

NONTSIZI MGQWETHO'S *THE NATION'S BOUNTY*:
A PROPHETIC VOICE TOWARDS AN AFRICAN LITERARY THEORY

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Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the ways in which Africans and African scholarship in particular have relied on the West to lead the way in scientific inquiry, theory and ways of approaching literary texts thus the stunting effects of this in the growth and development of uniquely African literary scholarship and theorising. In his seminal work, *Decolonising the Mind*, Wa Thiong'o (1987a) stresses that "...how we view ourselves, our environment even, is very much dependent on where we stand in relationship to imperialism in its colonial and neo-colonial stages; that if we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today, then we have to coldly and consciously look at what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe" (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p.88). Although most African countries obtained their liberation decades ago, seemingly western cultural imperialism still dominates and plagues the African psyche; hence they largely look to the West and ways of the West for established and emergent theoretical conceptions.

This thesis aims to interrogate popular western literary theories unquestioningly used to analyse African works, particularly feminism and post-colonial theory; furthermore, to show crucial factors not taken into account such as the evolving power dynamics in African societies, the role of the "sacred" or spirituality which often forms and informs the dynamics of the text, and lastly, based on the poetry of Nontsizi Mqgqwetho, to advocate for the need for an African literary theory and put forward the essential tenets of such a theory.

The poetry of Xhosa poet, Nontsizi Mqgqwetho, is used to analyse the complexities and dynamics of African literary production written in African languages; her poetry is written in isiXhosa to a Xhosa audience, a far cry from the assumption that African literary texts are concerned with writing to the "centre" as post-colonial theorists claim. Her work explicitly provides Africans with an approach to overcome territorial and cultural imperialism; she sees within the African psyche and traditional values empowering modes of resistance against any type of domination and through her poetry illustrates meaningful ways that Africans can

critically engage with and examine the positives and negatives of cultural exchange and or assimilation, and the effects thereof while at the same time remaining proudly Africa.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Since the virtual demise of colonialism on the African continent, Africans have been involved in a process of redefining themselves and doing so apart from the images of themselves painted by the colonial ‘other’. They are finding out who they were and are as a people before, during and after colonial domination. In 1998, in his speech at the United Nations University in Tokyo, Japan, former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, paints a picture of Europe’s evolving view of Africa from the first century until the fifteenth century. The first account is by the Roman, Pliny the Elder, who wrote:

Of the Ethiopians there are diverse forms and kinds of men. Some there are toward the east that have neither nose nor nostrils, but the face all full. Others that have no upper lip, they are without tongues, and they speak by signs, and they have but a little hole to take their breath at, by the which they drink with an oaten straw ... In a part of Afrikke be people called Pteomphane, for their King they have a dog, at whose fancy they are governed...And the people called Anthropomphagi which we call cannibals, live with human flesh. The Cinamolgi, their heads are almost like to heads of dogs ... Blemmyis a people so called, they have no heads, but hide their mouth and their eyes in their breasts (Quoted in Mbeki, 1998, p. 1).

Fifteen centuries later, a positive account is given by a Spaniard living in Morocco by the name of Leo Africanus, which makes one wonder what happened to the “diverse forms and kinds of men” described in the first century:

The rich king of Timbuktu ... keeps a magnificent and well-furnished court ... Here are great store of doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men, that are bountifully maintained at the king's cost and charges. And hither are brought diverse manuscripts or written books out of Barbarie, which are sold for more money than any other merchandise (Quoted in Mbeki, 1998, p. 1).

Although centuries apart, the two conflicting accounts of the continent as seen by Europeans highlight the need and importance of Africans defining themselves for themselves and not relying on others to do so. Mbeki (1998) aptly points out that “Unless we are able to answer the question “Who were we?” we will not be able to answer the question “What shall we be?” (Mbeki, 1998, p. 4) Furthermore, if Africans rely on others to tell them who they were and are, they might be left in a worse condition. In advocating for an African renaissance Mbeki explains that rebellion is a crucial part of this process, he explains that

...we have had to undertake a voyage of discovery into our own antecedents, our own past, as Africans. And when archaeology presents daily evidence of an African primacy in the historical evolution to the emergence of the human person described in science as homo sapiens, how can we but be confident that we are capable of effecting Africa's rebirth? (Mbeki, 1998, p. 3)

Wa Thiong'o (1987a) echoes similar sentiments when he explains the significance and results of an African renaissance “...after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the center of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective” (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 94). Wa Thiong'o goes on to highlight a specific point of departure:

Equally important to our cultural renaissance is the teaching and study of African languages. We have already seen what any colonial system does: impose its tongue on the subject races, and then downgrade the vernacular tongues of the people. By so doing they make the acquisition of their tongue a status symbol; anyone who learns it begins to despise the peasant majority and their barbaric tongues. By acquiring the

thought-processes and values of his adopted tongue, he becomes alienated from the values of his mother tongue, or from the language of the masses. Language after all is a carrier of values fashioned by a people over a period of time (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 72).

Thus the focus of this research is on the lack of African scholarship in the field of literary theory. African literary texts written in African languages are often analysed using universalised theories from a Euro-American perspective of how to approach and analyse a text, which often has the effect of not revealing, if not muting the complexities and dynamics of the text which are often continent or culturally specific. This begs the question why African intellectuals continue to teach theoretical perspectives that do not quite ring true for their reality, especially for works written in African languages. Mazisi Kunene (1989) makes this very important point that

...the act of writing in African languages has got its own dimensions such as the direction in which the poetry, or the literature in general develops ... There is a difference in the direction which is taken by literature written in the African tradition and the Anglo-African fiction written in English (Quoted in Gibbons, 1989, p. 49).

How then can Euro-American literary theories continue to be blindly used to analyse and account for writing in African languages when the concerns and aims of texts in African languages and the philosophy behind them are so different? Wa Thiong'o (1987a) aptly points out that

African children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were thus experiencing the world as defined and reflected in the European experience of history. Their entire way of looking at the world, even the world of the immediate environment, was Eurocentric. Europe was the center of the universe. The earth moved around the European intellectual scholarly axis (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 92).

Sadly, this is still the case in current literary theory production. Many theories and more specifically post-colonial theory claim universality or universal application whilst not taking

into account literary production in African languages which often defies the very notion of universality. Thus African scholars need to seriously and rigorously interrogate widely accepted theories and notions of literary production, particularly those taken for granted to be universal whereas the term largely refers to Euro-American contexts. The starting point of this process is to look at Africa's concerns and self-definition outside of the gaze of the west. This will be illustrated with Nontsizi Mqgqwetho's poetry, whose concern is not the universal world but the African continent and Africans: who they were, what they have been and what they ought to become.

1.2 What is theory, literary theory and why do we need them?

Swanepoel (1990) offers a concise definition of theory as "a framework or system of ideas which serves as an explanation base for the suppositions, hypotheses, methods and findings of scholarly inquiry – preferably so formulated that the results could either be proved correct by supplementary research, or otherwise falsified" (Swanepoel, 1990, p. 1) Thus, simply put theory offers an explanation for understanding why a situation, behaviour or occurrence is the way it is and making sense of it using a coherent line of reasoning based on certain presuppositions. For example, in psychology, Freud's theory of psychoanalysis explains how the unconscious controls our behaviour much more than we think. With every theory there are usually opposing theories using evidence to substantiate their assertions and explanations.

On the other hand, literary theory can be defined as "the systematic account of the nature of literature and of the methods for analysing it" (Culler, 1997, p. 1). This refers to the theories or perspectives we use as rationale to read and understand literature within certain assumptions. For instance, a feminist reading of a text will obviously look at power relationships between the sexes and the ideologies underpinning those and how they manifest in the roles men and women take in society; in essence a feminist approach looks at gender inequality. A literary work can be read from various perspectives and the theory used to analyse and understand the work will determine the outcome or conclusions we make about

the literary text and the interpretations we make about the culture or context the text takes place in.

Theory and literary theory are important in that they give us tools to interpret and account for situations, events or behaviours. The different ways of reading or approaching a text gives us insight into the dynamics of the text which we might have overlooked. How we interpret a text is determined by the presuppositions we make. Certain assumptions made about a literary work are obvious, some are taken for granted and others can resonate as true, inaccurate or biased. For example, one can read Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* from a western feminist perspective and focus on the apparent patriarchy and gender inequality and abuse; however, someone applying a womanist reading of the text will see the layers of oppression: gender, race and class and how women are worse off because they experience and suffer all three, yet are aware that the men who abuse them are also victims of patriarchy, class and racist oppression and extend compassion towards them. The framework used to read a text will determine the extent to which the complexities of the work are revealed. Thus the choice of theory is crucial and has wide implications about the kind of conclusions we draw from a text about a people, their behaviour and culture.

1.3 Background to the study

The impetus for this study derives from two sources; the first is from Paulin J. Hountondji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (1983) where he cautions "If theoretical discourse is to be meaningful in modern Africa, it must promote within African society itself a theoretical debate of its own that is capable of developing its themes and problems autonomously instead of remaining a remote appendix to European theoretical and scientific debates" (Hountondji, 1983, p.204). The second comes five years later from the introduction of Henry Louis Gates (1988) Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey* where he points out that

So remarkably much about the black literary traditions remains to be written that no scholar can claim to have had the final word. The traditions of African, Caribbean, and Afro-American literature remain intact, to be explicated and theorized about again and again. The remnants of prejudice that manifest themselves against even the academic study of these subjects can only be confronted by the scholar's patient labours (Gates, 1988, p. xii).

It is interesting to note that more than sixty years earlier the same sentiments were rendered in the preface to a poem by Xhosa poet, Nontsizi Mqgwetho, where she draws on the wisdom and legacy of the Xhosa prophet Ntsikana, and asks her audience:

Akazange ukuxelelena u Ntsikana ukuba uze uqwalasele i Bhaibhile? Wazuka wena wayiyeka, wayiqwalaselelwa ngabelungu; andigxeki mlungu ke ngakuba nditsho; kodwa ke xa kutiwa: "Funa wawuya kufumana" akutshiwo ke ukutiwa mawufunelwe ngomnye umntu: Yiva ke!¹ (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 421).

Didn't Ntsikana tell you to study the scriptures? And you left the white to study them for you. I'm not mocking the whites when I say that. But when it's written "Seek and ye shall find," it doesn't mean that someone else must do the finding for you. Listen then!" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 420).

From this poem by Mqgwetho and the admonitions from the two authors from the African diaspora, it is clear that the African literary tradition and more so African literary theory is in urgent need of scholarly attention. Furthermore, because much of African literature concerns itself with "the observation of the world-order as defined by African cosmology" (Kunene, 1989, p. 50) often European theories of reading overlook this aspect. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) aptly point out

Since the Enlightenment the sacred has been an ambivalent area in Western thinking that has uniformly tended to privilege the secular. As

¹ The orthography used in all the poems is that used by Mqgwetho.

Chakrabarty and other critics have reminded us, secularity, economic rationalism and progressivism have dominated Western thinking, while ‘the Sacred’ has so often been relegated to primitivism and the archaic (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006, p. 7-8).

In her poetry Mqgqwetho rouses the African to interrogate truth and the politics of knowledge for themselves rather than unquestioningly accepting what has been handed down to them by the Europeans. This has further implications when it comes to theories of literature which have been handed down as a lens or framework through which to study and view African works, yet not coming from the Africans themselves. Of course there is nothing wrong with using a framework that one prefers or one that works, but “[t]he choice of framework has a decisive influence on the results one is going to achieve” (Lerner as quoted in Swanepoel, 1990, p. 1). Often one makes use of popular and readily available theories such as Post-colonialism without thinking whether the framework will reveal the work in its entirety, thus failing to do justice to African creative works, especially those in African languages.

Amuta (1989) aptly points out that it is “ not possible, even if it appears convenient, to practice literary theory and criticism as an abstract, value-free and politically sanitised undertaking in a continent which is the concentration of most of the world’s afflictions and disasters” (Amuta, 1989, p. 197). As a result, the African often creates and reads their own work as informed and instructed by the very European ideology that is responsible for their subjugation, and this is what in stanza six of the poem “Saxulutywa! Ngamatye Omsebenzi!!” “Our efforts stone us!” (See annexure A for full poem) Mqgqwetho decries. She argues:

Inyaniso masipatwe ngananinye

Inyaniso kungaviwa bantu banye

Nantso ke! Inyaniso yezi Bhalo

Napantsi ke, kweyetu imibhalo.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 197)

The truth must be treated fairly,
the truth must be heard from both sides:
the truth is there in the scriptures
and also within our blankets.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 196).

Xhosa people used to smear red ochre on their faces and on the blankets they wore; thus in this context the blankets represent African tradition and knowledge which Mgqwetho points out has been side-lined. Xhosa people who had not converted to Christianity were referred to as “Reds” and were seen as heathens and devoid of morality purely because they had not accepted western education and Christianity. Christianised and western educated Xhosa people had to wash this red ochre off their faces and cast off their red blankets to symbolise their conversion and acceptance of Christian notions of morality. In this stanza Mgqwetho shows this privileging of western knowledge and ways of knowing over African culture and knowledge as unfair and biased and assigning value to one way of perceiving the world as right and applicable for all people. She does not deny that there might be some truth in what the missionaries have to offer; in fact, she agrees that there is truth in the scriptures, but argues that is not the only way of arriving at truth. Thus Mgqwetho’s approach is more accommodative and tolerant and acknowledges a multiplicity of truth. In his seminal work, *The West and The Rest of Us*, Ibikwe Chinweizu (1975) argues that “what Europe does we automatically assume as the standard we must imitate in order to appear civilized [...] we have lost the ability to define ourselves” (Chinweizu, 1975, p. 493). It is this very ability that this study aims to arouse.

The purpose of this research is not only to point out the need for African scholars and theorists to define themselves, but for the need for a uniquely African literary theory which must not only integrate but “transcend the theoretical heritage of European or Western Philosophy and must reflect a rigorous process of independent scientific inquiry” (Hountondji, 1983, p. 204). This is an implicit theme throughout Mgqwetho’s work; through

a close reading and analysis of *The Nation's Bounty*, a collection of poems written by Nontsizi Mqgqwetho and translated and compiled into a volume by Professor Jeff Opland, the ensuing research will reveal that it is one which Africans have overlooked for a long time despite urgent admonitions and exhortation and one which can no longer be ignored.

1.4 Objectives of the study

Much of African life and literature is concerned not only with the material but the spiritual as well. The sacred informs a lot of African philosophy and writing which needs to be taken into account when talking about theoretical frameworks for reading African literature. As Chinweizu indicates, “as far as intellectual thought is concerned, there is a broad chasm between a materially grounded theory of African realities and one that merely mimics the viewpoint of the West” which often speaks for and on behalf of Africa (Chinweizu, 1975, p. 493). The results of which can create a distorted view of Africa which does not accurately mirror African realities.

This study considers and assesses the ways in which European or Western theories such as Postcolonial theory and feminism might be deemed inadequate in dealing with African texts, especially those written in African Languages for an African audience. Postcolonial theory is often uncritically used to read or decipher texts written in African Languages yet it focuses on literature written in English by non-English speakers and assumes that the same applies to written works in African languages. Furthermore, and “similarly to feminism, postcolonialism approaches such questions of epistemology and agency universally; that is to say, as questions which are relevant to a ‘human condition’ or ‘global situation’” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 168). Yet we need to rigorously “examine the assumption that we must read African literature from a universal viewpoint” (Chinweizu, 1975, p. 77). How can we assume that the dynamics in African literary texts will be applicable or ring true universally at any given point in time whereas the text is culturally-bound?

Through Mgqwetho's poetry I interrogate "truth" or the politics of knowledge which provides a unique approach from which to talk about African literary theory which should come from the African. Furthermore, I use Mgqwetho's poetry to look at what she postulates as a solution to African approaches being sidelined which provides a critical foundation towards formulating an African Literary Theory. Mgqwetho's unique position as a female *imbongi* is examined in terms of how she fits into the role and functions of an *imbongi* as well as how she creates a space for herself which transforms and transcends traditional roles and boundaries of an *imbongi* thereby amplifying her voice.

Mgqwetho's poetry is examined to reveal how the African should deal with the gap in the intellectualisation of African knowledge and theory, thus considering what is or has been allowed or disallowed. Lastly, the uniquely African provisions that an African literary theory should have in order to read and reveal African literary texts in their entirety, is explored.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

The research involved a close reading of current theories and criticism largely used to read and analyse works in African literature. In my analysis I highlight why these theories can be deemed inadequate for reading African texts in African languages. As Barber (1995) points out, Postcolonial criticism, which is not a homogenous entity but comprises a number of voices and viewpoints, "has promoted a binarized, generalized model of the world which has had the effect of eliminating African-language expression from view" (Barber, 1995, p. 3). This calls for African writers to interrogate theories about how to read their texts and to provide a framework through which to view African works in African languages and fill this void in literary criticism.

This requires the provision of a theory that is uniquely African and which focuses on texts written in African languages for an African audience. By uniquely African I do not mean that the idea or perspective is not found or held anywhere else in the world, but I use it as a tool to

talk about common elements and cultural ideas from Africa. The research points towards such a theory by highlighting what Western criticism leaves out purposefully or negligently concerning African texts. The point of departure in the much needed formulation of this new approach is Mgqwetho's implicit suggestions as contained in her writing which I analyse through close reading and by making eclectic use of the techniques of literary criticism and discourse analysis.

Mgqwetho does not only suggest how Africans should position themselves in the world, but how to question their own shortcomings before blaming colonial domination. She further presents a lens through which to read the Bible or foreign works and encourages Africans not to leave the "white man" to do it for him. Rather than accepting and using their prescriptions, she puts forward that Africans should look to Ntsikana, the Xhosa Prophet and first convert to Christianity, as he provided a model on how to read the Bible and appropriate Christianity as part of an African identity, rather than losing the African identity in favour of a Western Christian identity. Hodgson (1997) explains Ntsikana's significance in this regard:

In contrast to later converts, Ntsikana continued to live among his own people. He adopted new beliefs, such as the doctrine of salvation in Christ, and new practices, such as regular meetings of non-kinship groups for worship and prayer. He maintained cultural continuity by filling elements of the Xhosa tradition with Christian content, most notably in his Great Hymn, [which Mgqwetho borrows from throughout her poetry] the first in Xhosa, which drew its symbols and images from everyday life (Hodgson, 1997, p. 72).

Throughout her poetry Mgqwetho mentions Ntsikana as a trusted prophet providing a way for Africans to read the Bible themselves and to think for themselves. She validates her position by saying "Andinguye Nongqause (sic) / Yena wadiliza Intaba zama Xosa. Funda! Izibhalo!" "I'm not Nongqawuse / who brought Xhosa Mountains crashing down. Read the scriptures!" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 258-259). Ntsikana's words are trusted and valorised while Nongqawuse's prophecies are called into question and held responsible for the destruction of the Xhosa kingdom. Thus Mgqwetho as an *imbongi* sees herself as a prophet as well. Thus she offers a prophetic

voice by first looking back to Ntsikana's teachings and sayings on self-assertion and appropriation of knowledge and using them as a basis to provide a way forward, towards an African literary approach. It is the foundation for a new African literary theory that this thesis seeks to explicate.

