesting that just as any *intsomi* creates a fictional world, a world of make - believe, so the homeland system was not realistic, it pretended to be what it was not. Not only were the homelands rejected but the homeland leaders were also ridiculed in many ways. The manner in which

Mbombayi is described illustrates that the homeland leaders were seen as dangerous to society as the words, “*Mbombayi ungunca-a-tsha, Mbombayi unguncothoza*” illustrate. The idea of the homeland system was rejected categorically by the Black people because the homeland leaders were not regarded as democratically elected. This meant that these leaders were at risk of being alienated from society. This point is evident in the names that were assigned to these leaders, such as, “*ungunca-a-tsha, unguncothoza*” (you are a traitor, you are a spy) as reflected in the above extract. Some of them were given nicknames as the following examples from the extract suggest, “*Mbombayi ungunyhek’ enkulu yaphesheya kweNciba, Mbombayi uyindubula yaseMaba-a-a-tho*”. The first one refers to the then leader from the Ciskei, the late Chief Lennox Sebe and the second one to the leader from Mabatho in Bophuthatswana, Chief Mangophe.

However, at the time of this performance (in 1995), the question of homelands was something of the past, hence the *imbongi*’s words, “*Ndithetha ngoMbombayi kodwa namhlanje uMbombayi ubhubhile, Yiyo loo nto sisithi bye bye Mbombayi*”. One will remember that it was a year after the historic event of the first democratic elections in which all citizens of South Africa had a right to vote (for a single government). What is interesting is that this event is directly linked to Mqhayi’s period more specifically, to his ideals of a united South Africa in which all people live together peacefully. In fact, if we trace the roots of the New South Africa, we notice that it goes back to the period of Mqhayi and his predecessors. It had always been Mqhayi’s wish to have a democratic South Africa in which all the people would live together as one nation. This point is evident in his reference to the Eutopian city, *Mnandi* as reflected in his book *UDon Jadu*(1929: 59),

Ibe sisiseko esihle kunene othe wasekeka phezu kwaso lo mzi, kwanelizwe elo liphela. Bakhuthala abemi balo, bawaphaphamela amalungelo abo, nawe sizwe esi basiso... Ngaphaya kwako konke oku, bazuze neyona nto idla ngokunqabela nezona zizwe zinamandla,- “umanyano nemvisiswano”.

It was a good foundation on which this city as well as the whole country was established. Its citizens were diligent and they were conscious of their rights and of the rights of the nation which they were... above all, they possessed a quality which is

scarce even to renowned countries- “unity and co-operation”
(my translation)

If we observe the above extract carefully, we will notice that it is in line with Mqhayi’s dreams of a united South Africa. For instance, his Eutopian city (*Mnandi*) is characterised by a spirit of unity as it is reflected in the lines, “*Bakhuthala abemi balo, bawaphaphamela amalungelo abo...bazuze neyona nto idla ngokunqabela nezona zizwe zinamandla,-‘umanyano nemvisiswano’*”. The spirit of unity in this city is also reflected in Wilson & Perrot (1973: 540), who assert that:

There is neither racialism nor isolationism in *Mnandi*. Immigration is encouraged, and experts of all races and shades of colour come from the four corners of the earth to make a permanent home there. There is full social, economic and political equality.

If we compare the above statement with the situation in South Africa today, we will find that Mqhayi’s ideals are evident. As the constitution of South Africa stipulates, its citizens shall live together in peace and share equal opportunities. What South Africa is today, can be attributed to the contribution of Mqhayi and his contemporaries and their predecessors. In other words, Mqhayi and his predecessors have laid a foundation for the modern *iimbongi* towards a new South Africa. Mqhayi’s role is evident in his essay, *Unyulo oluzayo* in Saule (1989: 71) where he emphatically calls out:

...nabani na oyindoda makazi, ngakumbi engumvoti okokuba le nto iphambi komzi asiyiyo ndlalo yosapho, ngumlo ongqongqo into eyayame egazini yonyulo.”