1.6 Cultural Context

Bonner (1982) describes the period that Mqgqwetho began writing as follows: "The period 1918 – 1920 represents the most intense radicalisation of black political leadership in South Africa prior to the Second World War" (Bonner, 1982, p. 305). Beinart (1987) also highlights that the 1920s "saw an intensification of political struggles in many parts of South Africa" (Beinart, 1987, p. 223). It is against this intensely political background that Mqgqwetho writes her poetry. She actively engages with the politics of her time both in the rural setting she comes from and the urban setting in Johannesburg where she lived and was writing from. The mining newspaper *Umteteli wa Bantu* ("The People's spokesman") that Mqgqwetho wrote for was founded during this turbulent time and Opland (1998) describes the paper as "a major vehicle for Xhosa literature" (Opland, 1998, p. 196). Mqgqwetho contributed more than ninety poems spread over a decade to this newspaper.

Willan (1984) explains the surrounding circumstances leading up to the establishment of this newspaper:

The idea for such a newspaper actually originated in 1919 with a request from a group of conservative African political leaders in the Transvaal – Saul Msane and Isaiah Bud- M'belle among them – for support from the Chamber of Mines for a newspaper which would provide an alternative voice to *Abantu- Batho*, the Congress newspaper which was controlled by the radical Transvaal branch of the movement. Their original approach was not successful, however, and the Chamber turned down their requests for support. But in the early months of 1920, following a massive black miners' strike that February, the Chamber of Mines – more specifically its Native Recruiting Corporation – decided to take the initiative in launching a newspaper with the objective, as they put it, of

dispelling “certain erroneous ideas cherished by many natives and sedulously fostered by European and Native agitators, and by certain Native newspapers (Willan, 1984, p. 251).

Having this background information gives one an understanding of Mgqwetho’s outrage at being associated with and mentioned in the rival newspaper *Abantu-Batho*. In the poem “Imbongikazi No “Abantu Batho” “The woman poet and Abantu-Batho” (See Annexure B for full poem) she gives a scathing verbal attack on L.T Mvabaza, the then editor of *Abantu-Batho* who also seemingly accused the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu*, Rev. Marshall Maxeke, of causing division among Africans simply because they provided an alternative voice. In stanzas 11 -15 she writes:

11 Wena Mvabaza uluyengeyenge

Olweza lupetwe ngesikotile

Lwafika e Rautini 45

Lwabona soluyi nkokeli.

12 Akuyiyo ke Inkokeli

Nakanye wena Mvabaza

Ungumrwebi

Elona gama lako. 50

13 Yekana no Mfu. Maxeke

Ngu Tixo oseke elapepa

Ebona ukupela kwabantu

Kukufunzwa eweni.

- 14 Ngubani owakubeka 55
- Ukuba ube yinkokeli?
 Zikona nje Inkosi
 Ezadalwa ngu Tixo.
- 15 Akuyazi wena Mvabaza
- Nendalo ka Tixo 60
 Naku nam soundenza
 Imbong'kazi ka "Abantu Batho"
- 16 Uyavuya wena weza
- Nembongikazi e Ngqushwa
 Ukuba mayizokukwenzela 65
 Isonka e Rautini
 Sakubona
 (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 25- 29)
- 11 You tremble, Mvabaza, like jelly
- served on a plate;
 a Joburg Johnny-come-lately, 45
 an overnight leader.
- 12 You're no leader, Mvabaza,
- and you never will be,
 all you can claim
 is the status of shopkeeper. 50

13 Leave Reverend Maxeke alone:

It was God who founded that paper
seeing our people wasted,
urged over the edge.

14 When did you win 55

election to rule?
We still have our chiefs
established by God.

15 Mvabaza, you're blind

to God's creation, 60
wanting me woman poet
of your *Abantu-Batho*.

16 You brag that you brought

the woman poet from Peddie
to earn your bread 65
in Johannesburg!
That'll be the day!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 24-28)

Mgqwetho paints Mvabaza as a nervous newcomer to the city, Johannesburg, and as someone who suddenly became a leader without credentials to back him up thus hinting that he does not deserve to assume the position of leader. Mgqwetho corrects herself in the next stanza stating that in fact Mvabaza is no leader at all nor does he have the potential to ever be one. For Mgqwetho the newspaper becomes a vehicle of self-expression and assertion; in traditional Xhosa society she would never be given a public platform to criticise and speak in

such terms to a man. Also, because she is in the city where all things traditionally taboo are permissible, and she is an unmarried woman, these factors liberate her to speak and she makes full use of the empowering space she takes up in the city and in the newspaper. If she were in the rural space, her father or husband, if she were married, would be addressed and instructed to keep her in line and discipline her for speaking to another man like that, even if she were telling the truth. By virtue of her being a woman she would be relegated to a passive and subservient position.

In stanza 13 Mgqwetho goes further in transgressing traditional gender roles by defending Reverend Maxeke, a married man who automatically is given the role of head of the family, and is also a religious leader and editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu*; she takes it upon herself to assert and legitimize his authority. She warns Mvabaza to stop accusing Reverend Maxeke and using him as a scapegoat for internal problems within Congress (South African Native National Congress) just because he started a rival newspaper. She argues that while Mvabaza is a mere “mrwebi” “shopkeeper”, Reverend Maxeke and his *Umteteli wa Bantu* are divinely appointed by God because he saw the desperate state of the nation: people exploited and led to destruction. As in other poems throughout the collection, African leaders are generally painted in very negative terms, especially political leaders; they are depicted as “educated and Christian” opportunists who exploit the poor and the “Reds” for their own personal gain, and the leaders of Congress and their newspaper are no exception.

In stanza 14 Mgqwetho asks Mvabaza who appointed him to rule, implying that he assumed himself a leader and an authority for the people. As far as Mgqwetho is concerned the chiefs are the legitimate leaders divinely appointed to rule over black people; regardless of the fact that they now find themselves in the city, she sees chiefs as the ones bearing legitimate authority to rule over them. These same sentiments concerning chiefs were expressed by Tiyo Soga, writing in *Indaba* newspaper:

Ubukosi bomhlaba bumiswe ngu-Tixo; litsho i-Lizwi, ati kambe amakolwa abambe lona. Liti ozichasileyo inkosi—ozalayo inkosi; uchase, wala isimiselo sika-Tixo—litsho liti owenjenjalo uyakibetwa.

(“Amhrestu nenkosi zelilizwe” “Christians and Chiefs,” *Indaba* 2.6, June 1864: 353-354 X).

The chieftainship of this world was established by God. So says the Bible which the Christians claim to follow. It says those who oppose the authority of the chiefs and reject them oppose and reject the ordinances of God. (Translation is by J.J.R. Jolobe in Soga, 1983, 173).

Here, Soga legitimizes the authority of chiefs as divinely instituted and that all people should give them due respect, especially those who claim to be Christian because that is what the Bible says. Soga penned the letter in response to allegations that once Xhosa people become Christians they reject their chiefs and no longer regard them as important. In the same way in Mqgqwetho's time many African leaders were doing the same and Mqgqwetho wasted no time in correcting them and reminding them of their true authority. Of those who rejected the authority of the chiefs, Soga corrected them as follows:

Umntu olikolwa lase-Maxhoseni, makangabekisi ngacalanye ukuzimbulela kwake, nokuzendza kwake izinto. Akwenjenjalo, woti eba ayibambe yonke imiteto kaTixo, kanti uyite-ju kubini, wayinqamlela. Umtu (sic) owenjenje, simbona tina efana nenhqwala ehamba ngamlendze mnye, ihrolise ngomnye, unje ngomtu (sic) obona ngaso'nye, nova ngandhlebe'nye, nobamba ngangalo'nye. (“Amhrestu nenkosi zelilizwe” “Christians and Chiefs,” *Indaba* 2.6, June 1864: 353-354 X)

A person who has become a convert should not look only in one direction in his self-regard and in his actions. If he follows that method he may think he has fulfilled all the laws of God, while in fact he will have broken them in the middle into two parts. A person who does this we can liken him to a lame person who walks with one leg and drags the other. He is also like a one-eyed person or one who hears with one ear or one who uses only one arm. (Translation is by J.J.R. Jolobe in Soga, 1983, 173)

This is the approach that Mqgqwetho decries when she argues that the truth should be treated fairly; it must not only come from one side but must be balanced and not broken in two parts as Soga says. This would create a handicap and a disadvantage for people who only view things in a narrow way and this is the criticism she has against missionaries who regard all that comes from black people and their culture as heathen and backward, as well as black converts who reject their culture and embrace Christianity and western education and throw away their cultural knowledge and beliefs without scrutinising both approaches.

In this poem, her stance with regards to Congress (South African Native National Congress) and its leaders is very clear. Mqgqwetho depicts Mvabaza as a corrupt and ineffective newcomer to politics who is no leader at all. She describes him as one shunning the day insinuating that he is devious and up to no good. Mqgqwetho accuses leaders of Congress of leading the people to destruction. It is clear that Mqgqwetho abhors being associated with Congress and its newspaper hence she dedicates a whole poem to addressing Mvabaza's claim that she is supposedly the woman poet of *Abantu-Batho* and that he brought her from Peddie so he can make a living exploiting her talent. Mqgqwetho sides with the newly established *Umteteli wa Bantu* and its editor who is by far a better leader than Mvabaza. Interestingly, Mqgqwetho was identified by Jeff Opland in a clip from a photograph of the *Abantu-Batho* staff in Johannesburg, probably taken in 1919, the year she made her first appearance in print by contributing two poems to the paper. (See Annexure C, a picture of the Poet of *Abantu-Batho*).

Indeed this was an extremely turbulent time in black politics in South Africa and Mqgqwetho's poetry accurately reflects this; she is right in the thick of critical political engagement. She outspokenly and unashamedly criticises Congress (now the African National Congress) for causing division amongst black people and then accusing others of doing so. Mqgqwetho clearly sees herself as the poet of *Umteteli wa Bantu* and not of *Abantu-Batho*, though her writing first appeared in this paper. When the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu* is accused of creating the split within Congress, Mqgqwetho does not hesitate to set the record straight. In

“[Uqekeko lwe Congress]” “[The split within Congress]” (See Annexure D for full poem) she writes:

16 Uti ke yena oka Maxeke (B.A.,)

Ungasemoyeni

Imikwa yabo kudala

Ayikangela wancama.

17 Uti oka Maxeke (B.A.,)

70

O Funz’eweni abasazi

Nalapo mabapate

Bayeke kona.

18 Bati oka Maxeke

Utengisa nge sizwe

75

Kanti kudala bona

Basitengisa kuqala.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 17 - 23)

16 Maxeke, B.A., speaks out.

Long he stood downwind

watching their antics,

and in the end he turned his back.

- 17 We're urged over the edge, 70
 says Maxeke, B.A.,
 by those who run blind,
 with no home to turn to.
- 18 Maxeke, they claim,
 is selling the nation; 75
 but they sold it off
 a long time ago.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 16 - 22)

Mgqwetho tells Congress leaders that they are blind to their own internal politics and the discontentment that people are experiencing. They are essentially out of touch with the people and see any opposing voice as a threat opposing Congress. Thus they are standing in the way of a solution and as a result have betrayed the nation. She argues that Maxeke has been patiently watching Congress and was not quick to offer criticism but after seeing that they were deceiving people he broke away from them. She paints Congress as being busy with petty politics while there are urgent and important issues to address. Instead they are misleading people and using Maxeke and the rival newspaper as a scapegoat by claiming that they are bringing division among black people. Mgqwetho paints Congress leaders as untrustworthy leaders with self-serving interests parading as heroes and saviours of the nation whilst blind to the true state of the nation and its people who are looking to them to provide a way forward.

Although written almost a century ago, Mgqwetho's work resonates with contemporary significance. She raises and addresses issues that are currently plaguing the African National Congress (ANC) even now. Many leaders within the ANC are found over and over again to be corrupt and claiming positions of leadership they have no credentials for, nor the heart for

the people they are supposed to be serving. Mgqwetho exposes corruption and exploitation and fulfils the role of *imbongi* by offering both praise and criticism: praise for what is good and criticism for what is deplorable. This is something that modern *iimbongi* like Zolani Mkiva have completely lost; they offer only praise for leaders and the ruling party. Mkiva has been able to do this so well that he is given “grandiloquent titles such as ‘Poet of the Whole Nation’, ‘Royal Poet of the Republic’, ‘Government’s Poet’, amongst others” (d’ Abdon, 2015, p. 1). It would appear that Mkiva is given these titles precisely because he turns a blind eye to the socio-political crisis and corrupt leadership in South Africa hence he is “Government’s Poet”. Thus the true role of *imbongi* has been usurped for political gain. Yet criticism is an integral part of the role of *imbongi* without which people would be disillusioned and corrupt leaders would go unchecked. As Opland (1998) aptly points out, Mgqwetho is “...painfully sensitive to the dissension amongst blacks and the failure of black leaders that constitute major obstacles to the attainment of black freedom” (Opland, 1998, p. 207).

It is abundantly clear that the printing press became a battle site for the politics of the day, and the newspapers became a powerful vehicle for black expression, creativity and advocacy. Mgqwetho joined a long history of black writers in newspapers who engaged with pertinent issues of the day. Although black newspapers were initially run and controlled by missionaries, they “passed into secular (and often black) control as from 1884” (Opland, 2008, p. 1). Popular newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century included *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *Izwi labantu*, *Abantu-Batho* and *Umteteli wa Bantu* in which “poetry, biographies, travelogues, history, gossip and social news” were published (Opland, 2008, p. 1).

Thus “the medium of the popular press is an indispensable factor [in that history,] for it brought Xhosa literature to maturity at the turn of the century before Xhosa books had appeared on any large scale” (Opland, 1998, p. 261). Mgqwetho’s body of work was contained in the pages of *Umteteli wa Bantu* from 1920 until 1929. Thereafter, her literary career spanning a decade was only available in the archives of the Chamber of Mines Library until 1984 when Professor Jeff Opland who was doing research in the Chamber Library came

across her contributions in the pages of *Umteteli wa Bantu*. It is important to note that the newspapers provided a powerful and empowering outlet for Mgqwetho's creativity and political stance, a space that would have been denied by traditional Xhosa society.

1.7 Who is Nontsizi Mgqwetho?

Former South African President, Thabo Mbeki (2007), describes Nontsizi Mgqwetho as “the most prolific Xhosa woman poet of the twentieth century” (Mbeki, 2007, p. 6). Mgqwetho entered the writer's scene when she contributed two poems to *Abantu-Batho* in 1919; from 1920 she started regularly contributing poetry to *Umteteli wa Bantu*.² She wrote many poems to *Umteteli wa Bantu* until January 1929 and then as Opland points out, she “disappear[ed] into the shrouding silence she first burst from. Nothing more is heard from her, but the poetry she left immediately claims for her the status of one of the greatest literary artists ever to write in Xhosa” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.xiv). Apart from her work in these two newspapers very little is known about Mgqwetho. Jeff Opland discovered and collected her poems, translated them into English and produced a collection titled *The Nation's Bounty: The Xhosa Poetry of Nontsizi Mgqwetho*. Though very little is known about Mgqwetho, her writing is powerful, pertinent and resonates with contemporary significance.

Mgqwetho's poetry permeates with both strong Christian and traditional African beliefs, which makes positioning her in ideological terms almost impossible. The titles of her poems alone indicate this. In her prose piece “Ziyazaliseka – Ngoku! Izihlabo ko Ntshundu!! Pulapula!!!” “The prophecies about blacks have now come to pass! Listen!” she draws heavily upon the Bible, calling Xhosa customs into question:

² *Umteteli wa Bantu* was a multilingual weekly newspaper launched in 1920 by the Chamber of Mines in Johannesburg. See Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*: 251.

Taru! Mhleli ngesituba sezi mbongi; asinakutula, umhlaba ubolile: Ngani myeke no Tsalitoro okwangoku: Fundani Izibhalo—yena usisandla so Yehova—Esibeta tina: Nanko! Nomprofeti u Yesaya esixelela: Usifuba lugangato kulo Gabriyeli: Nangona, iziprofeto zake ziyinzwana azindembebele; kuba azizihle ngalondlela kuti, njenge nyibiba yejojoisemlanjeni: Engazenzi ke naye betu u Mprofeti u Yesaya kuba uqutywa zi ntsika zako wabo: Kwane Zulu lihlokoma umgala gala: Liti “Masibuye” namhlanje, kuba amabhongo entliziyo siwagqibile: Uti yena Umprofeti u Yesaya lidlule apa ihashe lika Yehova liyinto emanzi: Latoba Imbokotwe watsho wazula: Nango ke lomagade!—Kuwe ndlu Emnyama: Siya kulwa sodwa, kubhaliwe kwatshiwo: Sivingcelwe silaulwe ngo Kumkani abanencwangu: Ihlutwe kuti nemisebenzi: Kubhaliwe kwatshiwo; njengokuba kunjalo njeke nangoku: U Yehova anenze ninkwantye nigubé kuba kaloku aninazo nezixobo, eniyakolwa ngazo nentshaba, eziya kutunyelwa ngu Yehova kuni: Ngenxa ke yabaxinezeli benu, niyakwa ndula ke nikalele ku Yehova anitumelake u Msindisi. Xelelani nabanini milambo, bazi ukuba Ilizwe lipetukile: Sekummangele nja mna Tixo—senifile konke konke: Camagu! Awu! Ozinkomo namahashe, ozigusha nozibhokwe, senditshilo ziyatshaba: Nizonele ngokwenene—Mna nemvula ndoyibamba: Camagu ke! C’ibi Elinomnqwazi ngapezulu! Ndlovu Edla Ezindle—Ungalala Endleleni Ulahlekile: Liso Lesabonkolo elingapantsi kwa manzi kanti libona ngapezulu: “Xaka” Elimnyama: Opondo lujonge Pezulu, olunye lwabheka Emhlabeni: Kudala naba Profeti Benyaniso besixelela: Naku namhlanje Duma Barwazele, sasi kubona ngokuduma: Camagu! Mhlabi ngezihlabo use Zulwini: Zilenzi elihlala Embodleleni: Siti ulungile nje, kanti ukwa Yingozi: Ziyazaliseka! Izihlabo ko Ntsundu: Kangelani ke kade sinixelela: Azi niyakebisana Nabani ke; ningenalo nje nasiko nimise Umzi ngalo: Bekindlebe wena mhlaba! Ingubo ye Afrika? Yalala yodwa na? Ngokuswela umambati? Lizakuguqulwa lona Ilizwe lonakele:—Uyakubuya ke noba akusatandi!—Nditsho usilwa ubeta nangenqindi: Inkokeli esizifunayo ke ngoku: Mazifike namabhayi avela Ezulwini: Zicombulule amaqina azakusixaka: Zinga hambe zicombulula imali zetu ezingxoweni, ze ngayo ziyoku xaka abafazi bamanye amadoda, zixake kwanotywala yonke lento; Haikona! Asizifuni ne Nkokeli, eziti zakupelelwa kukutya ezindlwini zazo, zimeme umhlangano, zisenzela ukuba zipile ngetiki zalo mhlango—Haikona! Ezinjalo asizifuni nezihamba zipalazisa igazi le Sizwe ngabom: Imfazwe zidalwa ngu Tixo: Inkokeli ke ezi zezika Tixo ngenyani: Ziti za’ ubona ukuba konakele, zicebisane no Tixo Olisiko: Ziya zaliseka ke Izihlabo koNtsundu, seziqalile: Masitandazele ke! Abaprofeti benyaniso, abayakusiweza kulo “Mfula Wosizi” abaprofeti sinabo kwapakati kwetu: Akuko nakanye oyakuvuka Engcwabeni azo kusixelela—Napakade!!! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 217 - 219).