...every man, especially a voter, must know that this issue placed before the people is not child’s play, it is an enormous battle, it is something that touches the life of the nation

(Translation by Saule)

In the above extract Mqhayi is trying to encourage his people to attach importance to the issue

of voting rights since if not taken seriously, the voter may not only lose voting rights but may deprive himself of political participation in decision making. His plea, “...le nto iphambi komzi asiyiyo ndlalo” confirms this point. Using Saule’s terms in (1989:71), Mqhayi’s reference to “battle” and ‘blood” in the above passage does not by any means suggest a physical confrontation and the shedding of blood by Blacks to achieve their political goals, but is an urgent and earnest appeal for an undivided effort to struggle for survival through constitutional means. The importance of voting powers is also reflected in the above poem of Mkiva where he makes reference to the unpopular homeland system in which the homeland leaders were nominated by the government. What this boils down to is that the subject of politics is not a new topic but the modern poets are emphasizing the groundwork that has been laid by their predecessors such as Mqhayi. This point is confirmed in Kaschula (2001:xiii) who states that, “the oral word is a powerful political tool, hence oral literature has increasingly been used and manipulated as part of political rhetoric”. As I have indicated in Chapter 3, Mqhayi was actively involved in nation-building and was concerned about the rights of his people. This point is evident in the extract from one of his essays, *Ivoti* in Saule (1989:70) where he states that “*Ilungelo lobuvoti malingachukunyiswa*”. (The right to vote should not be disturbed). According to Saule (1989:70), Mqhayi wrote this essay in response to the system of politics in his time. The uniform system and the Hertzog Bill controversies caused division among the entire Black population in the Cape colony and the division was cause for concern to Mqhayi because he could see that his people were in danger of losing voting rights. In other words, they had no platform to speak with one voice and raise their concerns. We find a similar situation in the above example of Mkiva’s poem. Initially, his subject of praise were the graduates but in the course of his performance he diverts to politics and reminds his audience about the danger of the homeland system which had deprived them of quality education and voting powers:

Wena wath’ usinik’ imfuno kanti uxel’ impundulu

Wena wathi uza nozimele-geqe kanti uxel’ uzifele geqe...

Kuba kaloku wazibiza ngokub’ uyi Paramount Chief kanti uyiparamount thief

You who said you are giving us education but you meant witchcraft

You who said you bring independence, only to mean self- destruction...

Because he called himself a Paramount Chief only to mean a paramount thief

(Translation by Neethling)

In the above examples we find a similarity in the concerns that are raised by Mqhayi and Mkiva: they both refer to the socio-political conditions of their time. Although the conditions were different during Mkiva's period, we note that there is continuity in terms of issues which were raised by Mqhayi namely, concerns with the system of governance and unity among the people. This confirms the link between Mqhayi's work and that of the modern *iimbongi* as well as the fact that oral poetry and modern poetry are on a continuum. If we look at South Africa today, we find that the *iimbongi* such as Mqhayi contributed to the shift from a colonial period to a democratic South Africa through their work. Although the work of the traditional *iimbongi* such as Mqhayi and that of modern *iimbongi* refer to similar subjects or themes, as is the case in the above discussion, we notice that the emphasis is different. This means that, although the themes may be similar, because of changes over time, the emphasis will always be different between oral poetry and modern poetry. If we look back to Mqhayi's period, we find that the concern was to address the issue of voting rights for all nations. Due to social changes in South Africa over the years, this concern has materialised because all the citizens of South Africa now have a right to vote. Similarly, the modern *iimbongi* may also refer to the subject of politics but he will be operating at a different level. This is evident in the following stanza from Mkiva's poem which he performed on 10 May 1994 at the inauguration of the first Black President of South Africa, President Nelson Mandela. This year is also marked by the first democratic elections in which all South African people had a right to vote. The poem reflects these changes as the following stanza from his poem, *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* (The Honeybird has plans) illustrates:

Ubekiwe uMongameli wenene nenyano weli loMdibaniso...

Xa kunamhla sithi sikhululekile,

Apartheid is dead, and is now buried,

No ghost, no *zombi*,

(Mtuzze & Kaschula: 1993: 143)

The appropriate President of South Africa has been inaugurated...

Today we say we are free,

Apartheid is dead, and is now buried,
No ghost, no *zombi*,
(my translation)

The above stanza illustrates a remarkable occasion in the history of politics in South Africa and the *imbongi* shares this joy as his words, "Today we say we are free" illustrate. It is interesting to see how this stanza connects to Mqhayi's ideals in *UDon Jadu* (1929: 59) as he comments, "...*bawaphaphamela amalungelo abo...*" (...they were conscious of their rights...) because these events of 1994 confirm Mqhayi's ideals. In other words, both Mqhayi and Mkiva are addressing the same topic at different levels because the situation in South Africa has changed. This notion of situation brings us to the following discussion.

5.2.2 Context of performance

In the previous section, the relationship between the traditional *imbongi* and the modern *imbongi* was illustrated in terms of the subject of praise and the themes. Through the work of Mqhayi and that of modern *iimbongi*, I demonstrated that there is a sense of continuity between oral and written traditions. This point is evident in the following extract from my interview with Zolani Mkiva:

Mpolweni: *Apha kwaXhosa kukho imbongi ebizwa ngokuba nguS. E. K. Mqhayi, ingaba wazi ntoni ngayo?* (Among the Xhosa people there is an *imbongi* in the name of S. E. K. Mqhayi, what do you know about him?)

Mkiva: *UMqhayi wayeyimbongi yeSizwe jikelele, useyiyo nangoku. Mna ndinguMqhayi wale mihla.* (Mqhayi was the bard of the nation and is still the one. I am Mqhayi of today.)

The above comment can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, the phrase, "*UMqhayi wayeyimbongi yesizwe jikelele, useyiyo nangoku*", could be seen as symbolic of the continuity of orality. This point is confirmed by the fact that Mqhayi's work is still given high regard and some of the modern *iimbongi*'s work as Mbambo has indicated in the previous section, has been influenced by Mqhayi's work.

The second interpretation is to see the above statement as indicative of the link between oral and written poetry as the phrase, “*Mna ndinguMqhayi wale mihla*” illustrates. If one looks at Mkiva’s work carefully, one finds a number of similarities between him and Mqhayi. For instance, Mqhayi praised both the local and international figures such as the Prince of Wales, representatives from the Glasgow Missionary Society namely, Revs. John Brownlee, John Bennie and John Ross. For instance, the following stanza is in praise of Bennie:

Ulusingasinga ngumdaka kaBhene...

Uyise wentetho kaXhosa,

Enqunq’ amabatha namakhwiniba...

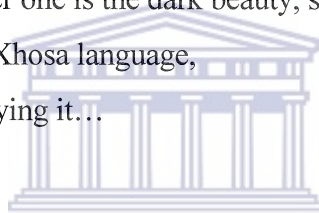
(Mqhayi: 1974: 58)

The tall and slender one is the dark beauty, son of Bennie...

The Father of the Xhosa language,

Editing and modifying it...

(my translation)



In the above stanza, Mqhayi highlights Bennie’s contribution to the growth of the Xhosa language. For instance, Bennie is among the pioneers who participated in reducing Xhosa to writing. He was also involved in editing Xhosa translations. Hence Mqhayi calls him, “*Uyise wentetho kaXhosa*”. We also notice that the above stanza illustrates that Mqhayi’s poetry transcended cultural boundaries as he refers to Bennie as, “*...ngumdaka kaBhene* (the dark beauty, son of Bennie).

Similarly, like Mqhayi, Mkiva is a renowned *imbongi*. He gained his popularity from being the first *imbongi* to be President Mandela’s *imbongi*. The association with the President gave him access to many countries because he was travelling with the President. As a result, Mkiva has praised international figures such as the heads of state. At the time of our interview he had just returned from Lybia where he rendered a performance for President Gadaffi. It was also interesting to learn that he uses snippets of some of the international languages as the following stanza from his poem in praise of the new State President *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* (The

Honey-bird is never without plans) illustrates:

Watheth' uYassar Arafat, wathi:
“Solidarity in action and solidarity forever”.
Ziyatheth' izizwe, ziyatheth' iinkokheli;
Ndimvile uBoutros Boutros Ghali, esithi:
“L'union c'est la force”,
(Mtuzze & Kaschula: 1993: 144)

Yassar Arafat spoke saying:

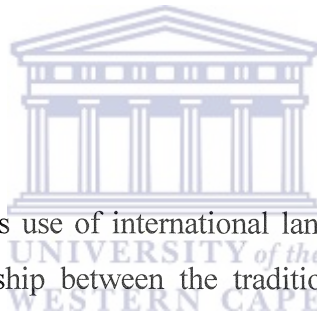
“Solidarity in action and solidarity forever”.

Nations are talking, leaders are talking;

I have heard Boutros Boutros Ghali saying:

Unity is strength

(my translation)



In the above stanza, Mkiva's use of international languages within the same poem has great significance for the relationship between the traditional *imbongi* and the modern *imbongi*. Firstly, it highlights the dynamic nature of poetry because the *imbongi* adjusts to changes in society and his work will reflect these changes. Secondly, it illustrates a change in style of the individual *imbongi*. If we place the above stanza in context, we find that the poem marks a new era in the history of South Africa, a period of unity among the nations. Hence the *imbongi*'s words, “*Ziyatheth' izizwe, ziyatheth' iinkokheli... Ndimvil'...*” These lines indicate that other leaders and other nations share the joy that South Africans are experiencing.