The prophecies about blacks have now come to pass! Listen!

Isaiah 19: 2, 4, 8-10, 15-16, 20.

Editor, thanks for the poets’ column. We can’t sit silent, the country’s rotten. For the moment, please ignore the Hertzogs: study the Scriptures, Jehovah’s hand—beating us.

There! The prophet Isaiah informs us, Toughbreast from Gabriel's home. His

prophecies are handsome, but not really stately: they don't appeal much from our point of view, like a lily in a damp river bank. The prophet Isaiah's not much help to himself either, because he is constrained by his domestic principles. Even heaven shatters boxwood in thundering "Let us come home" today, because we've satisfied our hearts' desires. The prophet Isaiah says Jehovah's horse has gone past here wet with sweat. It dropped a rock that unsettled him: Look at those sods! To you black community: we will fight amongst ourselves alone, because it is written so. We will be encircled and ruled by hostile kings. Jobs will be wrenched from us. So it is written; exactly as it is now. Jehovah will make you shake and tremble with fear because you lack the resources Jehovah will send you to fight the enemy. Because of your oppressors, you will cry out to Jehovah for the first time and he will send you a Saviour. Tell the owners of rivers too, so they know the country has changed. If I as God had not been so amazed, every last one of you would have been dead. Peace! Oh! I have said that cattle, horses, sheep and goats will grow hostile. You have brought this on yourselves. I will even withhold the rain. Peace then, Lake with a bonnet on top; Elephant grazing the plains—if you sleep on the way, you'll be lost; Eye of a tadpole under water, yet it can see above the surface; Black ox with one horn looking up and the other pointing to the ground. For a long time the Prophets of Truth have been telling us. There it is today, Thunder-and-they-shudder; we can see you thundering. Peace! Stabber with heavenly prophecies, Watersnake living in a bottle. We consider you good, but also dangerous. The prophecies about blacks have come to pass: Take a look then: we've been telling you for a long time. Who will there be for you to take advice from? You do not even have one custom to sustain this house. Lend me your ears, earth! Will the blanket of Africa lie alone, lacking someone for it to cover? The country will be upended, and damaged! You will come back, like it or not—kicking and screaming, you will! The leaders we need now must come to us with wraps from Heaven and unravel problems which will obstruct us. They should not go about unravelling our cash in their pockets, and then with it obstruct other men's wives on one side, and liquor on the other. Not at all! We don't want leaders who, when food's running short in their huts, call a meeting, so they can live on the tickies raised at that gathering—Not at all! We don't want such leaders, and those who go about deliberately spilling the blood of the nation. Wars are instigated by God. Leaders are in reality God's leaders: when they see that things aren't right they seek the advice of God, who is Custom. The prophecies about blacks have now come to pass, they have commenced. And so we must pray! The prophets of truth who will carry us across this "Stream of Despair," those prophets we have amongst us. No one is going to rise from the grave to tell us. Never!!! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 216 - 218).

Analysis of Mgqwetho's poetry in *Umteteli wa Bantu*

Mgqwetho often views the political situation in which Africans find themselves from a Christian perspective: for instance, she takes it for granted that her readers are familiar

with Christian texts such as the Bible and *Pilgrim's Progress*,³ making reference to them without explanation. In the prose piece above, Mqgqwetho offers a biblical explanation for South Africa's socio-political condition at the time. She tells her readers to pay no mind to the white government and its leaders who are oppressing them and to look at the real cause of black people's oppression. Using biblical references to substantiate her view she tells black people that Africa is being punished by God and the racist political leaders like Hertzog are mere instruments used by God to carry out Africa's punishment. One can only imagine how startled and infuriated black political leaders fighting to end racist oppression in South would be at hearing this. This would mean that their political efforts have been in vain because if they were to buy into what Mqgqwetho was suggesting, all this time they had been fighting the wrong enemy and opposing God. One would imagine that this biblical interpretation of the political situation in South African was very unpopular and may have left political activists feeling that their political strategies and antics would have been in vain and would now be ill equipped to fight a spiritual battle through political means.

Furthermore, the lack of unity amongst Africans is something that Mqgqwetho decries and is the subject of much of her poetry; however, in this prose piece she now depicts this division as having a divine source – God himself, causing division between Africans because they have not acknowledged him. She cites Isaiah 19:2 and 4 to show this:

I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian – brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom (Isaiah 19:2 The Bible, New International Version).

I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them, declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty (Isaiah 19:4 The Bible, New International Version).

³ Tiyo Soga translated the book into Xhosa as *Uhambo loMhambi*. A. C. Jordan remarks that "Soga's translation was to exercise an influence on written Xhosa literature comparable to that of the Authorised Version on English literary history" (quoted in Hofmeyr 116).

Instead of looking to external factors, this reading of the African situation focuses inward, for the Africans themselves to see what supposedly made them susceptible to such domination. Mgqwetho looks beyond obvious political explanations and offers a biblical interpretation of the socio-political situation in South Africa and Africa as a whole.

According to this reading Africans have brought this upon themselves and what they are experiencing are prophet Isaiah's prophecies coming to pass. She believes that in this text, the unjust laws and poor working conditions of black people are also foretold:

The fishermen will groan and lament, all who cast hooks into the Nile; those who throw nets on the water will pine away. Those who work with combed flax will despair, the weavers of fine linen will lose hope. The workers in cloth will be dejected, and all wage earners will be sick at heart (Isaiah 19: 8-10 The Bible, New International Version).

The passage above refers to the different types of African workers who work and toil but do not reap the fruit of their labour and are disheartened and disillusioned because of their exploitation. The passages that Mgqwetho references would clearly ring true to many black workers especially mine workers at the time because of the unrest and miners' strikes that were occurring. All the major problems blacks were experiencing at the time – cruel oppressors, division among Africans, and discontent among workers are accounted for in the passages she references and applies to the political situation in South Africa. This would have obviously resonated with many black people at the time and would mean that they must now rethink how to respond to the situation given this new insight. But the next verse she references shows the futility of the situation, it would seem black people have to let the process run its course:

There is nothing Egypt can do – head or tail, palm branch or reed. In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will be shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the Lord Almighty raises against them (Isaiah 19: 15- 16 The Bible, New International Version).

Because of the oppressive and demeaning laws, black men were emasculated in their own country. Many feared the law and the military power of the white government. To hear that all this was caused by God because of their disobedience would have caused a level of confusion and not surprisingly resistance. However, all is not lost. The piece culminates with a hopeful passage that provides a way forward:

It will be a sign and witness to the Lord almighty in the land of Egypt.
When they cry out to the Lord because of their oppressors, he will send
them a saviour and defender, and he will rescue them (Isaiah 19: 20 The
Bible, New International Version).

Only when black people reach out to God as their ally will he hear and deliver them from their oppressors by providing a saviour. Mqgqwetho believes that “Imfazwe zidalwa ngu Tixo: Inkokeli ke ezi zezika Tixo ngenyani: Ziti za’ ubona ukuba konakele, zicebisane no Tixo Olisiko” “Wars are instigated by God. Leaders are in reality God’s leaders: when they see that things aren’t right they seek the advice of God, who is Custom” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 217-218). Here she describes the kind of leadership required: leaders with spiritual eyes to see the root cause of the situation in South Africa which she believes is spiritual. Perhaps one of the reasons Mqgqwetho supports and defends the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu*, Reverend Maxeke is because he is such a leader. She believes that the leaders required for the situation in South Africa are those who pray and can discern the times. She believes that those leaders are among them but have been overshadowed by corrupt political leaders. She believes that it is the “Abaprofeti benyaniso, abayakusiweza kulo “Mfula Wosizi” abaprofeti sinabo kwapakati kwetu” “The prophets of truth who will carry us across this “Stream of Despair” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 217- 219). The prophets of truth are those who seek God’s counsel and the only ones who will be able to usher in liberation for black people.

But the reader of this piece could be left curious, if not confused, as to the poet’s view of African customs and approaches to the political situation in South Africa; why does she seemingly view them as useless and unable to help carry blacks across the “Stream of Despair”? The fact is that throughout her writing Mqgqwetho assumes a series of different

Mgqwetho's Affirmation of traditional Xhosa identity

1 Taru Mhleli ngesituba sezi mbongi
 Ndisahleli ndingumfana andimbongi
 Ndingumpati tunga lezi Nxiba-Mxaka
 Makabhekabheke onka magqob'oka.

2 Taru Mhleli ngesituba sezimbongi
Ndiko noko ndisahleli andimbongi
Ndililo iqaba eli lintyontyayo
Bikela mawenu uti ndim otshoyo.

5

3	Ati amogqob'oka singabahedeni	
	Kodwa wonke umzi usaya eweni	10
	Naputum' umlungu zenibe babini	

28

Kodwa lon' Ilizwi lifike sinani.

- 4 Zemnka zihlepuka kwanento zo Ngqika
Nezandundu zityabuke kukuxoka
Ngenxa yalemfundo yenu magqob'oka 15
Nigqob'ok' emini kuhlwe nizinc'uka.

- 5 Sinengqungqutela tina bomaqaba
Siko sisahleli sisaziv' indaba
Kwezontlanganiso zenu asibangako
Zicas' amaqaba ngohlobo lungako. 20
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.225 – 227)

- 1 Editor, thanks for the poets' column.
I'm still here, a young man and no poet;
I carry the milkpail to arm-ringed celebrities;
let all Christians glance behind them.

- 2 Editor, thanks for the poets' column. 5
I'm here, still alive and no poet.
You'd better believe I'm still a Red:
tell your people I'm the one talking.

- 3 Christians call us heathens
but every home's unstable. 10
When the Word appeared we were together,

but you chased the whites to join them.

4 Ngqika himself broke away,

cheeks chafed from his lies.

Christians, because of your school education 15

you're Christians by day, hyenas by night.

5 Just like always, we Reds come together,

sitting here, swapping news.

We never enter your meetings,

where the mood is so hostile to Reds. 20

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 224 - 226)

In the first stanza Mgqwetho thanks the editor for the poet's column; this is something she does in a lot of her poems. Perhaps it is because she is aware of and ever grateful for the empowering space the newspaper provides for her as a black woman, a platform and audience she would not have anywhere else. In this poem she positions herself as a young man and not as a poet, a young man who serves "lezi Nxiba- Mxaka" "arm-ringed celebrities". These are Xhosa men of battle who had fought in wars and had won victories, to indicate their courageous status they wore "rings" on their arm. This young man tells Christians to watch their backs because they would never be a match for such men. Here he is tipping the scales, usually Christians were the ones addressing "Reds" to enlighten them, but this Red young man is in a position of power writing and addressing Christians. This is unexpected because to be a Red meant you had not received western education and could not write, and if one had received western education they were considered Christian because the two came hand in hand. This opening stanza must have startled many readers.

In the second stanza the young man affirms his position as a Red because he can imagine their disbelief and he emphasises that he is still a Red. By virtue of accepting missionary education, educated Africans were Christian and required to reject a lot of African beliefs and pride in their identity, to now read of an educated Red who proudly asserts his “redness” after receiving education was unheard of. This shows that he had maintained his traditional values despite exposure to opposing ideologies. The young man asks the reader to tell others that he is the one talking, not anyone else on his behalf. In other words, he is not a scribe for an illiterate Red wanting to bring his ideas across.

In stanza three, he talks about how Christians refer to Reds as heathens just because they do not believe what Christians do. Xhosa people who had accepted Christianity were seen as having weakened the bond of unity of the Xhosa nation because now a contradicting ideology was introduced that demanded total rejection of Xhosa values and customs and embracing European notions of education and Christianity. He indicates that no one group or entity is perfect or void of challenges and thus Christians should refrain from judging Reds. He cites the case of Xhosa people who used to be united as one group but now because of Christianity there is division and Xhosa people are no longer united because of those who sided with missionaries and their values and those who held on to their traditional way of life. By pointing this out the young man is insinuating that Christians should be more tolerant because although they are united now as Christians, things might change in the same way they did for Xhosa people. Thus he is implying that people should be more reflective rather than eager to discriminate against others. Once again Mgqwetho’s idea of providing an equal platform and assigning equal value to all views comes through.

In the fourth stanza the young man points out how great the division caused by Christianity was that even the Xhosa Chief, Ngqika, also joined the Christians. As a chief he is supposed to be an upholder and defender of tradition and Xhosa society, yet he is depicted as having turned his back on his people and become a deceitful man and not Christian at all in his behaviour. Mqhayi (in Opland (ed and trans) 2009) points out that Ngqika “for a time joined the mission as a teacher, until he was removed from the station and from missionary influence by his disgruntled councillors” (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 424-6). The young

man tells the missionary educated black people that they are only pretending to be Christian because of the education they received but when no one was looking their true colours showed. Here he is interrogating the idea that to be educated means you must be Christian and that the two are synonymous. This is because European education was taught by missionaries and the education that was popularised was one that had Christian views and values. Thus to receive education meant that Xhosa people were exposed to and taught within a Christian worldview. He illustrates how this approach has been unsuccessful by pointing out how their behaviour at night time belies their confessed Christianity portrayed during the day.

He contrasts this behaviour with that of Reds which is one of unity and solidarity where they come together to share and engage with current issues of the day rather than covering up two selves. He tells the Christians that Reds are aware of their hostility and intolerance towards them and as a result they keep their distance. They do not attend their meetings because they know that they are not welcomed there. This is a very sad picture of how people who were once united were suddenly isolated from each other because one group saw themselves as enlightened and superior and suddenly despised what they had previously believed.

In the last two stanzas of the poem the young man concludes by saying that the Christians are beyond any intervention, there's nothing anyone can do to help them, their behaviour is despicable and unbecoming of the faith they claim to profess. The only interest they have in Reds is that of self-enrichment, using them only for personal gain. In closing, the so called Christians are reminded of the very Bible they ought to know and that salvation will come to them (Reds) while they as Christians are caught up in meaningless endeavours.

As Opland points out, throughout Mqgqwetho's oeuvre it is evident that "despite her dependence upon and familiarity with the Bible ... she often denounces it. [At times...] the Bible [is] an agent of dispossession" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. xxii), and at other times it is portrayed as containing the only solution to Africa's problems. In defence of her ambivalence towards Christianity, Mqgqwetho argues that "The truth must be treated fairly, /

the truth must be heard from both sides: / the truth is there in the scriptures / and also within our blankets”⁵ (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 196 line 21-24). It is this outlook that informs Mgqwetho’s poetry and makes sense of the multiple personas, ranging from sangoma to preacher, that she assumed in her attempt to be truly Christian and proudly African at the same time.

The role of the Bible in South Africa

In “Yayisenzelwa Ntonina i Bhaibhile?” “Why was the Bible created?” (See Annexure F for full poem) she asks her readers to truly engage with the Bible themselves and come to their own conclusions rather than unquestioningly taking other people’s interpretations of the Bible. She uses Ntsikana’s words that they should study the scriptures themselves as a point of reference in order to amplify her voice. She begins the poem by providing a scriptural verse that answers the question that the title of her poem poses:

Ngokuba konke okube kubhaliwe pambili, beku bhalelwe okwetu ukufundiswa, ukuze siti ngawo umonde nolwonwabiso lwezi Bhalo sibe netemba. Yiva ke! Akazange ukuxelelena u Ntsikana ukuba uze uqwalasele i Bhaibhile? Wazuka wena wayiyeka, wayiqwalaselelwa ngabelungu; andigxeki mlungu ke ngakuba nditsho: kodwa ke xa kutiwa: “Funa wawuya kufumana,” akutshiwo ke ukutiwa mawufunelwe ngomnye umntu: Yiva ke! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 421)

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by patience and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. Now listen! Didn’t Ntsikana tell you to study the scriptures? And you left the whites to study them for you. I’m not mocking the white when I say that. But when it’s written “Seek and ye shall find,” it doesn’t mean that someone else must do the finding for you. Listen then! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 420)

⁵ Xhosa people who had not converted to Christianity wore blankets smeared with red ochre; thus in this context the blankets represent African tradition and wisdom.

Mgqwetho juxtaposes what the Bible says and what black people actually experience; the Bible says it was written to encourage people and to inspire hope but the picture of what is happening in Africa since the arrival of the Bible seems to be contrary. Mgqwetho then continues with the rest of the poem contrasting what the Bible says about why it was written and how she believes the Bible has been used for other treacherous activities which do not have biblical support thus illustrating the importance of searching and reading the Bible for oneself rather than relying on second hand interpretations of it. Stanza 5 and 6 provide the crux of the poem:

5 Wapulwana Afrika nje ngesitya

Esinga nandziweyo sona isitya

Limnke ngenyani nelizwi e Afrika

Ndayibona imfene emazinyo amdaka. 20

Izwi nabelungu kade lafikayo

Sixakwe yonanto makube kuyiyo

Liko ngaku Tixo, kuti ligalele—

Ndixakiwe kanye nganindikwelele,

Baduda benetemba lezi Bhalo 25

Lahlani pantsi eyenu imibhalo

Namhla kuti banje ngentaba zemb'ola

Balwa nezizwe zonke zibakwelela.

6 Make sikumbule “Imihla” yo bawo,

Siwabandeze lamanxiwa ka Tshiwo 30

Yayinge mnyama kade ingqondo yetu

Yakulo Ngubencuka kweza kowetu.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 421 - 423)

5 Africa, have you been trashed
like a plate of little worth?
Truly the word is departing from Africa:
I saw a baboon with dirty teeth. 20
Long ago the whites brought the word
but recent events confuse us:
over there it's with God, over here it flogs us.
I'm quite confused: I'd better scam.
They danced with their faith in the scriptures: 25
"Discard your striped woollen blankets."
Today they're like our abandoned clay pits:
all nations gave way to their onslaught.

6 Let's remember the days of our fathers,
seal Tshiwo's deserted villages. 30
When you lived with Ngubengcuka
your mind was never black.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 420 - 422).