The aspect of unity is also illustrated by the presence of dignitaries from other countries at the occasion. The notion of change in situations with regard to the modern *imbongi* is also evident in Brown (1998: 5) who identifies the modern *iimbongi* performing at university ceremonies, eg. the installation of a new chancellor, at graduation ceremonies, at the inauguration of the state president of the country and at a celebration of the victory of a South African cricket team.

The shift in situations is also reflected in Hoho's poem *Andiva makwedini* (I can't hear you, young boys) in (Nyamende et al: 1995:31). In this poem, Hoho expresses his concern about the present situation in which the custom of circumcision does not seem to receive the respect that it deserves. This point is reflected in the following stanzas:

Vi-tyo-!

Aheziya-!

Ma-kwedini' andiva!...

Yingceke makwedini hay'eyasemlungwini,

Awu! Andiva makwedini, andi-va!

Bath' ubudoda yingqondo

Ndithi mn' ingqond' iqanduselwa lihlathi,

Bath' ubudoda yingqondo

Ndithi mn' ingqond' iqanduselw' emlanjeni;

Vi-tyo-!

Aheziya-!

Young-boys I can't-hear!...

It is the traditional cream not calamine,

Oh! I can't hear you young boys, I can't hear!

They say manhood is intelligence

I say, intelligence is the product of the forest,

They say manhood is intelligence

I say, intelligence is the product of the river;

(my translation)

If we take the above stanzas in context, we will find that it brings us to a custom that is at the centre of Xhosa culture. In the above stanza, Hoho takes us through life at the initiation school as it is illustrated in the opening lines, "*Vi-tyo-! Aheziya-! Ma-kwedini' andiva-!*" These phrases represent the dialogue between the initiates and the person (only males) who visits the initiates.

The significance of the dialogue is to ensure that the visitor is welcome because the lessons taught at this school are confidential. Since the initiation school is seen as a school with specific rules, Hoho objects to the idea of conducting the custom in the “western way” by sending the boys to the hospital. This point is evident in his words, “*Yingceke makwedini hay’ eyasemlungwini*”. *Ingeceke* is a special cream used by the initiates and it is not available in hospital, hence Hoho’s objection to the idea of the hospital. Hoho’s objection to the alternative way of conducting circumcision is further indicated in his words, “*Bath’ ubudoda yingqondo, Ndithi mn’ ingqond’ iqanduselwa lihlathi*”, *Ndithi mn’ ingqond’ iqanduselw’ emlanjeni*”. The term *ihlathi* in this context refers to the initiation school which is normally built in the bushes. According to the Xhosa people, a boy becomes mature when he has gone through the initiation school because of the knowledge that he gains from the school in preparation for his future. Since the school is usually built in the bushes away from the people, it is for this reason that Hoho sees manhood as the product of the forest. Similarly, Hoho sees manhood as the product of the river as it is illustrated in the words, “*Ndithi mn’ ingqond’ iqanduselwa emlanjeni*”. The reasoning behind this is that on the graduation day, the initiates wash at the river. This is symbolic of cleansing the old life and it is a beginning of a new life. At the graduation celebration, the elders address the graduates, welcoming them to the life of manhood and informing them of the expectations of society. This tradition has been preserved and respected even during Mqhayi’s period. In fact, Mqhayi is one of the role models of this custom because despite the restrictions of the missionary school that he attended regarding this custom, Mqhayi made his way to the initiation school. This point is reflected in Mbambo’s comment during our interview.

Mpolweni: *Ingaba likho ifuthe olifumene kuMqhayi okanye kwizibongo zakhe?*

(Would you say that Mqhayi has influenced you in his character or his work?)

Mbambo: *Kakhulu, kakhulu... Isiko lokwaluka lisekho nje, kungenxa yakhe.* (Absolutely, absolutely. The fact that the custom of circumcision still exists is because of his influence.)

From the above interview it is evident that in the past, the custom of circumcision was given much respect. But because of changes in society as reflected in Chapter three, many people more especially Christian converts were gradually moving away from their customs including

the custom of circumcision. However, despite these obstacles, this custom is still practised and people like Mqhayi were instrumental in the preservation of this custom. However, it is important to note that the situation regarding this custom has taken drastic changes in terms of the value attached to it and the procedure followed in conducting it. These changes are a cause of concern to modern *iimbongi*. Hence Hoho's emphatic words, "*Ndithi mn'...iqanduselwa lihlathi, Ndithi mn'.... iqanduselwa emlanjeni*". The use of the first person illustrates his discontent. What is interesting is that although both Mqhayi and Hoho have addressed the issue of circumcision, the contexts in which the two *iimbongi* address this issue differ because of the different conditions and situations which each *iimbongi* is faced with. What does this imply for orality and literacy? It means that, although oral tradition is still practised, there are identifiable differences with regard to the way it is practised because of social changes.

In this chapter it became clear that the influence of Mqhayi on modern *iimbongi* cannot be disputed as some of the *iimbongi* such as Mbambo have stated clearly that he has influenced him directly. His contribution does not only have an impact on *iimbongi* but on Xhosa people in general. This point is illustrated by the fact that celebrations are held annually more especially, in the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, in memory of this great poet. It means that, for the aspiring *iimbongi*, there will always be models to look up to. One of the promising young *iimbongi* is Zolani Mkiva. Mkiva has taken strides because he has performed internationally, but it will be misleading to compare him with Mqhayi at this stage. I can sum up Mqhayi's impact by referring to the following extract from Qangule (1979:27):

Even in the late seventies the voice of a young poet, Ngcangata (1976: 7) still echoes the views of older poets about the illustrious career of S.E.K. Mqhayi:

1. *Phay' eNtabozuko ulele umZima,*
2. *Igama lakh' ezingqondweni alinakucima.*

1. There at Mount Glory rests in peace he of the Zima clan
2. Never shall his name be erased from the minds of men

The above lines are words of hope and inspiration to other *iimbongi* and to the people in

general, as the phrases, “*ulele* and *ezingqondwen’ alinakucima*” suggest. In other words, to the *imbongi*, Mqhayi is ‘just asleep’. This implies that he is still with us and this point is emphasized by the line, “*Igama lakh’ ezingqondweni alinakucima*”.



CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have addressed three crucial issues namely, the status of orality, the link between orality and literacy and whether written poetry is just oral poetry in written form. What became clear is that the place of oral tradition or orality will remain important for generations to come. This is evident in the role played by iimbongi in social and political issues of the day. For instance, the iimbongi Zolani Mkiva has served as an ambassador of South Africa when he accompanied the former President Nelson Mandela in his international visits. Some iimbongi such as, Dalukuhlomla Mkgangisa are working closely with traditional leaders in an endeavour to promote nation building. In addition to this, the iimbongi are given platform to perform at official functions such as the opening of parliament and the inauguration of the president. This means that the role of the (traditional) iimbongi and of oral poetry remains crucial. Kaschula (2001: xi) confirms this view as he states that the role and function of oral literature as part of both national and global literatures will continue to bring great literary wealth and depth to our existence in the modern world. The reason for the continued existence of oral literature or orality can be explained in two ways. In the first place, I found that *ubumbongi* (being a praise singer) is hereditary as it is indicated in the interviews in Chapter five. Secondly, I found that the techniques of oral poetry are visible in written poetry. On the one hand, this illustrates the status of oral poetry and on the other hand, it shows the footprints of the traditional *imbongi* as well as his influence on the modern *iimbongi*. What are the implications of these findings for critics of oral literature? It means that the views of some critics of oral literature regarding the status of oral literature needs to be revisited.

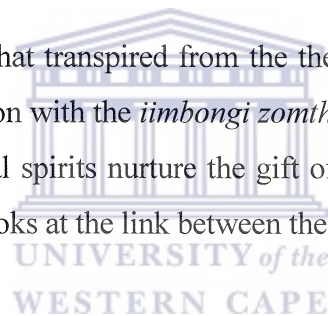
Although it is true that the modern *imbongi* applies traditional techniques in his work, this does not mean that written poetry is a replica of oral poetry. What emerged from this research is that, each *imbongi* is a unique human being and he reacts in his own way to stimuli that inspire his thoughts. In addition to this, I found that, since life is dynamic, it means that the traditional *imbongi* and the modern *imbongi* exist in different situations and contexts and therefore their work is influenced by the prevailing conditions.

One can conclude by saying, there seems to be a fine line between orality and literacy although

the two may differ in terms of structure and context. What is evident is that the factors that drive the *iimbongi*'s creation are similar because each *imbongi* is a social being. As Kaschula (1977: 177) puts it, "both the written and the oral media should be viewed as autonomous, on the one hand, but complementary on the other". In terms of the aims and functions of literature, there is little difference between them, and they are both fuelled and moulded by the culture that underlies them.

Since oral poetry will continue to exist, this shows that the traditional *iimbongi* will remain the models of aspiring *iimbongi*. In this thesis, the work of Mqhayi played a crucial role to illustrate this point. Among other things, in this thesis, the work of Mqhayi made a great contribution in highlighting that orality and literacy are intertwined. In addition to this, a discovery about Mqhayi is that he can be seen as the forerunner of the New Democratic South Africa. This became evident in the discussion in Chapter 3.