By opening the poem with a scriptural reference on why the Bible was created, Mgqwetho seeks to show the discrepancies between the stated purpose of the Bible and the purposes it has been employed for in the South African context. When missionaries arrived they introduced the Bible and professed to bring good news to black people, yet in a poem meant to be about why the Bible was created Mgqwetho asks a rhetorical question, if Africa has

been ill treated, to which she answers by saying that the gospel has truly departed from Africa. By this she is implying that what the Bible was said to be bringing when it was initially preached is not what black people are experiencing. She narrates how when white people came they brought the word and concerned themselves with its teachings but black people are confused about how things are unfolding. The word according to the missionaries was to bring peace and a better life for black people but in reality, according to Mqgqwetho, this is evidently not so. According to Mqgqwetho, black people are the ones who are suffering as a consequence of “the word” because it seems to be favouring white people while heavily disadvantaging black people in the way that it is preached and applied. Here Mqgqwetho echoes sentiments that were widely held by many black people who had accepted Christianity but found that there were discrepancies between how the Bible says they should be relating to each other and what they experienced as black people.

Mqgqwetho explains that when Xhosa people accepted Christianity they rejoiced and put their hope in scriptures and discarded Xhosa traditions and teachings but they then find themselves worse off. By accepting the Bible as preached by white people, Mqgqwetho argues that black people made themselves susceptible to domination and oppression. In stanza 6 Mqgqwetho asks her readers to look back and remember bygone days of their forefathers and how things were and to restore what has been lost. In asking her readers to remember bygone days, she is asking them to compare the past with the present and to use the past as a point of departure to determine how they should live and engage with the present circumstances given how the gospel has unfolded thus far. Mqgqwetho highlights that black people were not backward or unenlightened as they were told by missionaries. In the days of their fathers they were insightful and knowledgeable but their knowledge has been devalued and overtaken by western values and knowledge which occupies a privileged position to the detriment of black people.

This is not a new contention. Reverend Tiyo Soga, writing in *Indaba* newspaper in 1862 urged readers to remember the past and to preserve the wealth of knowledge from their ancestors in writing:

Mabavuswe O-Ngconde, no-Togu, no-Phalo, no-Rharhabe no-Mlau, no-Ngqika, no-Ndhlambe. Mayivuke imishologu yohlanga lwa-Maxosa nolwa-Mamfengu, ize kusishiya nelifa elikulu lamavo (“Ipepa le-Ndaba ZaseKaya” “A National Newspaper” *Indaba* 1.1, August 1862: 10).

We should revive and bring to the light all this great wealth of information. Let us bring to life our ancestors; Ngconde, Togu, Tshiwo, Phalo, Rharhabe, Mlawu, Ngqika and Ndlambe. Let us resurrect our ancestral forebears who bequeathed to us a rich heritage (Translation is by J.J.R. Jolobe in Soga, 1983, 173).

This is something that black elites who had been through missionary education wanted to do, they wanted to affirm their identity and history as a people by recording African history in writing to preserve it for future generations; they valued the wealth of information and the rich heritage passed down orally by their forefathers and wanted it to be accessible through the medium of the press and books and to dispel notions that their traditions and customs were worthless.

In the poem above Mgqwetho appears to repudiate Christianity as preached by “ngabelungu” “the whites,” and encourages Africans to search the scriptures themselves in order to avoid exploitation and deceit because what the Bible gives as reasons for why it was written is not what they found in their experience of the Bible according to white people. The mood of the poem is one of disappointment with having been told one thing but experiencing another; thus she emphasises the need for independent critical inquiry in encountering the Bible or any new knowledge which is a major theme in many of Mgqwetho’s poems.

Speak up: “Gquba! Ungatuli Mdaka we Afrika”

In the poem “Ukutula! Ikwakukuvuma!!” “Silence implies consent” (See Annexure G for full poem), from the outset Christianity is seen as a tool of oppression that Africans need to examine for themselves so as to identify and extract such truth as it may contain. Furthermore, they are urged to be vocal about their experiences otherwise they are making

38

it's no fun to pray looking over your shoulder.

5 The laws outnumber those of Moses!

They dish out your portion if you sit silent:

it's the tracks of a leopard across your yard.

If you sit silent they say you agree.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 158-160)

In this poem Mgqwetho tells her readers that being silent about the state of affairs in the country is not an option: she argues that South Africa is in socio-political crisis and if she were to delve deeper in exposing the true state of the country, Christians would be shocked in disbelief. Here she implies that Christians are living in ignorance and pay no mind to what is really happening in the country. She argues that because they do not know what is going on and are silent this means they are consenting to and perpetuating the status quo. In the next stanza she exposes the way white people treat black people in the church. Black people clearly feel that they are not welcomed and are not accepted by white people in the church, they would seemingly prefer it if black people worshipped elsewhere. Black people do not feel comfortable or safe to worship with white people. This later led to a lot of black people breaking away from white churches and starting their own churches independent of white control.

Furthermore, she argues that the laws brought by white people are more than those required by the Bible. They are preached as if that is what the Bible requires but she points out that they are even more than the laws brought by Moses. She warns that if black people do not say or do something about these laws, that means they are consenting to them and the laws will continue unchallenged. Here she is urging black people to be active in their own liberation; if they sit passively they are implicated in their subjugation. In the last two stanzas of the poem she becomes very militant and seeks to mobilise black people out of their passivity:

11 Gquba! Ungatuli Mdaka we Afrika

Boguqa bakedame nabalwa nawe

Lovangeli yabo yokusikohlisa

Mina ingangam ndigaqe ngedolo.

12 Lingasiposa ne Zulu siyimamela

45

Kub' inomkonto obuye usihlabé

Iyahanahanisa kumntu Ontsundu

Iwugqwetile ke lomhlaba ka Palo.

Kauve!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 159-161)

11 Dark One of Africa, don't sit in silence,

quell your foes with a roar of defiance!

This gospel of theirs, designed to deceive us,

stands as tall as I do down on my knees.

12 Heed its word and heaven's lost:

45

it's a spear that wheels to stab us.

The hypocritical cant of the white man's gospel

turns Phalo's land on its head.

Please hear!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 160)

She calls on black people to “Gquba” which loosely translated means to raise hell, to be defiant. Even their defiance she rouses should be strong and loud like that of a lion. They should be loud enough to be heard so that those who hear should fear and take note. She goes on to differentiate between the gospel of white people and the true gospel preached by the Bible. The gospel according to white people is a fabricated gospel, one that is meant to deceive and lull black people into subservience. If black people listen to it they will lose their fight against oppression and even miss heaven. The white man’s gospel has wounded black people and seeks out their destruction to such an extent that they cannot ignore it any longer, that it has become blatantly clear that it favours white people only. She closes the poem by saying that this false and hypocritical gospel is what has caused havoc in the Xhosa nation, leaving black people in disarray. Mqhayi a contemporary of Mgqwetho, also voiced his outrage at the deceitfulness of the white man’s gospel, he called it:

Ukuhamba behlolela iinkosi zabo ezibahlawulayo umhlaba
Bahamba nalo ilizwi ukuba lihamba liba yingcambane
Yokulawula izikhubani nesizwe, yathi imfuno yayinto nje
Eyenzelwe ukuba kuviwane ngentetho
(Mqhayi, 1942, p. 70)

Human movement in search of land grabbing land from chiefs
Using the word of God as a tool
And instrument to rule kings and nations
An education so inferior
Became an institution to prepare slaves for new masters
(Translation from Mqhayi’s *Inzuzo* Mqhayi, 1942, p. 70)

It is clear that black people who had received missionary education were becoming awakened to the devices of how the gospel was preached to black people. The gospel they preached left

black people worse off and actually paved the way for their subjugation. By reading the Bible themselves and interpreting it for themselves they see that the gospel of the Bible and the gospel of white people are like night and day. This resulted in the need for black people to conduct their own critical inquiry of Christianity and interrogate the Bible and to read it directly and not as second hand information. Interestingly, black people at the time did not ‘throw out the baby with the bath water’; they saw value and relevance in the teachings of the Bible that resonated with their way of life and aspirations and embraced it as it affirmed black identity and integrity.

In her work, Mkgqetho awakens black people to give equal attention to African traditions and knowledge as well as the knowledge they have received through contact with white people. She does not discard wholesale the knowledge brought about by white people but completely discards that which is found to be wanting and oppressive to black people – faulty white interpretations of the Bible. In summation, Mkgqetho stresses that black people should not imbibe knowledge without interrogating and sifting it to see if it is true. She argues that this should not be done by others but black people should seek truth out for themselves and embrace that which is not to the detriment of black people and the abandonment of African values. Thus throughout her work she promotes critical enquiry and engagement with current affairs and argues for the equal treatment of different knowledge systems and due attention to be paid to multiple ways of arriving at knowledge. Mkgqetho does not align herself exclusively with one ideology but reveals a complexity and fluidity of identities and allegiances with a focus on those that place African well being and concerns at the centre.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 African intellectuals and African philosophy

Early missionary educated African intellectuals tended to use European thought and rationale as a standard which they ought to achieve. This they were taught by missionaries who compared and placed in binary oppositions that which originated from Africa with what was from Europe. The educators saw nothing of intellectual or spiritual value in Africa and they assumed the role of teachers and all Africans their students in need of enlightenment and salvation. This approach prohibited the natural development of a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship between Africa and the European world. This posed a major challenge and stumbling block for early African intellectuals in their pursuit for the production and intellectualisation of African thought and philosophy. Africans had to fight the assumption that all that is scientifically and universally sound must emerge from or at the very least get the approval of European or American thinkers, who have assumed the role of gatekeepers or senior staff in terms of what can be deemed intellectual, philosophical, and scientific thought. As Brown (2004a) points out “It seems short-sighted to view philosophical thought as beginning within Ancient Greek culture and to hold that those who do not come out of that lineage or who have different concerns have no philosophical perspectives or have perspectives that do not merit scholarly attention” (Brown, 2004a, p. vi). Yet this is what many African theorists and intellectuals have had to grapple with.

Even now, “postcolonial African cultures are very much concerned about the impositions of Western conceptions of ethics, justice, fairness, right, compassion, and humanness. It is thought that in many respects, those conceptions appear to stand in contrast to precolonial conceptions found in traditional African cultures” (Brown, 2004a, p.vi). Yes, some early African intellectuals internalised the standards and prescriptions of the colonial power and reproduced them in their writing and approaches. This is because;

It has been alleged that philosophy is written and that since traditional African cultures were rooted in oral traditions they could not produce philosophy. Second, it has been alleged that philosophy is rooted in critical inquiry, and that since what is usually characterized as traditional African philosophical thought is associated with folk wisdom or sagacious edits, it is not philosophy (Brown, 2004a, p. v).

From the above allegation alone it becomes abundantly clear that before African thinkers and philosophers can begin to produce what can be deemed as philosophy by the self-appointed gatekeepers, they have to firstly interrogate the politics of knowledge - who decides what can be accepted as scientific, universal, or philosophical and on what basis? A deeper inquiry shows that there are great discrepancies that tend to apply certain rules when it comes to African philosophical thought that are not applied to others. As Brown (2004a) posits;

Concerning what counts as doing philosophy, the oral traditions that grounded the distribution of information within early African cultures ought not to count against there being philosophical thought or philosophical perspectives within traditional African cultures. Were we to be consistent and hold that traditional African thought cannot be philosophical because philosophical thought is thought that is written or is non-sagacious in character, we could not count Socrates, Buddha, or Jesus as having engaged in philosophical thought. None wrote about what they taught or thought, and the general character of much of what came forth from Buddha and Jesus was sagacious. Moreover, that which is characterised as sagacious does not simply emerge without critical inquiry and significant reflection (Brown, 2004a, p. vi).

It is clear that there is a certain bias that tends to favour thought coming from certain traditions and parts of the world and ignore others and African thought is part of the “other”. An awareness of this is necessary before we can begin to talk fairly about African literature, and the development of an African literary theory. The African intellectual should be the one on the forefront of the development of African literary theory and should drive the process of intellectualisation of African literature and philosophy, rather than leave it to European or

Western philosophers to set and define the standard and its limits, then submit to it even when clearly unsuitable. There is a great need for African intellectuals to put to paper things they have discovered and learned of, things not “in the white man’s books nor in his church...things that lay far deep in the recesses of the African psyche” (Magona, 1998b. p. 9).

2.2 African approaches to literature

In his seminal work, *African Literature: Approaches and Applications*, Swanepoel (1990) examines various approaches to literature: under emerging African approaches, he explains that these approaches have emerged because “the so called universal values may fail to do justice to creative writing by Africans, both in the vernaculars and European languages. This legitimate concern rooted in the fact that “imported” theories may cause one to disregard, or even to deny, culture-specific features which may occur in literary works”(Swanepoel, 1990, p. 48). He introduces the emergent approaches as Irele’s sociological approach, Marxism and Africa, Anozie’s structural pragmatics, Myth criticism: Soyinka, Okpewho and PS Groenewald’s approach.

Irele’s sociological approach

In his own words, Irele (1971) articulates his approach as follows:

I personally take the view that the African is being transformed not only into something or somebody else, but into something or somebody new, and I similarly tend to look upon our literature as tending towards the transposition of an old scale of feelings and attitudes into a new key of expression. The implication of this view for the criticism of modern literature is clear. Unless we are prepared to take into consideration the whole imaginative tradition in Africa, we who set out to interpret the writings of new authors are going to miss the finer modulations which

give to the best in modern African literature interest and value...Not only can our criticism be limited if we do not relate the work to its specific cultural framework, it can be falsified...Furthermore, we all tend to forget that the dichotomy between traditional and modern, as applied to African, expresses itself not as an opposition of two worlds but as unity, as an entity which is more unified than our distinctions are wont to make clear (Irele, 1971, p. 17 - 18).

Once again the importance of acknowledging that although literature is universal, a work needs to be examined in relation to its particular cultural framework, in order for the full value of the work to be revealed. For example, Mgqwetho's poetry was written in the 1920s, during a very politically turbulent time in South Africa. The fact that she is writing at this time, and taking up the position of *imbongi* is in itself an anomaly. People not privy to Xhosa society and culture will not know that women in traditional Xhosa society could not be *imbongi*, that position was the preserve of men. But if you are reading from a western framework which has a long history of female poets and writers, one would take Mgqwetho's unique position for granted. In her poem "Pulapulani Makowetu" "Listen, Compatriots" (See Annexure H for full poem) Mgqwetho shares what happened to her when she tried to take the role of the *imbongi* in the rural space:

16 Taru! Nontsizi intombi ka Sandile

Mntana wenkosi kwinkosi zakwa Ngqika

Kubonga amakosi not amabhungexe

Watshiswa zinduku kumataf' akwa Ngqika.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 81)

16 Mercy, Nontsizi, Sandile's daughter,

child of the Ngqika paramount.

You were thrashed by kieres on Ngqika plains

for praising chiefs and *not* commoners.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 80)

Mgqwetho was censured and assaulted by kieries (which only men carried) for attempting to praise chiefs. This was taboo in Xhosa society and she was disciplined for doing that; women could *bonga* (praise) but only *imbongi* could praise chiefs or hold the status of *imbongi*. As Opland (2008) explains “While women transmitted the memorized clan praises, and composed and performed their own praise poems about themselves and their friends, and while these poems would on occasion be uttered as an exhortation to men, no woman could be an *imbongi*, a court poet” (Opland, 2008, p. 2). Even after Mgqwetho has left the rural space and moves to the city and becomes an *imbongi* using the medium of print to disseminate her poetry, she is still careful not to praise chiefs. In numerous poems whenever she starts mentioning the names of chiefs and their genealogy she stops short of naming them and writes ‘*Amagama enkosi ayandipazamisa*’, the names of kings confuse me, because she knows that it is taboo to praise chiefs and as a result self-censures. As Kolawole (2004) points out, there have been “...conscious efforts by African woman writers to break the culture of silence through the creative process. A majority of African women writers are spokespersons for their gender and are re-creating women’s space in a self-conscious way” (Kolawole, 2004, p. 257). Thus if one does not understand the cultural framework of literary texts, they will overlook certain features thus limiting criticism of the work.

In crystalising his approach, Irele (1971) states

We want now to decide whether it [African literature] will or forever remain a tributary of Western literature, or a full literature in its own right with a legitimate place in the modern culture of Africa. And its only claim of this kind of legitimacy can come from its original African quality and from its relevance to contemporary existence, and it is here that our critical effort assumes a wider social and cultural significance (Irele, 1971, p. 22).

Evident in Irele's approach is the urgency for African literature to find its own legitimate space in relation to world literatures and the need for African literature to show contemporary significance and clout. This is only possible once Africans take the reins of formulating their own theories grounded in an African worldview and cultural framework to drive the process of rediscovering, reconstruction and redirecting African literature and philosophy.

Marxism and Africa

Van Luxemburg et al. (1983) explain that "Marxist or materialistic criticism developed from the views of Karl Marx, who believed that the economic structure of society served as the foundation for its social, political and cultural structures." Thus, "As cultural phenomenon, literature in this sense expresses economic relations. Literary texts can therefore only be understood when related to these conditions" (Quoted in Swanepoel, 1990, p. 52). Swanepoel (1990) clarifies the appeal of Marxism to Africa as follows:

In Africa with its long and turbulent colonial history wrought in hegemony, discrimination, and deprivation, it is understandable that Marxism was embraced as a strong intellectual underpinning for the struggle for liberation. In South Africa itself, the wrongs of apartheid perpetuated the ailments of the colonial era (Swanepoel, 1990, p. 53).

As a result of the immediate relevance and resonance of Marxism on the continent, numerous African writers began to look elsewhere for inspiration. As Amuta (1989) posits "In place of Plato, Aristotle, F R Leavis, I A Richards, Northrop Frye, Gerald Moore, Izevbaye etc.," they sought conceptual inspiration from "Marx, Engels, Plekhanov, Mao, Trotsky, Eagleton, Fanon, Onoge, Ngugi, Cabral and kindred spirits" (Amuta, 1989, p. viii). He further states that;

African literature and its criticism testify to the historical contradictions that define the African situation. In order to resolve these contradictions

in the direction of progressive change, literary criticism must be predicated on a theoretical outlook that couples cultural theory back to social practice. In this respect, literary theory and practice must form part of the anti-imperialist struggle, thus demystifying literary criticism and reintergrating it into the social experience and practice of which literature itself is very much part (Amuta, 1989, p. 7).

Amuta (1989) concludes by saying that literary theory and theorising cannot ignore or remove itself from social conditions, but literature should rather seek “to banish those conditions which dehumanize humankind and threaten the nobility of art itself. The business of literature ought to begin from the creation of the conditions necessary for economic and political freedom, for it is from there that cultural freedom flows” (Amuta, 1989, p.199). During this period, Marxist ideology greatly influenced African literature and a lot of protest poetry, writing, and materialist research emerged and flourished with this ideological backing. In Mqgqwetho’s poem “Wabutwana—Afrika? Njengezitungu—Zesanda” “Are you bundled for threshing, Africa?” (See Annexure I for full poem) she questions the political and economic conditions that Africans live under and makes it clear that unless black people are free politically and economically they cannot be truly free at all. She asks:

8 Ubuzwe ke xa kunjalo bubupina?

Ikaya ke xa kulapo lilipina? 30

Siyashiywa silibele kukugxeka

Imnke ke kupele yona i Afrika.