Another interesting finding that transpired from the thesis is the link between the *imbongi* and the ancestors. In my discussion with the *iimbongi zomthonyama* more especially, they expressed a strong feeling that ancestral spirits nurture the gift of *ukubonga*. This view can develop into another research topic that looks at the link between the *imbongi* and religion.



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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire

Mnumzana obekekileyo

Ndingumfundi owenza uphando ngonxibelelwano phakathi kwezibongo ezibongwa esidlangalaleni nezibhalwe phantsi. Njengoko uyenyeye yeembongi ezaziwayo zesiXhosa, ndithe mawube ngomnye wabantu endincokola nabo. Ndiyayibulela inxaxheba yakho.

Dear Sir

I am a student who is doing research on the relation between oral poetry and written poetry. As you are one of the renowned iimbongi, I would appreciate it if you could be one of the participants in this research. My sincere thanks for your co-operation.

1. Waqala nini ukubonga?

When did you start to sing praises?

2. Ingaba kukho nto okanye mntu owalifumana kuye eli futhe lokubonga?

Is there something or a person that had influenced you to sing praises?

3. Imbongi izilungiselela njani phambi kokuba ibonge okanye sukuba kutheni ukuze uzive ufuna ukubonga?

How does an imbongi prepare himself for his performance or what inspires you to sing praises?

4. Ingaba ubonga kwiindawo ezithile?

Do you perform at certain places or for certain occasions?

5. Luthini uluvo lwakho mayela nembongi evela idanduluke neqala ngokubhala phantsi?

What is your view regarding an imbongi that performs spontaneously and the one that first writes his poems?

6. Izibongo zakho uyazibhala okanye uyabonga nje kuphela?

Do you write your poems or are they performed orally?

7. Ngokwezakho izimvo, ingaba ukubhalwa kwezibongo ebezidluliswe ngomlomo kuyabungxenga ubumnandi bazo okanye uyibona le nto njengebonisa ukuthungelana kwezibongo?

In your opinion, if an oral poem has been transformed into written form, does this affect the nature of the poem?

8. Ucinga ukuba yayiyintoni indima yembongi yomthonyama mandulo?

What do you think was the role of the imbongi?

9. Ingaba le ndima isayidlala kule mihla okanye zikhona izinto ezitshintshileyo?

Does he still play this role or are there some changes?

10. Ukuba zikhona izinto ezitshintshileyo ziintoni?

If there are changes, can you identify them?

11. Ngokuphathelele kwimixholo, ingaba yahlukile eyamandulo neyanamhla?

Regarding the themes, are the poems that were performed orally different from the modern poems?

12. Izinto ezibongwa zezi mbongi zanamhla ingaba zahlukile kwezo

zazibongwa mandulo? Xhasa uluvo lwakho ngemizekelo.

Is the subject of praise of the modern iimbongi different from that of the traditional iimbongi? Motivate your answer with examples.

13. Xa ujonge ikamva lezibongo ulibona linjani?

How would you perceive the future of praise poems?

14. Zinto zini ongazichaphazela ezikuxhasayo?

Can you identify things that support your viewpoint?

15. Siphawula ukuba zikho iimbongi ezisebenzisa nengoma xa zibongayo, ungathini ngolu nxibelelwano lwezibongo neengoma?

We notice that some iimbongi include music in their poems, what is your comment regarding this relation between poems and songs?

16. Apha kwimbali yakwaXhosa kukho imbongi ebizwa ngokuba nguS.E.K.Mqhayi, ingaba wazi ntoni ngayo?

In the history of the Xhosa people there is an imbongi who in the name of S.E.K. Mqhayi. What do you know about him?

17. Ingaba likho ifuthe olifumene kule mbongi okanye kwizibongo zayo?

Would you say he has influenced you in his character or in his poems?

18. Sikwafumanisa ukuba le mbongi yaphiwa igama elithi, Imbongi Yesizwe Jikelele. Ucinga ukuba ilifanele eli wonga? Ngoba?

We also learn that this imbongi was honoured with the name, The imbongi of the whole nation. Do you think he deserved this status? Why do you think so?

APPENDIX 11

Mqhayi's poem in praise of the Year 1931

IMIYOLELO YOWE-1931 UMNKYAKA

Awu!!!

Ewe, kaloku kuyavakala.

Kuyavakal' ukuthetha kwendoda.

Isephi na indod' esayolelayo,

Esalubizayo usapho lwayo?

Basephi na onyan' abasavumayo

Ukuzithwal' iinzima zooyise?

Nakhal' izolo nomhla nisithi,

"Iminyaka mibi, ibhukuqekile!"

Yaye iminyak' ilila, isithi,

"Onyana bakaAdam babhukuqekile!"

Zilungisen' iindlela zenu, Bantu,

Uphele umona nentle bendwane;

Liphele ikratshi nokuthand' amawonga.

Ngubani na oza kuphath' ihlabathi,

Aliphathe ngezandl' ezimsulwa?

Kuba ziphelelw' izikumkani,

Zingenelwe ngumhlwa nemphele.

Nango kambe ungena umnyaka-

Taruni, nto zakowethu!

Ncincilili!!!

(Bennie, W.G.: 1971:128)

(*nomhla* Old orthography of *namhla* used by the author)

THE PROPHECIES OF THE YEAR 1931

Oh!!!

Yes, we can feel it.

We can feel the words of a man.

Where else, would you find a man who still makes prophecies,

A man who still calls out his family?

Where else would you still find sons who are

Prepared to carry their father's burdens?

Yesterday you were crying and even today you are still saying,

“Years are bad, there is commotion!”

And the years are crying, saying,

“Adam's sons are confused.”

Make sure you are on the right track, people,

So that jealousy and gossip are eradicated

So that pride and quench for honour is eradicated.

Who will govern the world,

And govern it with clean hands?

For the kings have not succeeded,

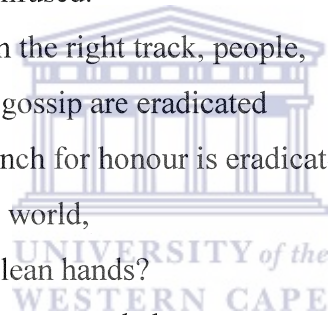
They have been infected by the bacteria and dangerous disease.

Here comes the new year-

Take care fellowmen!

I disappear!!!

(my translation)



APPENDIX 111

Mqhayi's poem in praise of Chief Archie Sandile (A! Velile).

- A! Velile
Ikwekwe kaFaku ezalwa nguNobantu
Igama layo ngu-Archie Sandile
Yeyona nkosi amaNgqika onke selejonge kuyo ngaphesheya
nangaphonoshono kweNciba
- 5 Imbongi yesizwe ithi ngayo
Yimbishi-mbishi yingqishi-ngqishi
Ngumabhinqel' ezantsi ang' ubhinq' isikhaka
Kant' ubhinq' ibhulukhwe
Kokw' ezi bhulukhwe zimagwagusha
- 10 Bezifun' ukuya kwezikayisemkhulu bezifun' ukuya kwezikaGonya
Kulokw' ezikaGonya zimagwashu
Umntwan' enkosi yinzinzilili
Ngesaphul' abant' u'k'b ebebelekwa
Kulok' int' enkul' ithwashuza ngokwayo
- 15 Ikhe yalinga kamb' intlanjana yoMdiza
Yath' ingambeleka yon' imkhukulise
Koko yathwal' inkabi yehashe
Yayishiy' inzilili ngasemva
Kuze sifike sithabath' iintonga
- 20 Sibuye nomfo wasemaMbalwini
Hayi nkos' isoyek' umntakaFaku
Kub' unobugqwirh' obusegazini
Uzimisela kwangokwakhe
Uthi qwab' eli liso x' abon' utshaba
- 25 Athi qwab' eli x' abon' isihlobo
Yintw' engqob' isenqinen' ukusing' eMthatha

- Kub' iphuthum' amaxhoba kaMlawu
Umacekis' ingcek' abuy' ayiphuthume
Umaphuthum' ingcek' abuy' ayicekise
- 30 Umty' omtyenen' osukwe kowawo
Kub' usukwe ngooyise nooyisemkhulu
Xa nditshoyo nditheth' uBonisani noGawushigqili
Hay' umfo kaHolidide ngokwaz' ukusoka
Aba bakaZaze ngababuzeli
- 35 Siyamdela thin' umfo kaNikani sitshw' usisu-senkomo
Ndlela zini n' ezizineentsasa namaqhekeza
Sikhe sakholwa ngemihla kaZimasile
Hayi bafo baseBhayi nikwazil' ukusoka
Nikwazil' ukuyisok' inkosi yenu
- 40 Seyincinan' indawan' esiyixakayo
Asiwabon' amabal' eenkomo zenu
Mzi waseRhini nowaseKapa nani thina siyanibulela
Kokw' asiwabon' amabala eenkomo zenu
Yingxow' enkul' umfo kaFaku
- 45 Yingxow' enkul' enemilenze
Afaka kuy' amadun' akowabo
Yintw' efunde yafunda yada yayityekeza
Ndith' asinkos' ukukwaz' ukugweba
Yamgweb' uMabutho walala ngophothe
- 50 Yamgweb' uGushiphela yamsakasa
Ijong' emahlathini x' ikhuph' isigwebo
Apho balele khon' ooMgolombane
Thathan' intonga ninik' uSilimela
USilimela ngokaNdluzodaka kwaNdlambe
Thathan' intonga ninik' uGushiphela
UGushiphela ngokaMenziwa kwaMdushane
Thathan' intonga ninik' uMgcawezulu
UMgcawezulu ngokaNonqane kwaNtinde