9 Amagwangqa amanyene ngabamnyama

Nama Kula nama Tshay’na ngokumnyama

Nabutwana njengezitungu ze Sanda 35

Nobutyakala kuni buye busanda.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 251)

- 8 Living like this, can you have a country?
 Living like this, can you have a home? 30
 As we idly bicker we're left in the dust
 and Africa slips through our fingers forever.
- 9 The whites are united against the blacks,
 the Coolies and Chinese against the blacks.
 Are you gathered in bundles for threshing? 35
 Your recklessness is rampant.
 (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 251)

In the first stanza she asks how can black people lay claim to South Africa and that they belong to it if they live in conditions that do not allow them to enjoy the freedoms of that land. She implies that unless black people have political and economic freedom they cannot call South Africa their home or country. She calls black people to do something about it and mobilise instead of just bickering about the unjust conditions they live under otherwise they will lose the land. During this time in South African history black people did not have freedom of movement in the city. They needed passes to travel in their own country whereas white people did not. These conditions caused Mgqwetho to rouse her readers to action; she shows how whites, Indians and Chinese are united against black people and that black people need to act together as a group and not waste any time. She tells black people the way forward:

- 10 Umanyano nje kupela lunga "Mandla"
 Kuba lulo lodwa olunokusondla
 Zonk' intshaba zakoyiswa ngenxa yalo
 Nentsika ze Zulu zakwapulwa ngalo. 40

11 Kuninina makowetu sikonkota

Sipikisa abantu besiqongqota

Sizwe sini sona esi silubisi

Lungasafikiyo nase zimvabeni

12 Namhla i Afrika itshelwe sic'eko

45

Azi kwabadala yena akaseko

Onyusa ne “Ngxelo” iye ko Pezulu

Atshise ne “Dini” ngonyana omkulu

Camagu!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 251)

10 Unity's our only strength,

it alone can nourish us:

all enemies will be crushed by it,

and the pillars of heaven shattered.

40

11 We bark for you, my people,

confronting those who pick us clean.

What nation is this whose milk

lacks strength to reach the milksack?

12 Today Africa yields no milk.

Is there no one to among the elders

to bear this report to the One on High,

to burn his first son as sacrifice? (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 250)

When black people unite as a group they will have strength enough to face these oppressive conditions and nothing will be able to defeat them, she claims. She believes that unity is such a powerful force that it can even bring down the pillars of heaven. When Mqgqwetho and those like her take action, they are acting for black people, “sikonkota” “we bark for you” she says; the motivation for her action is freedom for black people. But the economic and socio-political conditions make it hard for their efforts to bear fruit and she asks “Sizwe sini sona esi silubisi/Lungasafikiyo nase zimvabeni” “What nation is this whose milk/ lacks strength to reach the milksack?” This shows frustration at the fact that their efforts to date have not produced the desired results, for black people Africa “itshwele sic’eko” “yields no milk”; it is not the land of milk and honey for black people. She ends the poem by asking if there is anyone who will intercede with God for Africa’s liberation and offer their first born son as a sacrificial lamb. In this poem she rallies black people to unite and not to be indifferent but instead to offer their best for the liberation of all black people.

Black people had been fighting oppression in South Africa before Apartheid and Mqgqwetho encourages them not to be discouraged but to put their hands to the plough and be united. She also appeals to spiritual leaders to plead their case to God and sacrifice whatever it takes to end black struggle. Similarly, in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *A grain of wheat* the idea of sacrifice for liberation is central in the text. One of the characters, Kihika, says to Karanja: “I die for you, you die for me, we become a sacrifice for one another. So I can say that you, Karanja, are Christ. I am Christ. Everybody who takes the Oath of Unity to change things in Kenya is Christ” (Wa Thiong’o, 1967, p. 93). So black people as the lowest class in South Africa and in Kenya saw the need for group solidarity, to act as one unit against colonialism; they never accepted their status of being secondary citizens in their own countries but sought tools to overpower the system through sacrifice and unity, as posited in Mqgqwetho’s poem. As demonstrated above, Marxist Criticism has significant appeal in Africa where black people were oppressed as a class and lived under oppressive economic and political conditions which the literature reflects. Sacrifice and unity are major themes in African liberation texts; both these texts appropriate aspects of Christianity as a tool for liberation in the struggle; they indigenise the text and in their reading of the Bible see strategies of resistance (sacrifice and unity) to liberate black people, whereas their coloniser’s interpretations of the Bible have

oppressed black people. Thus depending on who controls knowledge and assigns value to certain ways of knowing controls the kind of literature that is produced and legitimised hence the need for Africans to take the reins of the direction of African literature and literary criticism within an African context.

These approaches to the study of African literature help to think outside of the European and Western scholarly “centre” and provide alternative ways to apply theory in a manner that best reveals the work by firstly interrogating the politics of knowledge. This is a crucial step: being aware of who gets to choose how literature should be examined and why it should be approached and theorised about in a particular way, such as a universal standpoint. Alternatively, the importance of the cultural framework from which a work emerges is highlighted. Unless the cultural framework of a text is taken into account, the theoretical approach used to examine the work will fail to do justice to the text thereby falsifying the results of that criticism. Furthermore, it is emphasised that Africans should be the ones driving this direction in African literary criticism instead of relying on the West to provide the lead. As Mgqwetho posits:

Akazange ukuxelelana u Ntsikana ukuba uze uqwalasele i Bhaibhile? Wazuka wena wayiyeka, wayiqwalaselelwa ngabelungu; andigxeki mlungu ke ngakuba nditsho: kodwa ke xa kutiwa: “Funa wawuya kufumana,” akutshiwo ke ukutiwa mawufunelwe ngomnye Umntu (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 421).

Didn’t Ntsikana tell you to study the scriptures? And you left the whites to study them for you. I’m not mocking the white when I say that. But when it’s written ‘Seek and ye shall find,’ it doesn’t mean that someone else must do the finding for you (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 420).

Thus Africans should be the ones interrogating African literature and philosophy from a view that prioritises an African Cultural framework as a point from which to theorise and think about literary criticism. One cannot take for granted that scientific or critical inquiry from the West is infallible in a continent where they have been used by the colonisers to devalue a people’s history and intellectual capabilities and to justify their subjugation, whilst “... not

adequately [recognising] the complexities and specificities of the reality of African societies” (Kolawole, 2004, p. 251). Common amongst the approaches above is the urgent need for rigorous African scholarship that holds its own and privileges and prioritises an African perspective for works coming from an African context.

2.3 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory is a response to colonial legacies of cultural imperialism; it analyses and explains how subjects respond to colonial domination. The focus of this theory is what used to be called Third World Literature. Postcolonial writers are “concerned with writing back to the centre, actively engaged in a process of questioning and travestying colonial discourse in their work” (McLeod, 2000, p. 25). This theory is inadequate for Xhosa writers like Mqgqwetho because they are not concerned with speaking back to the “centre” or Empire. Mqgqwetho writes in Xhosa and does not direct her work to the “centre” or Empire as Postcolonial writers do. As Barber (1995) explains:

Despite intermittent claims to specificity, this model [postcolonial] blocks a properly historical, localized understanding of any scene of colonial and post-Independence literary production in Africa. Instead it selects and overemphasizes one sliver of literary production in Africa — written literature in the English language — and treats this as all there is, representative of a whole culture or even a whole global “colonial experience”. It thus negligently or deliberately erases all other forms of expression — written literature in African languages (Barber, 1995, p. 3).

Mqgqwetho writes in Xhosa to a Xhosa audience and immerses herself in the condition of her people and blames nobody but her fellow Africans for the condition in which they find themselves. This is aptly illustrated in the poem “Maibuye! I Africa! Awu!” “Come back, Africa! Awu!” (See full poem in Annexure J), the title of this poem plays on the then popular slogan “Mayibuy’ iAfrika” meaning “Come back Africa”, which was a cry for order and peace to be restored in Africa, but Mqgqwetho’s poem is not about Africa coming back but about Africans coming back to their senses. She begins with:

Kade simemeza naso isijwili sako ke Afrika! Ntsimi ye Afrika,
Wadliwa zintaka ke wahlakazeka umi kodwa wena ungazange umke
Amazwi atshile kuk'uk'waza wena sigqibe lamazwe sikwaz' inikisi,
Yonanto ifunwa zintaka inkuku kusa ziqondele kuhlwe zingay' boni.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 59)

For a long time now we've been calling, Africa.

Hear our wailing, Garden of Africa!!

Your crop was consumed and scattered by birds,

but you stood firm and never left us.

Our voices are hoarse from imploring you;

we track through nations, appeal to phantoms,

nothing more than chickens' scratchings,

eager at dawn, at dusk empty-handed.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 58)

She narrates how black people have been appealing to and calling for Africa to come back for such a long time but to no avail. Here anyone reading the poem would think that she is calling out for Africa's restoration as was common during the 1920s. The cry to Africa is short lived because in the third line she says that Africa has gone nowhere and has never left but black people have been crying out all over the world till their voices grew hoarse but with no results to show for their wailing. During this time a lot of black people such as Sol Plaatje and Charlotte Maxeke were travelling to many different countries abroad to raise awareness about what was happening in South Africa and to garner support for black political organisations in South Africa but according to Mgqwetho there were no tangible changes in the socio-economic condition of black people. In the third stanza she becomes even more direct:

- 3 Uti maibuye? Makubuye wena izizwe zomhlaba zix'witana ngawe, 10
Zipuma e Node zipuma e Sude kwas'empumalanga nase ntshonalanga.
I Afrika ihleli ayiyangandawo kangela enc'eni wofik'isahluma,
Kangel'imitombo yamanz'isatsitsa kangela yonk'into imi ngendlela,
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 59)

- 3 You say "Come back"? *You* must come back!!
You're profit to all the earth's nations,
they come from the north, they come from the south,
from the east and from the west. 20
Africa stayed! She's nowhere else:
look how the grass continues to sprout.
Look at the springs still bubbling with water.
Look all around, it's all in its place!
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 58)

She corrects the call for Africa to come back and points out that it is the Africans who need to come back to their senses and realise their worth: she points out how people come from all over the world to benefit from Africa so Africa has never gone anywhere; the land continues to be fruitful and a thriving natural resource despite the exploitation it has suffered. Here she points out how the wealth of the continent is sought after and that despite all the exploitation the land has experienced it continues to thrive. She then asks Africans what they as a people have done and achieved:

- 4 Woz' ufe na gxebe ungeko entweni wake nyizililo uti maibuye,
Makubuye wena woshukuma nomzi zihambe nendaba zime nge Jeriko.

Kautsho! Afrika kwakumlambo mnina ap' umnt' engazinto ati maibuye, 15
Kuba ndibonanje sinempau zonke esihamba ngazo zasebudengeni.

- 5 Simi ngama Monti sikony' izililo simi ngama Dike sikony' izililo,
Sezizw' ezintsundu ngapantsi kwelanga u Satan adane kutshone nenkaba.
Aninaluthando! Animanyananga ningab' onxazonke abangenacala,
Nikwango ntamnaniopembabeshiya niyek' amawenu nincedis' umlungu. 20
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 59)

- 4 Will you go to the grave with nothing achieved,
raising your cry, calling "Come back"? 25
If *you* come back first the nation will rise
and news of its stirring will ring out to Jericho.
But tell us, Africa, where else in the world
can any old fool say "Come home"? 30
From my point of view, we bear all the signs
as we stumble along in stupidity.

- 5 From the Buffalo's banks we raise our cry,
from the Tyhume's banks we raise our cry
for all the black nations under the sun, 35
so Satan's ashamed until his guts bust.
You display no love, display no togetherness,
you sit on the fence, won't take a stand.
Nothing but sell-outs, you set fires and run,
betray your own people to bolster the whites.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 58 - 60)

Here Mqgqwetho is calling Africans to rise to the greatness of the land and to achieve something of significance. She stresses that when Africans come to their senses and awaken to their potential, news of this will spread far. She calls Africans foolish for telling Africa, the land, to come back. Many people using the slogan at the time could have been taken aback at Mqgqwetho's harsh criticism but she holds no punches and even goes as far as labeling the slogan stupid. She says that black people have been crying out to Africa for so long to no avail because they lack love and unity, they are double minded traitors who instigate trouble and deceive each other to benefit white people. She points to these as the stumbling blocks to black people achieving greatness. Here she is blaming black people for their own oppression because they have abandoned traditional values of love and unity and instead are the ones who betray each other. The move from the rural areas to the city has always been depicted as one of moral decay. The rural space is often depicted in African literature as one of wholeness, fruitfulness and hospitality and the city as its opposites full of depravities and isolation. In the next stanza she blames black people for abandoning traditional values:

Nikony' izililo? Niti maibuye nopala nisopa makubuye nina

Akuko nasiko lakumisa umzi akuko bukosi akuko ntwisento.

Seninje ngenkumbi zisele kwezinye nashiywa bubuzwe nashiywa bubuntu

Nashiywa yimfuyo zonke ezo zinto senizixolisa ngo Cimizingqala.

Uti maibuye? Makubuye wena wonwaya intloko ulila ngabani, 25

Nanko no Ntsikana kade akutyela zuyeke imali siqu sempundulu.

Mfondini wotutu lwakud' e Afrika wazonela ngani? Pambi koYehova,

Nalo ke ne China lize ngemitombo nalo ke ne Kula lize ngama empty.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 61)

Gone are our customs for setting up homesteads,

monarchy, values, nothing is left!

You live like locusts left by the swarm,
you've lost all pride, your sense of a nation,
lock, stock and barrel, everything's lost:
you seek balm in the bottle that blots out all pain.

You say "Come back"? *You* must come back!

You scratch your head in search of a scapegoat. 25

Ntsikana warned you a long time ago,
"Money's the lightning-bird: leave it alone."
Child of the soil of far-flung Africa,
what have you done to so offend God?
Here the Chink sells you malt for your home-brew,
there the Coolie buys up your empties.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 60)

Once in the city black people appear to have abandoned their responsibility to set up homesteads in the rural areas and instead settle in the city where they even forget about chieftainship and a sense of nation and pride. It was customary for black people to set up a home in the rural area so that when they come home from extended periods away from work, they would settle in their new homes which were often built by sending money home and there the young men who had since become adult men would have their own place to start their family and to carry out family rituals. Here in the city they give themselves over to alcohol and moral decay and have nothing left to contribute to those back home. Mqgqwetho paints this loss of moral virtue as what needs restoration, thus it is the African, not Africa that needs to come back, to return to old values and traditions.

She argues that black people are searching for an escape goat instead of taking responsibility for their own actions. Supposedly, the oppressive conditions they live under are no excuse for their behaviour. Furthermore, she reminds her audience of Ntsikana's warning: to beware of money and its deceitfulness. Many sayings and warnings by Ntsikana had been passed down orally for generations and many black people valued his wisdom because the things he prophesied about which later came to pass, thus he became viewed as a prophet and worthy of attention and contrasted to Nongqawuse, the girl prophet, whose prophecies did not come to pass. Mgqwetho asks what have the Africans done against God that they find themselves in a situation where all people seem to be exploiting them and profiting from their depravity: the Chinese sell black people malt for beer whilst Indian people sell them empty bottles to contain the beer in. Here she is echoing the same sentiments as in the earlier poem "Ziyazalekisa—Ngoku! Izihlabo ko Ntsundu!! Pulapula!!!" "The prophecies about blacks have come to pass! Listen!" where she provides a biblical explanation for the suffering of black people. By pointing out the lack of unity and abandonment of traditional values among black people she is holding them accountable for the situation they find themselves in and calls them to take responsibility and return to their senses and ends the poem by appealing for God's intervention:

Camagu ke Langa! Camagu ke Nyanga nini amagosa awasipeteyo,
Yinyusen' ingxelo iye ko Pezulu nisitetelele nide nicokise.

Camagu! Awu!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 63)

Peace, Sun! Peace, Moon!

Stewards of our Protector,
bear the report to the One on High,
plead our case in elegant terms.

Peace! Awu!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.62)

In the second edition of *The Postcolonial Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) aptly point out that:

[d]ebates concerning the traditional and sacred beliefs of colonised, indigenous and marginalized peoples have increased in importance in Postcolonial studies. Indeed, it would be true to say that it remains the field of Postcolonial studies in most need of critical and scholarly attention. Since the Enlightenment the sacred has been an ambivalent area in Western thinking that has uniformly tended to privilege the secular (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2006, p. 7- 8).

As shown in the earlier poem “Ziyazalekisa—Ngoku! Izihlabo ko Ntsundu!! Pulapula!!!” “The prophecies about blacks have come to pass! Listen!” and many others, Mgqwetho draws heavily on Christian discourse given that in African societies spirituality is part and parcel of everyday life and affecting every sphere. Someone from outside this context might view this inclusion of the spiritual in literature as moralistic but in African culture, spirituality permeates every facet of life and is used to understand and account for everyday occurrences and there is no secular and sacred divide. As Peires explains;

Like most other African religions, Xhosa religion was logical enough, given the assumption that the unseen world was active in this one and exercised an important causal influence...It was further assumed that the unseen world was comprehensible, and that its forces behaved according to set patterns, and that it was therefore open to manipulation and control. This made religious practice an inseparable part of secular activity (Peires, 1979, p. 54-55).

Thus what would be seen as strange and preachy by others outside this framework, the African scholar views without judgement hence the need and proposition for a theory that merges and accommodates an African worldview and spirituality, which will be elucidated in the next chapter. Despite Mgqwetho drawing heavily on Christian discourse as illustrated

earlier in the analysis of some of her poems, she calls for the appropriation of pre-colonial spirituality. In the poem “Vumisani! kwi Nyange Lemihla!!” “Consult the ancient sage!” (See full poem in Annexure K) she describes the erosion of traditional values and the poverty that now pervades homesteads which were once teeming with life and blessings. This barrenness in the land, she claims, has been caused by a hypocritical adoption of Christianity and abandonment of traditional beliefs and custom. She laments:

Hai! Ukuhlala kwawo wodwa Umzi
 Obantu babenikwe Intsikelelo
 Amasango etu onke akanamntu
 Nababandezeli basuke bayintloko. Camagu!

Halahoyi! Afrika nalo ke ivumba 5
 Linukisa okwe nyoka yomlambo
 Intsikelelo zagxotwa yintonina
 Namasiko sekusa siwafanisa.

Panda pantsi uxele amahlungulu
 Intsikelelo zasishiy’ elubala 10
 Ndingatini betu kungeko nanye nje
 Kwinto zakowetu engabisasele.
 (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 112)

Oh the homestead standing alone,
 whose people once had plenty,
 its gates now unattended,
 its oppressors in control. Peace!

Halahoyi! Africans, something stinks

5

like the river snake, fouling the air:

where are our onetime blessings?

Now we're estranged from custom.

Scratch the earth like crows:

our blessings led to the scrapheap.

10

I tell you, nothing that once was ours

survives to sustain us today.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 113)

In stanza one Mqgqwetho laments the abandonment of homesteads which were once a place of safety but now stand with no one looking after them because of the oppressor. Here Mqgqwetho could be referring to the fact that many black men had to leave the rural areas in search of work because the tax pall system was introduced and black people now had to pay money for the land they lived on so there was a move from the homesteads to the city. Many black men went to work in the mines because there was a demand for cheap labour. As a result, the homesteads had no one to guard and protect them, the women were left alone and had to go to the fields and provide for the family left behind.

In the second stanza Mqgqwetho questions what has happened to chase the blessings that were once there, where people used to have more than enough. She says she can smell that something is not right and the people are now estranged from custom. The estrangement from custom she writes about could be as a result of the introduction of a new belief system (Christianity) amongst black people which now challenged and called them to abandon their customs. Renowned Xhosa writer, S.E.K Mqhayi, writes about this new challenge in accepting Christianity the way the missionaries demanded which necessitated the abandoning of African customs:

Lo msebenzi ke ndiza kungena kuwo, ndiyawazi ukuchaseka kwawo kubafundisi, koko ke ndixolele nook kugxothwa, kunokuba ndingabi yiyo le nto ndinga ndingaba yiyo. Engqondweni yam ndedwa, ndandiqonda ukuba ndiya kuba ngumsebenzi kweli lizwe lakowethu lasemaXhoseni—umsebenzi kwizinto zeLwizi; kwezentlalo yasemakhaya; kwezombuso; nakwezemfundo. Kwamhlophe kum ukuba andiyi kwenza nanye yezi zinto iphumelele, ndingabanga yindoda njengabo (Mqhayi, 1939, p. 58).

I know how hateful the circumcision school was to the ministers, but I had determined to be expelled rather than not become “a man.” In my own mind I felt that I was going to be a worker for my own people in my own country, a worker for the Gospel for social service, in politics, and in educational matters; and it was clear to me that I could not accomplish my work if I did not become a man (Scott, P.E. *Mqhayi in translation* 1976, p. 24).

Mqhayi stood up to the ministers and risked expulsion from school; he fervently believed that he could not abandon this rite of passage and if he was to even work for the gospel he had to honour the custom of becoming a man according to Xhosa culture. Mqhayi and many earlier writers believed in a different expression of Christianity from the missionaries, one that merged African culture and traditions with Christian beliefs. Yet still because of westernisation and Christianity there was a general abandonment of many African customs which were previously held in high regard. Mgqwetho highlights this erosion and what it has led to:

Amasiko etu anxietywa ilokwe

Yinkohliso yodwa nobumenemene

Kwakutatwa izitembu tina siyashwsha

15

Ukuze singaqondwa ngawo amaqaba.

Ax’entsa intlombe zix’entswa nasiti

Sigqobok' emini kuhlwe sizinc'uka

Sixakiwe konke kuba sinxazonke

Nabalandelayo bobeta besotuka.

(Opland, (ed and trans) 2007, p. 113)

Our customs are dressed in tatters,
deceit and delusion are all we maintain:

Reds keep a number of wives,

15

but we keep our secret lovers.

They dance in courtship, and so do we,

Christians by day, hyenas by night,

we're caught between two worlds:

the next generation will gaze slack-jawed.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 112)

Mgqwetho argues that African customs have not been maintained and as a result they have deteriorated, all that people do now is deceive each other. Mgqwetho points to this deception as evident in the double standards that many Christians have: although some African Christians had internalised the views of the missionaries and abhorred polygamy as backward, they had multiple partners in secret. Xhosa traditional dances (*intlombe*) were condemned by the missionaries yet Christians danced in courtship. She highlights this double standard to show that Africans left their customs and replaced them with European equivalents. Furthermore, although some black people claimed to be Christians, at night time their true colours come out – Mgqwetho says that they are caught in between two worlds, with one foot in Christianity and the other in leading immoral lives. She claims that the next generation will be amazed at this hypocrisy. Here Mgqwetho is showing the futility of claiming to be one thing while practicing another and the resultant erosion of traditional values. Mgqwetho offers advice to rectify this situation. She tells her audience to:

Bhekan' ezincwadini ze Nyange Lemihla

Isibhalane esabhala masiko

Njengebhadi libhadula ukufuna umtombo

Ngawubhadule nawe ufune amasiko.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 115)

Look in the books of the ancient sage,

the scribe who inscribed our customs;

please journey in quest of your customs

like a springbok in quest of a spring.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 114)

Here Mgqwetho is offering direction that would restore the blessings that have been chased away by abandoning custom and calls black people to go in fervent search of their customs by consulting the ancient sage: according to her, this would restore order among black people, not the hypocritical Christianity they have adopted. This sentiment is echoed in many of her poems where she tells black people "Icawe mazivalwe/Siye ezintilini" "Shut the churches, / return to the battlefield" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 14-15). The churches are depicted to be the ones that contributed to the current socio-political situation. She sees this as a matter of urgency in the battle for African customs; here she seems to say that the churches have caused the loss of values and immorality to run rampant and have torn away at African customs which should be fought for. She concludes the poem by advising:

Ndoda ecingayo yivake

Ubeke amehlo ngasemva

Biza inkumbulo ivuke

Ixele intlalo endala,

70

Yayama emsimelelweni

Upulapulise indlebe

Yolul' amapiko usinge 75

Ngasemaxesheni akude.

Uzeke kwakona indaba

Zemihla yo Palo no Tshiwo. Camagu!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 117)

So listen, thinker,

cast your eyes back, 70

kindle your memory,

talk of old ways,

lean on your staff,

prick up your ears,

spread your wings, 75

consider times past,

and bring us the news once more

of the days of Phalo and Tshiwo. Peace!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 116)

Here Mqgwetho does not ask her readers to read the scriptures or quote biblical references; in this poem the adoption of Christianity and western values is shown to be the root cause of this very poverty in a land that once had plenty and people were united. Now there is division

between the Christians and Reds yet in private the Christians are doing exactly what they decry during the day. She asks her readers to instead look back and remember the ways of old, to remember how things were: to listen carefully to ancient wisdom and talk about the days of their forefathers. Mqgqwetho is perhaps calling for this in the hope that once black people remember the good old days when they honoured custom and blessings abounded, they will return to their senses and be restored and become a whole people once more. By urging them to consult the ancient sage, Mqgqwetho is directing them to a practise that Christians abhor but which was a source of wisdom and direction to their forefathers and one that she is reviving and providing as a way forward, towards Africa's restoration.

The advent of Christianity and Westernisation is depicted as causing moral decay, division and poverty. Thus her work privileges and valorises traditional African wisdom and thought which is shown to have a positive outworking in the natural realm: there was plenty to eat, fields flourished and blessings abounded. Mqgqwetho's work thus provides a framework to think about African problems and challenges: to go in search of solutions from African philosophical thought and wisdom, to see how things were done in the past and how those strategies can be useful in forging a way forward in thinking about African literary criticism that values and makes provision for African philosophical thought and strategies of resistance, rather than borrowing and relying on philosophical thought from the English and western world because as Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) point out "...Western Knowledge creates differences between itself as the norm and other knowledge systems as inferior" (Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010, p. 618).

2.4 Western Feminism versus African Feminism/Womanism

After centuries and in some places decades of freedom from colonial oppression, the time is now ripe for literary criticism based on African philosophy, a philosophy "without the infusion of foreign influence – most notably without the infusion of Judaic, Islamic, Christian, Greek, and Western conceptual schemes into sub-Saharan cultures", a uniquely African theory that reflects the African psyche (Brown, 2004a, p. vii). Such a move would not be entirely new, for some time now African women have interrogated and challenged

western feminism and come up with a variety of African womanist or “feminist” theories with which to analyse African texts. Mariama Ba (Quoted in Nfah-Abbenyi 1997) insists that:

As [African] women, we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which harms us and we must no longer submit to it. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon....women have a place within African literature (Quoted in Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997, p. 50).

African women have long realised the need to make their voice heard in literature and have made headways in formulating a theory that places the concerns of African women at the centre. For them it was not enough to uncritically take feminism as defined by the white European women at whose hands they have suffered oppression. A maid in Sindiwe Magona’s book *Living, Loving and Lying Awake* highlights the complexity of black women’s struggle: she comments: “Feminism in this country has been retarded, in part by this paternalistic attitude of white women towards black women. How can I be a sister to my father, the white woman?” (Magona, 1991, p. 42)

The concerns of white women are different to those of black women who suffer triple oppression, because of their class, race and gender. As Ogunyemi (1985) puts it “...while the white woman writer protests against sexism, the black woman writer must deal with it as one among many evils; she battles also with the dehumanization resulting from racism and poverty.” (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 68); these are the complexities African writers and intellectuals have to face when confronted with Western ideology and philosophy in the advancement of African literary theory.

H.L. Gates Jr. (1988) observes that “the writing of black people in western languages has, at all points, remained political, implicitly or explicitly, regardless of its intent or its subject” (Gates, 1988, p. 132). To illustrate this further, the creative works of Alice Walker and Sindiwe Magona will be analysed in this chapter as well as their advances along with many

black female writers in contributing towards new ways to analyse texts and theorise about black writing which do not unthinkingly bow to western feminist theories.

Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* was first published in 1982. In 1983 it went on to win both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for fiction. The novel is written in epistolary form and deals with the struggle of black women against exploitation and oppression by both white people and the black men in their lives. Walker uses the epistolary form purposefully; through this form the reader can immediately enter into the protagonist, Celie's private world and accept her thoughts, and the experiences she writes about, as real. One of the effects of the epistolary form is "to underscore the illusion of the real, but also of the spontaneous... [allowing] maximum identification with a character" (Gates, H.L. Jr, 1988, p. 246). Celie's letters are written with such innocence and rawness that the reader is readily able to sympathise with her. In *The Color Purple*, however, Walker also challenges the conventions of this form: epistolaries were written man to man and not from woman to woman as Walker shows. Furthermore, epistolaries utilised a gracious form of writing fitting the characters whereas in *The Color Purple* this is definitely not the case. Thus Walker enters a space that was the preserve of men, just like Mgqwetho does, and transforms it to reflect black female linguistic realities and narratives through a medium that was denied them.

While some critics may think Walker failed dismally in her use of this form, they eliminate the possibility that the supposed violations of this form are, as Hite (1989) recognises, "calculated subversions of conventions that the authors regarded as permeated with white, masculinist values" (Hite, 1989, p. 260). Walker deliberately uses the form for her own ends and allows what the conventions of this form disallow: women's voices and an alternative language. Despite much criticism and controversy surrounding the form and content of the novel, however, it continues to occupy an important and powerful position in black and women's literature because it challenges and confronts the marginalisation of the black female voice — one of the very issues Mgqwetho confronted by occupying the role of the *imbongi* decades before Walker was born.

Meanwhile, Magona's collection of short stories, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, voices and deals with black domestic workers' struggle against the Apartheid System in South Africa. Each of the maids describes in monologue form her struggle against racist and sexist oppression reflecting the black women's struggle in South Africa. Although their circumstances seem unchangeable, however, many of the stories "stimulate persistence and the will to go on, to survive" (Obradovic, 1993, p. 1). For example, Joyce, though a high school student, is forced to be a maid to help support her family yet she does not see her current situation as permanent. She says "Do you know how many African women doctors there are? In this whole country? Five. FIVE – that's all. Well look at me real well. Look! There will be six – that I promise you" (Magona, 1991, p. 40).

Although it is concerned with issues most people are not comfortable with confronting and would rather conceal than expose, Magona's text has not received the vicious criticism that Walker's novel was dealt. Though Magona confronts black women's sexist oppression by black men it is not the central focus of her work. She does however show how black men are implicated in the victimisation of black women. For example, when Imelda's boyfriend learns that she cannot bear children he abandons her. She is now of no use to him if she cannot give him offspring and the status that fatherhood brings within the community (Magona, 1991, p. 12). Similarly, when Lulu is about to get married her lobola is diminished because she has a child outside of wedlock, yet the status of the man who made her pregnant remains intact or is actually improved because having children is seen as a sign of manhood and virility (Magona, 1991, p. 21). Through the experiences of these two women Magona reveals the double standards and limitations placed on women by patriarchy.

Mgqwetho's work also unashamedly exposes this double standard. In her prose piece "Abafazi! Bomtandazo!! Pulapula!!" "Women of the Prayer Unions. Listen!" she writes about how women have been marginalised in the church. Mgqwetho responds to a letter by Mr Tyelenzima Gatyeni who says that all his life the Word of God has always been preached by ministers and evangelists only (who were men) and does not understand why women leave their homes and children to attend women's prayer unions; he goes on to argue that this is what has stunted the growth of Christianity. Mgqwetho responded to his argument by

saying that women have been marginalised in churches but in the women's prayer meeting a woman finds "indawo ke leyo emfaneleyo; namelwe ukushumayela kuyo, azintlite nangentloko, ezintsikeni zalo ndlu, nasezitulweni zayo etandaza" "a place fit for her, where she can preach her fill, slamming her head on the pillars and pews of the church, praying to her heart's content" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 192-193). Because of the patriarchal organisation of the church, Mgqwetho argues that women have had to create an alternative space to express their spirituality and spiritual gifts. In this poem Mgqwetho shows that women are not void of the same spiritual gifts as men but possess them in abundance but by virtue of their gender men have sought to silence them and have monopoly of the pulpit. She also demonstrates how women in the Bible have been at the forefront of spiritual activity and explains the following about Jesus:

Obeko naye kwange Nkazana engu "Maria" umfazi womtandazo ke nalowo. Kunye no Elisabete, Marta, Salomi, kwanabanye, ababezizilingane ezikulu zika "Yesu": Nabona bantu bokuqala abaya Engcwabeni, lingekapumi ne Langa; bakubona ukuvuka kuka "Yesu" Ekufeni Uteta ntoni ke umntu; ebuza ntoni? Tuluzufe! Izwe lawa nge Nkazana: Lavuswa kwa ngayo (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 193).

he too, born of a woman, Mary, another woman who put her trust in prayer. With her were Elizabeth, Martha, Salome and others, all good friends of Jesus, the first to go to the grave long before daybreak, the first to know that Jesus had risen from the dead.

What is the person saying? What is he asking? Shut your trap till your dying day! Because of a woman the world was lost and through a woman it was redeemed (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 192).

Here Mgqwetho is showing the significant place women have always occupied in Christianity: she shows that Jesus himself was born of woman without any man's intervention. Furthermore, Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also a woman of prayer, the very prayer Mr Gatyeni is criticising women for. She also points out that it was to women whom Jesus first appeared to and the first to know that he had been resurrected. Mgqwetho uses the Bible to assert women's identity and the significant role they have always played in the history of the church thus exposing men's ignorance of the very Bible they preach and their double standards. This shows that "African femisims in addition emphasise the power and

agency of African women in particular to theorise from their cultures and lived experiences to produce knowledge that is contextually relevant...”(Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010, p. 619).

For Walker, women’s struggle for equality is intricately tied to racial inequality. In her womanist prose work *In Search of our Mother’s Gardens* Walker (1983) asks:

How was the creativity of black women kept alive, year after year and century after century, when most of the years black people have been in America, it was a punishable crime for a black person to read and write?... Virginia Woolf, in her book *A Room of One’s Own*, wrote that in order for a woman to write fiction she must have two things, certainly: a room of her own (with key and lock) and enough money to support herself. What then are we to make of Phyllis Wheatley, a slave, who owned not even herself? (Walker, 1983, p. 234)

Walker’s reference to Phyllis Wheatley’s *Miscellaneous Subjects*, published in 1773 and the first book published by a black slave in America highlights how black women have always had more against them than white people and even black men. While Woolf argues that women need a room and money in order to support and liberate themselves, Walker contends that black women writers have achieved a measure of independent expression despite the absence of any access to either financial or personal freedom. This is why Walker explains how she could no longer accept and include herself under the banner of feminism; she found it an inadequate label as it did not recognise and address the needs of black women who not only faced sexist but also racist oppression.

In an interview with the *City Press* Magona agrees with Woolf, however, saying “I think that the great writer, Virginia Woolf, was right when she said a writer needs a room of her own and £ 5 000. In other words, financial security and a place to work in peace” (Bell, 2006, p. 27). The different responses from these writers indicate the discrepancies in black women’s struggle in different places namely America and South Africa. Most black women in South Africa face more immediate and pressing needs than most black women in America – the

need to survive. Financial security is obtained through working and getting an education in order to feed the family and only thereafter can one even think of the luxury and privilege of writing. Many black women in South Africa are uneducated and work as domestic workers to support their families – leaving them little or no space to write.

By agreeing with Woolf, however, Magona is by no means aligning herself with white western feminism, rather she is showing the complexity and diversity of the black women's struggle everywhere. In the *Cape Argus* Magona (2004) remarks of the hardships she had to endure in attaining an education in order to escape poverty: "I will not fool anyone that getting an education is easy. But living with a lack of education is not only harder, but a cruel fate to choose" (Magona, 2004, p. 1) As Kolawole (1997) states in *Womanism and African Consciousness*: "It is essential to situate African women's struggle and self-expression within African cultural context as well as within the larger struggle of third world and all Blacks" (Kolawole, 1997, p.19). Although black women across continents encounter triple oppression, the way they experience it and their means to overcome it will take different forms. Kolawole (1997) further argues that "None of the Euro-American schools of feminism is adequate for expressing the yearnings of all women at all times" (Kolawole, 1997, p. 11).

Ogunyemi (1985) asks where western feminism leaves the black woman:

Does she imitate their war effort and throw the gauntlet down to challenge black patriarchy? Does she fight the sexual war some of the time and the racial war at other times? Does she remain indifferent to the other sex war and, in maintaining a truce in the black sexual power tussle, fight only the race war? (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 63)

Ogunyemi (1985) suggests that faced with these challenges black women are likely to turn to womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker herself which she defines as:

A black feminist or feminist of colour. A woman who loves other women, sexually and or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female (Walker, 1983, p. xi).

Walker (1983) asserts the difference in emphasis by stating: "Womanism is to feminism as purple is to lavender" (Walker, 1983, p. xii). Furthermore, a womanist goes further than a feminist by incorporating not only sexual issues but "racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy" (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 64). Of this stance Walker writes "We are not white. We are not Europeans. We are black like the Africans themselves...We and the Africans will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere" (Quoted in Ogunyemi 1985, p. 63). This shows that white women through feminism employ strategies useful and applicable to them hence the need for black women to do the same.