Thathan' intonga ninik' uRhamncwana
 URhamncwana ngokaJali kwesikaMqhayi
 Thathan' intonga ninik' uDingindlovu
 UDingindlovu ngokaDom Toyise kumaGasela
 Mna ndiyakuthath' okaKak' abe ngumsimelelo
 Ndithath' uSilimela' abe yintonga yam yokuhomba
 Tarhuni maMbombo nani maMbede
 Kuthiwan' ukuthethwa ngomnt' osesekampini
 Kukho siqhamo sini n' esiseGxarha
 Vulcan' umtyhi maMbombo mabandla kaSuthu
 Vulcan' umtyhi maMbede mabandl' akoPosi
 70 Vulani luhlal' ulutho lwenu
 Vulani lungen' ulutho lwenu
 Ncincilili



Hail! Velile!
 The son of Faku and Nobantu,
 He is the one chief to whom all the Ngqika
 Of the Transkei and the Ciskei look
 5 The national poet says about him:
 His is big and stout, his step is heavy.
 He girds his garment like a skirt down around the hips,
 And yet it is trousers that he wears.
 But they are extra large trousers,
 10 Resembling those of his grandfather, resembling those of Gonya;
 But Gonya's fitted loosely.
 The son of a chief is heavily built,
 He would be too heavy to be carried,
 But the great one prefers to swish along on his own.
 15 The Mdiza rivulet made an attempt
 To carry him off and wash him downstream,

- But it managed to wash down only his horse
And left the stout one behind.
And so we took our sticks to divine,
- 13 And we returned with a story regarding a Mbalu fellow.
What a revered man, the son of Faku!
For he has supernatural powers in his veins;
His status as diviner is self-conferred.
A wink with one eye indicates a foe,
- 25 And with the other a friend,
He is fleet-footed on the way to Umtata
To reclaim those that Mlawu left behind.
He puts aside the white clay and then reclaims it;
He reclaims the white clay and then puts it aside.
- 30 The is a supple hide thong softened by its owner,
For he has been softened by his fathers and his grandfathers;
When I say this I refer to Bonisani and Gawushigqili.
Oh! How well Holiday chooses presents for initiates;
These men of Zaze would fight on his behalf.
- 35 We despise this fellow Nikani, we mean Sisu-senkomo:
What paths are these, littered with broken bottles?
What a good time we had in the days of Zimasile!
Men of Port Elizabeth, you have given good presents,
You have given fine presents to your chief.
- 40 A small matter still puzzles us:
We do not see the colors of your of your cattle.
People of Grahamstown and Cape Town, we thank you too,
Although we doo not see the colors of your cattle.
Faku's son is a big bag,
- 45 A big bag with legs left on:
He has room to cram in all his prominent men.
He is so full of education that he brings it up.
He knows very well how to give judgement in lawsuits:

- He sentenced Mabutho and knocked him flat,
50 He sentenced Gushiphela and tore him to shreds.
In giving judgement he faces the forests
Where his forefathers, Mgolombane and others, lie buried.
Take the mace and hand it to Silimela;
Silimela is the son of Ndluzodaka of the Ndlambe.
- 55 Take the mace and hand it to Gushiphela;
Gushiphela is the son of Menziwa of the Dushane.
Take the mace and hand it to Mgcawezulu;
Mgcawezulu is the son of Nonqane of the Ntinde.
Take the mace and hand it to Rhamncwana;
- 60 Rhamnwana is the son of Jali in the Mqhayi area.
Take the mace and hand it to Dingindlovu;
Dingindlovu is the son of Dom the son of Toyise of the Gasela.
Remember the son of Kaka in this;
Give a special place to Silimela.
- 65 Have mercy, Mbombo and Mbede.
How can one speak of a person enclosed in a camp?
What can be expected from Gxarha?
Give way, Mbombo, tribe of Suthu,
Give way, Mbede, tribe of Noposi,
- 70 Open up and let the one who belongs to you settle among you,
Open up and let the one who belongs to you enter.

Ncincilili!

(Translation by Opland)