In her autobiography, *Forced to Grow*, Magona (1998a) tells of the discrepancies in male and female teachers' salaries and when she challenges her male colleagues on the rationale behind why women receive lower wages one retorts: "No Sindi, I am a man. I have a wife. I am a breadwinner" (Magona, 1998a, p. 68); at the same time Magona was a single parent with three children to look after yet she was not considered a breadwinner by her colleague because she is a woman. In the same way, no matter how talented Xhosa women were in *ukubonga* (reciting praises), they were deprived the space and title to do that. In "Imbongi u Chizama" "Chizama the poet" Mqgqwetho asserts her appropriation of the title of *imbongi* and in the poem she points out that Xhosa women were not allowed to be *imbongi* which entailed calling the king to order. She makes this known as follows:

Hamba Sokulandela,

Kuba tina simadoda nje asizange

Siyibone kowetu imbongikazi,

20

Yenkazana kuba imbongi inyuka

Nenkundla ituke inkosi.

Hamba Sokulandela,

Nezi mbongikazi Tina sizibona

25

Apa kweli lo laita ne bhekile. (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 3)

Go and we'll follow you:

no female poet

20

came from our house:

the poet who rouses the court

and censures the king's always male.

Go and we'll follow you!

We first encountered these female poets

25

here in this land of thugs and booze.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 2)

In this poem Mgqwetho praises the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu* and his wife, Charlotte Maxeke. She acknowledges the traditionally transgressive position that female *imbongi* are occupying by identifying themselves as *iimbongi*; this was not possible in the rural space where Mgqwetho herself was physically assaulted by knobkierries for doing so. Because of the loss of traditional values in the city, Mgqwetho is able to take up the title and position of *imbongi* through the medium of newspapers, a space and position denied her in the rural space because of her gender. Although Mgqwetho advocates for the return to traditional African values, she does however note the advantages of moving out of the traditional rural setting into the city because of what it allows her to do which she would not be able to do in a rural set up at the time. Mgqwetho's stance thus suggests not a wholesale embracing of one way (traditional values and philosophy) and abandoning the other (modern values and

philosophy) but negotiating and transforming these two spaces by valorising and extracting from them what is good and beneficial for the benefit of all people, male and female, which she herself embodies as a modern female *imbongi*.

In *The Color Purple* Walker also intentionally points out the multifaceted disadvantages that black women face. In the text, Celie's husband, Albert, says to her "You are black, you pore (sic), you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (Walker, 1983, p. 176). Albert is aware of the status of black women in society and how they not only have the disadvantage of race counting against them but that of their gender as well. Albert's statement shows the power of language to create potentially harmful realities for women. His statement has the potential to completely demoralise Celie and to prevent her from having a sense of agency in her life; however, Celie chooses to use language to assert her identity. As Gates (1988) points out, in her letters to God and Nettie, Celie, "writes herself into being" and "for Celie it is the written voice which is her vehicle for self-expression and self-revelation" (Gates, 1988, p. 245). She admits what is true about herself, yet she refuses to let it cripple her and render her voiceless. She says "I'm pore (sic), I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook, a voice say to everything listening. But I'm here" (Walker, 1983, p. 176). Celie knows that the fact that she is "here" means that she has a right to exist just as Albert and all people do.

In *Living by the Word*, Walker (1987) highlights this further, stating that "Celie is created out of language. In *The Color Purple* you see Celie because you "see" her voice. To suppress her voice is to complete the murder of her" (Walker, 1987, p. 64). Moreover, Gates classifies *The Color Purple* as a speakerly text which he describes as privileging representation of the "speaking black voice...which Hurston and Reed defined as "an oral book, a talking book" (Gates, 1988, p. 112). Indeed Celie writes in her speaking voice and the reason we "see" her voice is because it "represents an act of speech in the written word" (Gates, 1988, p. 253).

Similarly, the oral-monologue style of *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* allows each of the women to "speak" her piece "uninterrupted, unquestioned; each has her own story, her

own desires, her own frustrations” (Loflin, 1998, p. 114). And all are worthy of being heard and who better to tell them than the maids themselves instead of the usual western novel form through which everything is seen through the eyes of the protagonist or narrator? Magona’s use of language reflects oral culture in South Africa; she deliberately transmits spoken forms into her writing to reflect the speech the domestic workers would use to communicate with each other. Magona goes against the grain by not writing in a purely western discourse thereby subverting “literary tradition which regards that which is western and English as the standard of literary achievement” (Soobrayan, 1995, p. 1).

In her autobiography, *My Children’s Children*, Magona explains that “ours is an oral tradition” which she would use to speak to her grandchildren if she would live to see them. They are not yet born and so she addresses them in writing: “I will keep for you my words in this manner” (Quoted in Daymond, 2002, p. 331). It is in this fusion of the oral and written in which Magona will continue to write her own story and those of others. In the same way, Mqgqwetho’s poetry, though adopting the western stanzaic form, is written in the oral style that an *imbongi* would perform his *izibongo*. The structure is western, but the content is African, thus demonstrating a complementary fusion between the two traditions. Thus instead of conforming to western prescriptions of form and content, black writers can use what works to serve their purpose in African literary output and use their own standards based on their functions to judge literary work. In using the newspapers as her vehicle for poetic expression, Mqgqwetho serves the purpose of being an *imbongi* which outside print she would not be able to perform. She is not attached to a chief as a traditional *imbongi* would be but begins to praise and critique those in authority in the contemporary arena she finds herself in and acts as mediator between those in power and those subject to it. As Chilisa and Ntseane (2010) point out “...oppressed groups can learn to identify their distinct opportunities to turn their condition of marginalisation into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is constructed” (Chilisa and Ntseane, 2010, p. 620).

Mqgqwetho appropriates the western stanzaic form to organise her ideas in print where pauses would be in performance. As Kaschula (2002) points out “certain aspects of the tradition had in fact not changed: opening formulas such as ‘A!’ and closing formulas such as ‘ncincilili’

still existed” (Kaschula, 2002, p. 37). These are reflected in Mgqwetho’s work as she usually opens her poetry with “Au!”, “Hom!”, “Hai!” to indicate she is about to *bonga* or say something of great importance and so draws attention using these opening formulas. Mgqwetho usually uses the closing formulas “Camagu!” (peace) or “Taru” (mercy) to indicate that she has finished saying what she needed to say and is retreating in peace.

Kaschula (2002) notes that “There has been a decline in the use of animal metaphor, probably partly due to the fact that animals no longer roam freely, as they did long ago, and therefore less useful as poetic metaphors” (Kaschula, 2002, p. 37). Mgqwetho does however makes use of animal metaphor in her poetry, perhaps because of her love for the rural setting though she finds herself in an urban setting. She often says “Halahoyi! Ma Afrika nalo ke ivumba/ linukisa okwenyoka yomlambo” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 205) “Halahoyi! Africans, something stinks/ like the river snake, fouling the air” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 204), “Uyimazi elubisi luncinana/ Olungasafikiyo nase zimvabeni” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 25) “Cow yielding dribbles of milk lacking the strength to reach the milksack.” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 24) or “Nigqobok’ emini kuhlwe nizincuka” you are “Christians by day, and hyenas by night” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 50). She takes it for granted that her readers will be able to relate to the animal metaphors she uses because of their rural upbringing. Thus in Mgqwetho’s poetry the rural and urban, as well as the oral and the written, reflect a complementary mix rather than signifying two different forms that are often placed in binary opposition as if they do not compliment each other.

Furthermore, there was rural life before urban life and the two continue to exist and people continue to live and move between these spaces, in the same way that “oral literature preceded writing, lives alongside writing, influences writing, and yet also manages to stand alone” (Finnegan quoted in Kaschula, 2002, p. 66). Mgqwetho’s work reflects a fluid interaction between cultures, concepts and form which should all be freely employed in a way that best reveals the functions of a literary work rather than placing these in binary opposition with little room for fluidity or hybridity.

Mgqwetho's poetic content is replete with the concerns of black people and the socio-political condition they find themselves in the contemporary setting. She is not an *imbongi* in the traditional sense yet fulfils the functions of an *imbongi* in the urban socio-political space and reaches a wider audience which transcends that of the tribal *imbongi*. Thus the African cultural and literary context is ever evolving and interacting with its environment and experimenting with new forms and merging them with traditional and contemporary forms to produce works that have something of the old and the new yet not strictly belonging to either. Thus an African literary theory reflects these complexities and influences and values them as a natural and necessary part of the ever evolving field of literature.

The form and content of both Magona's and Walker's work demonstrate the importance of using one's own language. As Walker (1983) argues:

It is not by suppressing our own language that we counter other people's racist stereotypes of us, but by having the conviction that if we present the words in the context that was natural to them, we do not perpetuate those stereotypes, but rather, expose them (Walker, 1983, p. 62).

Both Magona and Walker use a form of writing that asserts their identity as black women, which proves true what W.E.B Du Bois observed as early as 1915 that black people are "gaining their own voices, their own ideals" and he urged black writers:

Instead of drowning [their] originality in imitation of mediocre white folks...[they] have a right to affirm that the negro race is one of the great human races, inferior to none in its accomplishments and in its ability (Quoted in Gates, 2001, p. 114).

Although Walker's novel is written in English, she makes a deliberate decision to write it in what she terms "Black Folk English". Walker employs "Black Folk English" as a tool to express African-American identity and to distinguish the black characters from their white masters and oppressors because "Black Folk Speech has been historically devalued by the Standard (White) English speaking community, a devaluation that, as Wideman maintains,

“implies a linguistic hierarchy, the dominance of one version of reality over others” (Quoted in McDowell, 1987, p. 258). In using Black Folk English Walker overturns this hierarchy in order to legitimise African American identity. This is illustrated in *The Color Purple* when Darlene tries to teach Celie how to “talk”: Darlene suggests that Celie’s use of “US” is “not so hot. A dead country give-away. You say US where most folks say, WE, She say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored people think you a hick and white folks be amuse” to which Celie responds “Look like to me only a fool would want to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind” (Walker, 1983, p. 184).

Celie continues to speak in a way that feels natural to her. Celie’s comment here implies that the demand for people to speak Standard English by the dominant culture is in order to exercise power and control. Celie’s choice to continue speaking Black Folk English serves as an alternative and counter-narrative to the narratives of the dominant culture. The way Celie uses language reflects her reality. Black Folk English “delves for a ‘truth’ beneath the surface of standardized legitimized mainstream culture” (Brown, 2002, p. 213). By using Black Folk English Walker demonstrates her “commitment to reclaiming and valorizing the rural southern black vernacular” (Byerman, 2004, p. 234).

Many readers, especially educators, found Walker’s use of Black Folk English offensive and this was another of the criticisms waged against *The Color Purple*. Walker’s language, however, is not only necessary to portray an accurate depiction of life as it was for black people at that time but, more importantly, to exercise the subversion of authority and undermining of dominant cultural power that Black Folk English provides. In defending her choices, Walker (1987) makes it clear that the way in which Celie speaks:

Reveals not only an intelligence that transforms illiterate speech into something that is, at times, very beautiful, as well as effective in conveying her sense of her world but also what has been done to her by a racist and sexist system, and her blossoming as a human being despite her oppression demonstrates why her oppressors persist even today in trying to keep her down. For if and when Celie rises to her rightful, earned place in society across the planet, the world will be a different place, I can tell you (Walker, 1987, p. 64).

This can be seen when Celie leaves her abusive husband; she does not ostracise him because she realises that everyone has something positive to offer. She spends time with Albert getting to know and understand him and sees him as a victim too. This illustrates that Celie understands that “as blacks they, with their men, are victims of a white patriarchal culture; as women they are victimised on racial, sexual and class grounds by white men” (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 67).

In Mgqwetho’s work, she directly confronts male dominance. She is not intimidated by any man and confronts them head on. First, Mvabaza, the editor of *Abatho-Batho* for claiming that he brought her from Peddie to Johannesburg; she treats him as an equal without the traditional reverence women at the time would be expected to treat men. She goes as far as publicly insulting him by calling him “imazi elubisi luncinanana/ Olungasafikiyo? Nase zimvabeni” “cow yielding dribbles of milk/ lacking the strength/ to reach the milksack” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.25) criticising him for being a weak leader and in fact states that he is no leader at all. She tells Mr Gatyeni “Tuluzufe!” “Shut your trap till your dying day”; he is older than she and Mgqwetho would be expected to show him great respect because of his age and secondly because he is male but Mgqwetho treats him as intellectually inferior (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 193).

Mgqwetho appropriated the male position of *imbongi* and thus speaks authoritatively on pertinent socio-political issues and provides direction to the nation and criticised with impunity whoever warranted it. She does not allow her position as a woman in a patriarchal society to disempower her nor does she internalise any inferiority because of her gender. More than defending women’s prayer meetings and women’s important role in biblical history, she defends Reverend Maxeke, a very powerful man, and tells those who accuse him of causing division in Congress to leave him alone (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 26). Furthermore, she knows too and states in an ode to herself that she is “Uliramncwa akuvelwa ngasemva/ Nabakwaziyo babeta besotuka” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 77) a “Wild beast too fierce to take from behind, / those who know tremble in tackling you” (Opland (ed and

trans), 2007, p. 76). She knows that other poets are afraid to tackle her because of her poetic prowess and is not ashamed to sing her own praises. She does not pay special attention to men but sees them as equals and where need be challenges them to think for themselves rather than unthinkingly reinforcing patriarchal roles which exist in both the traditional and modern setting. Thus Mqgwetho is neither a staunch traditionalist nor an ardent modernist, but a symbol of a fusion of the best of both worlds. Thus the value she adds to an African literary approach is that of gender equality and eradicating baseless gender stereotyping which subjugate women in both traditional and modern settings. Mqgwetho advocates for traditional values that free rather than restrict women's potential and ability, that allow for each person to be judged according to their intellectual capital and ability; something Magona points out as lacking in how women are treated and paid in the modern workplace.

In an essay titled *Innovation and womanist traditions in Sindiwe Magona's wor(l)ds*, Pumla Gqola (2004) labels Magona a womanist and her work charged with womanist prose. She rationalises that Magona is a womanist as her work centres the experiences of women of colour as those to theorise from. Gqola (2004) further asserts that Magona in her short story collection "challenges the notion of who can speak authoritatively on experience by reversing the customary gaze of employer on employee as she represents the perceptions of domestic workers" thus shifting the usual location of speaking authority (Gqola, 2004, p. 59). Part of Walker's definition of a womanist is also a woman who "appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility, and women's strength" (Walker, 1983, p. xi). And this preference and appreciation of women's culture and strength is certainly evident in Magona's work as *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* is "concerned with representations of black, and in particular black South African, female experience" (Gqola, 2004, p. 57).

In an interview with Siphokazi Koyana in *First Decade*, when asked whether she considers herself a feminist Magona replied: "I consider myself a Universalist, if one would interpret that to include humanism and environmentalism, meaning 'one who has an abiding respect for all of life'" (Quoted in Koyana, 2004, p. 153). This is an indication that Magona does not

want to be “put into a box” and restricted to a particular ideology that does not encompass all her core beliefs, which feminism certainly does not.

By comparing the contexts of black women’s struggle through these texts and their responses to feminism and theoretical perspectives that do not adequately address or appreciate black women’s struggle, it is clear that these authors, along with other female theories, have forged a new path in literary criticism and theory, one which caters for black people, their complexities and a space in which to express and assert their language and identity. These texts constitute “a powerful statement about identity, community, connectedness to the counter or alternative culture, and the oration as well as perception of truth” (Brown, 2002, p. 214). For Mqgqwetho she grounds her identity and that of her people in traditional values that empower and liberate black people to reach their fullest potential. Even in their oppressed state Mqgqwetho expects and urges black people to achieve something of significance despite the oppressive conditions they find themselves in; she seems to expect them to look for creative strategies in making the most of the situation and restoring them to their former glory.

Furthermore, she uses the Bible to assert black people’s territorial integrity. She states “Lomhlaba i Afrika ngumhlaba wetu/ Besiduda sixentsa nobawo betu/ Angakohliseki noze nge Nqanawe/ Kaloku lihleli ele Zulu i Tshawe” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 229) “This land of Africa’s ours, / we frolicked and danced with our fathers. /Those who came by ship shouldn’t fool themselves:/ the Prince of Heaven is wide awake” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 228). Thus according to Mqgqwetho black people have God on their side who is watching everything white people are doing and will in time act on behalf of Africans, the rightful owners of the land. As Brown (2008) posits Mqgqwetho “literally re-authors or re-members (and translates) the Bible for a (South) African context...” (Brown, 2008, p. 85). This approach of using a form what would be deemed as un-african (such as the Bible) and reading it within an African context and using its teaching in light of an African socio-political framework is instructive for an African literary theory in that it shows that there are many ways of viewing and using a form and situating it within a cultural framework to decipher it and see if there is any value or resonance in that work for the particular culture in

which it finds itself thus the cultural framework is central in informing the reading of a text. For example, African Feminism and Womanism have created a platform for a multiplicity of truth, truth in writing in a language and way that reflects and asserts black struggle and identity, rather than using and submitting to “the master’s tongue” and way of thinking and theorising that is foreign to them. African women are not silent and have led the way in contributing towards literary theory that is grounded in an African context and in African beliefs.

Womanism and black feminism see Western feminism as limiting and not addressing the issues and complexities of black women yet claiming to address women universally. Whereas “African womanist theory critically examines the limitations of feminist theory and helps to explain, comprehensively, the ideas and activism of some African women who have contributed to womanist theory from differing ideological perspectives” (Dove, 1998, p. 515). Moreover, “the intelligent black woman writer, conscious of black impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She believes in him; hence her books end in integrative images of the male and female worlds” (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 68).

Western literature and theory does not have to be positioned in opposition and superior to theory and literatures emanating from Africa. But as it stands Western thinking and standards occupy a privileged position and are used to guide and measure African literature and theory, non - compliance to them is seen as deviant and as indicative of a lack of scholarly rigour. But as McGuire (1973) points out, “The value of criticism is not that it lays down laws which any reader must follow, but rather that it offers a new way of seeing a literary work which may not have been possible to the reader. And if it enriches his perception of a literary work, then it has value” (McGuire, 1973, p.80). What womanist scholars have done is provide an alternative to the dominant and prescriptive feminist discourses to issues of gender. Thus the value of proposing an African literary theory would be that it takes into account the complexities and nuances of African societies based on the cultural context and transformative ways of responding to literary texts which reflect an African frame of reference.

CHAPTER 3

THE SACRED IN LITERARY THEORY

3.1 The Spiritual Turn

A major challenge to the advancement of African literary theory and criticism is the inclusion of the spiritual, the sacred and or myth in African works and philosophy. Mark Mathuray (2009) defines Myth as “a narrative about gods or mythic personalities in common usage” (Mathuray, 2009, p. 3). Mathuray (2009) goes further to point out “...myth and narrative are opposed to rationality and truth” and that “the dominant strand in African literary criticism that opposes myth to truth – be it historical or political – partakes of a movement that began with the birth of Western Metaphysics” (Mathuray, 2009, p. 3). However, for many African writers and scholars, there is no real separation between the spiritual or sacred, and normal life in African culture. If one is to talk about an African literary theory it has to take into account the spiritual and the sacred without judgement or placing it in opposition to truth or rationality. This is one of the weaknesses of current literary criticism, especially post-colonial theory, as admitted by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2006) hardly any attention is paid to the significance of the spiritual or sacred in creating ways in which to read literary texts, especially literary texts which abound with such allusions.

Furthermore, in traditional African society spirituality is not divorced from the rational but is actually used to answer and explain the “causal influence” of the spiritual on the natural. Peires explains that the reason Ntsikana and Nxele became so influential in Xhosa society was because “In their own day their attraction depended not on their charisma or their supernatural abilities but on their power to reinterpret a world which had suddenly become incomprehensible” (Peires, 1979, p. 61). Thus the spiritual in African culture is not just “pie in the sky” but has direct bearing on the physical world and “Xhosa religion had long functioned as an instrument for the control of the material world” and Nxele and Ntsikana

were able to provide the Xhosa with acceptable explanations of past events and prescriptions for future actions” (Peires, 1979, p. 61). This approach is clearly reflected in Mgqwetho’s work; she moves with ease between the sacred and the secular, a binary divide not existent in traditional African culture. For example, Mgqwetho refers her readers to Ntsikana’s words “Nanko no Ntsikana kade akutyela zuyeke imali siqu sempundulu”, “Ntsikana warned you a long time ago, / “Money’s the lightning-bird: leave it alone.” (Mgqwetho 2007, p. 61) Often times she quotes Ntsikana’s sayings to substantiate a point; she quotes his sayings as holding keys for how black people should navigate the new world they find themselves in. His approach to the rapidly changing world was that black people should accept Christianity but on their own terms, not with European culture and its vices. Ntsikana’s approach of assimilating Christianity within an African framework, as well as his prophecies provided answers and direction the Xhosa were seeking.

For example, Ntsikana foretold the coming of white people and their money, how they will build roads through the forests as well as the arrival of the *Mfengu* among Xhosa people and how Xhosa people should not mistreat them. He said “Ze ningabachukumisi ke lolohlanga” “Do not mistreat that nation” (Jabavu, 1953, p. 4 my translation). With reference to white people he prophesied that they will bring a button without a hole, he advised “Ma ze ningalamkeli [eliqhosha] liya ku khukulisa uninzi” “Do not accept this button for it will bring great destruction” (Jabavu, 1953, p. 4 my translation). Thus the foreign gods Mgqwetho often refers to are gold and silver which Ntsikana prophesied would come and that black people should not accept.

In “Emva! Kumasiko Andulo” “Back to the age-old ways!” Mgqwetho addresses loss of traditional values and calls for black people to return to ancient ways: “Walahla ubuk’osi walahl’izitembu/ Imbola nesiko kanye kuba Tembu/ lemitshato ngoku iyeyamanina/ Imanywa, iqaulwa kwakumlambo pina” “You cast aside kingship, polygyny too, / ochre and custom in every village. / What must we make of modern marriage? / Wed then split: where do we get this?” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 188 - 189) Mgqwetho suggests that the blessings that black people once had are gone because they have abandoned their customs. She cries out “Hlaziya Yehova imihla yetu/ nje ngokwamandulo ko bawo betu / Ingaba usicekise mpela na?” “Jehovah, replenish our days on earth, / as you did in the time of our

fathers” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 190). When black people kept their customs Mqgqwetho says there was plenty and they were not oppressed or impoverished like they are today and she urges black people to rectify the situation:

Yenza nje ngendoda “Konya Izililo”

Uvuke usiwa guqa nangedolo

Uye kwezo mini ulilela zona

Ukuba ngazo ke watin’ u Ntsikana

Wod’uve!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 191)

Act like a man! Bellow your cry!

After you’ve fallen get to your knees

and return to the days you wail for

when you’ll hear Ntsikana’s words

in the end!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 190)

Mqgqwetho truly believes that if black people cry out to God in repentance and return to their sacred customs which ensured abundance and prosperity they will be restored and they will find spiritual direction in the words of Ntsikana. As demonstrated above this is why in Mqgqwetho’s work she draws on the supernatural to explain the subjugation of black people. Mqgqwetho offers two explanations for why black people are oppressed and draws from both Christian and African cosmology to account for black people’s oppression; firstly, by quoting biblical references and transposing the text to the South African situation. In the preface to “Mene! Mene! Tekele! UFarsin!! U- Daniel 5:25” “Mene! Mene! Tekel! Parsin!! Daniel 5:5”, Mqgqwetho takes the biblical reference about Daniel’s interpretation of the writing on the wall and applies it to the South African context. She writes:

Ngumbhalo lowo makowetu! Ezi ndongeni Zezwe: Ubhalwe ngesi Hebere: Inguqulo yawo iti—u Tixo ububalile ubukumkani bako wabufeza: Ulinganisiwe, ke ngoko eskalini; wafunyanwa ulula. Ubukumkani bako buhlutiwe, banikwa Izizwe ezingqonge Izwe lako: Ngati wawusi tsho kum nawe ndikangele nje; Tata i versi yesine kwakweso Sahluko: Iti—sasela i wayini, sabancoma otixo base mzini; begolide nesilivere nabo b'edu, nabesinyiti, nabemiti, nabamatye: Akunjalo ke? Ngawukangele ke nawe ubunewunewu belilizwe bentlobo zonke: Oleseshayo makaqike! Ukuba lominwe, eyabhala apo Eludongeni, ayimelwena ukuba namhla nje ayingeze ibhalena? Ezindongeni ze Afrika: Tata kwakona! Iversi yamashumi amabini anantatu kwa kweso Sahluko—iti: Sazipakamisa ngapezu ko Tixo Wezulu: Sati namasiko esasivele nawo, sawabona namhlanje ukuba ngawamaqaba; Sisenza u Tixo ke ngoko iqaba: Oyena kuse Sandleni Sake ukupefumla kwetu: Onazo zonke kwanendlela zetu: Camagu!! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 201)

That, my people, is the writing on the walls of the nation. It is written in Hebrew. The translation reads: “God has made a complete accounting of your kingdom. You have been weighed on the scale and found wanting. Your kingdom is therefore confiscated and handed to the nations on your borders.” Now this seems to refer to you and to me. Take the fourth verse in the same chapter. It reads: “We drank wine and praised foreign gods of gold and silver, brass and iron, wood and stone.” Isn’t that true? Look at the great variety of fripperies in this country. Reader, take note! Would that same hand that wrote on those walls over there not write today on the walls of Africa? Take again verse 23 in the same chapter. It reads: “We exalted ourselves above God in heaven.” Today we considered our customs Red, thus making God a Red, He who holds in His hands our breath and our every path. Peace!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 200)

According to Mgqwetho’s reading of this biblical passage, the reason that black people are oppressed is because they have turned to the foreign gods of “gold and silver, brass and iron, wood and stone”; as a result of this they have been handed over to oppressors. These are the very things Ntsikana warned Xhosa people against. Mgqwetho argues that black people by rejecting their own customs have rejected God and by considering their customs heathen they have made God heathen. Thus the reason black people are oppressed is because they have turned their back on God and exalted themselves above him by accepting foreign gods.

In view of this, a crucial element in African literary criticism would be one that does not alienate the supernatural or oppose it to rationality but sees how the supernatural and natural are not divided in African cosmology and to separate the two in analysing African texts would be creating a false dichotomy which would limit and falsify criticism.

As Derrida (1978) points out that “the privileging of the systemic denies the dynamics of the text, continues the project of Western metaphysics: the abrogation of myths in favour of logo-centrism” (Derrida, 1978, p. 291). This is exactly what Nontsizi Mqgqwetho points out and laments in her poem “Saxulutwa! – Ngamatye Omsebenzi!!” “Our efforts stone us!”:

Inyaniso masipatwe ngananinye

Inyaniso kungaviwa bantu banye

Nantso ke! Inyaniso yezi Bhalo

Napantsi ke, kweyetu imibhalo.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 197)

The truth must be treated fairly,

the truth must be heard from both sides:

the truth is there in the scriptures

and also within our blankets.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 196)

The privileging of one way of knowing over the other limits full analysis of the text which would otherwise not reflect African realities but western literary ideals. Thus Mqgqwetho advocates for a return and a privileging of traditional African thought and belief which black people have forsaken in order to chase after foreign ways and beliefs which often leave their minds and souls bankrupt and worse off. In her work, the fundamentals of traditional African

thought and belief are put forward and celebrated and at times severely scrutinised and criticised, but not without basis. Mgqwetho does not turn a blind eye to the shortfalls of traditional African ideology by virtue of it being African, by traditional meaning “without the infusion of foreign influence – most notably without the infusion of Judaic, Islamic, Christian, Greek, and Western conceptual schemes into sub-Saharan cultures”; she applies the same level of scrutiny she uses to examine new or foreign ideas and beliefs (Brown, 2004, p. vii). Through an analysis of Mgqwetho’s poetry, the fundamentals of traditional African thought and belief as outlined by Es’kia Mphahlele and how Mgqwetho valorises and at times critically engages such and other ideologies in her poetry will be discussed. An analysis and understanding of traditional African thought or African humanism is imperative if one is to speak of developing the foundations for an African literary theory. African cosmology permeates and informs every area of life, which is why Mgqwetho urges black people to consult the ancient sage and to seek a solution from the metaphysical world which has a causal relation to the physical world. Even when she uses biblical references as shown above, she uses them to account for the current situation Africans find themselves in; in Mgqwetho’s world there is continuity between the supernatural and the natural and that is something theorists reading and theorising about African texts should take into account.

3.2 African Spirituality

In his book, *Es’kia Continued*, Es’kia Mphahlele (2005) posits the fundamentals of traditional African thought and belief as follows:

- a. Belief in the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is a Vital Force, ever-present, controlling and regulating all life- breathing and inanimate forms (Mphahlele, 2005, p. 253).

This is clearly depicted in Mgqwetho’s poetry; there is never a question about the existence of a Supreme Being or God. In her poems she refers to “God”, “The Creator” and “Shades” indiscriminately because she takes for granted that her readers have a holistic view of life

wherein the sacred and the secular are inseparable. In Janet Hodgson's (1982) *God of the Xhosa*, Hodgson writes about the world-view of the Xhosa as one that does not differentiate between the natural and the supernatural. She explains as follows:

Without a radical gap between nature and the 'gods' religion cannot be a separate category of thought or experience. It is all-pervasive and therefore participates with the 'divine' in one monistic experience. It is characterised by a cosmic oneness. No distinction can be made between sacred and secular, between natural and supernatural, for Nature, Man and the Unseen are inseparably involved in one another in a total community" (Hodgson, 1982, p. 17).

The sacred is a common thread in the works of many African writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, to name a few. The understanding and acknowledgement of the existence of a Supreme Being is undisputed; the main argument or point of difference amongst Africans and African writers is about the politics of God or religion, the role of Christianity in Africa and the dilution or abandonment of African cosmology in exchange for "foreign" gods, which is often perceived as playing a major role in dismantling African values; but there is never a question about the existence of a spiritual world or force.

Thus, naturally Mgqwetho's work is unapologetically concerned with issues of spirituality and religion, the misappropriation thereof and how they inform everyday life. In the poem "Ikona na Intaba Oyaziyo? Kwezi Zimiyo Eyaka Yafuduka" "Show me the mountain that packed up and left" (See Annexure L) in stanza 8 she asks:

Upi yena lo Tixo simtandazayo

Nalo simtandazayo asingowetu

30

Sakwenzela intlants' eziq'uq'umbayo

Ziq'uq'umbela Intaba yase Yuropu.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 126-128)

Where is this God that we worship?

The one we worship's foreign: 30

we kindled a fire and sparks swirled up,
swirled up a European mountain.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 126-128)

Here Mqgqwetho is suggesting that the God or religion that Africans have now adopted is a foreign god, one that is not in line with an African way of life. Instead, this seeking after foreign gods has “swirled up a European mountain” thus what Africans are worshipping is European culture and not God at all: they forsook God in exchange for idols and found themselves with a huge problem. Furthermore, what they have adopted discriminates against black people while favouring white people. As illustrated in stanza 9 and 10:

Nabo ke ubulumko bo Tixo wabo—

Ntu bhinqela Indyebo yase Zulwini

Tina zesibhinquele eye Afrika 35

Zezakwa Faro ke ezo Izilumko.

Ezaziti—tshisa izitena ngenc'a

Litshone Ilanga ungabonanganto

Nangoku kunjalo nakuti Bantsundu

Kusa siqondele! Kuhlwe singaboni.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 126-128) 40

This is the wisdom of their God:

“Black man, prepare for the treasures of heaven
while we prepare for the treasures of Africa!” 35
Just as the wise men of Pharaoh’s land

commanded the Jews: “Use grass to bake bricks,”
leaving them empty-handed at sunset,
so it is for us black people now:
eager at dawn, at dusk empty-handed. 40
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 126-128)

According to this foreign god, black people are to focus and spend their lives preparing for spiritual treasures that they will enjoy once they get to heaven. In the meantime, white people are to enjoy and take for themselves the treasures of Africa. This Mgqwetho likens to the biblical story where the Pharaoh of Egypt made the Jews slaves to work and serve them while they enjoyed the riches of the land, thus leaving black people, like the Jews, empty handed. Clearly, for Mgqwetho this god is no god at all but human greed using the name of God to swindle the oppressed of their riches. In stanza 11, Mgqwetho calls on Africans to return to their own God; to remember the good works he did for them and that he is a restorer of the broken who also provided for them and can provide for them the same nourishment even now if they repent for following after foreign gods. She calls out:

Buya ke! Kumbula u Tixo wako
Umb’oli wenqanawa ziqekeka
U Tambo Dala okade bemqongqota
Mabamqongqote namhlanje e Afrika.

Buya ke! Utabatele ekuqaleni 45

Kumbula Umtundezi wako uneqenqa

Akutundeze ku Lwandle Olubomvu

Ukudla kokucelwa kuyaqumbela

Kauve!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 127-129)

So come on home! Remember your God,

a borer of holes in cracked ships,

Ancient Bone which they sucked for its marrow:

may it still yield them marrow in Africa.

So come back! Make a fresh start!

45

Remember the Crutch you leaned on as lepers,

let Him lead you dryshod through the Red Sea.

Food from another man's pot makes you fart.

Please listen!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 126 - 128)

In the final stanza above, Mgqwetho through the examples she draws from asks black people to see themselves in the suffering of the Jews and how they suffered in the hands of a cruel ruler yet they triumphed and were able to accomplish impossible feats. She concludes by saying that “ukudla kokucelwa kuyaqumbela” “Food from another man's pot makes you fart”. Here one can see that what is implied in Mgqwetho's writing is that unthinkingly taking concepts or ideas from elsewhere and applying them wholesale to an African context has undesirable consequences. Beliefs and ideologies are not just ideas but have tangible bearing and consequences on the lives of the people who embrace and perpetuate them.

Thus even reading literature from a certain perspective has implications for what kind of results one gets and how people begin to theorise and draw conclusions about certain

elements of the work such as the peoples, cultures and beliefs portrayed. Thus reading literature in the context from which it emanates is crucial and can provide a more accurate reading and rendering of a text, hence the proposition that African literature be read and analysed from an African perspective.

In the poem discussed above, the politics of Christianity as preached by Europeans is laid bare. There is a differentiation of God as Africans know him and that of the Europeans; those who embrace the God of the “white man’s bible” are said to be worshipping a foreign God, thus demonstrating that God or the concept of God did not arrive in Africa with Europeans. Mqgqwetho calls the people to return to God as Africans knew him before, because the gospel as preached by Europeans is deceitful and designed to rob the black man of his wealth and treasures while they take for themselves the treasures of Africa. Mqgqwetho likens the African situation at the time to that of the Israelites who were under Pharaoh’s oppressive rule and implores them to start over and let God lead the African people “dryshod through the Red Sea.” By placing or inscribing Africans in biblical stories, Mqgqwetho is advocating for “blacks” to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, and not according to the Europeans who use it to subjugate black people whilst enriching themselves.

In the poem “Yeyapina Lemfundiso?” “Where does this teaching come from?” (See annexure M for full poem), the preface to the poem contains a biblical passage from Matthew 28: 19-20 which reads as follows:

Hambani! Niye kuzenza abafundi zonke intlanga: Nizifundise egameni lo Yise nelo Nyana nelo Moya Oyingcwele, nifundise ukuba bazigcine zonke izinto endiniwisele umteto ngazo. Sifunde ntonina ke tina kubelungu? Yiyipina ke lemiteto yawiselwa abelungu nguSomandla, ukuba bayifundise tina ukuze siyigcine? Yile mfundiso yo Tsalitoro na o Kesare belilizwe? Asinakuyibona ke mos ne ndlela esinga ezulwini, ukuba kunjalo: Hayikona! (Quoted in Mqgqwetho, 2007, p. 401)

Go and make disciples of all nations. Teach them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, teach them to obey all those things I commanded you as law. What have we learnt from the whites? Which

are the laws the Almighty commanded the whites to teach us to obey? Is it the teaching of Hertzog and the Caesars of this country? If that's the case, we just can't see the way to heaven. Oh no! (Quoted in Mqgqwetho, 2007, p. 400)

Mqgqwetho demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the Bible, and adopts a critical stance towards how it has been read and preached to blacks and how it has been used as an object of dispossession for black people. She awakens her readers to interrogate if that is really what the Bible teaches; if the unjust laws in South Africa are what they are commanded to obey. She clearly differentiates against the misreadings of the Bible as preached by white people and her interpretation of what the Bible speaks for itself. In stanza 2 she continues as follows:

Kudala zinqoza sibona madoda

Kudala kufiwa sisiva madoda

Kukutshwa nabantu besiye 'mfazweni

Nezwi lika Tixo likwa seluhlwini

Yin' nale!

10

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 400 – 402)

For a long time, men, we occasionally see,

for a long time, men, we hear of the slain.

Our people were seized and sent off to war,

with the word of God as a battle cry.

What's this?

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 400-402)

Mgqwetho could possibly be making reference to the First World War where black South African troops died on board the ship Mendi, which sailed to France from Southampton. On board the ship were mainly black men who were to serve in France but died when the ship sank. Mgqwetho finds it strange that people would be “seized and sent off to war” in the name of God. In the next stanza she shows that the people who did this had no regard for black lives but wanted to use them for their own victory:

U-Kafile makafe singama Britani

Tina sonihluta intlaka emlonyeni

Asikanenzi nto singama Britani

Itole lemfene likula esizini

Niyabeva!

15

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 400 – 402)

“We’re British: the Kaffirs can die!

We’ll rip the candy from your mouths.

We didn’t touch you: we’re British!

A baby baboon’s no stranger to misery.”

Do you hear?

15

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 400 - 402)

The British are depicted as cruel racists with blatant disregard for black lives so the loss of black lives in the above stanza is illustrated as nothing significant because it has occurred many times before therefore it does not matter. What is a great tragedy for black people is viewed as no eventuality by the English. In stanza 6 of the poem Mgqwetho asks “Zipi I Bhaibhile namhla magqob’oka” “Christians, where are your bibles today?” Mgqwetho asks this because it has become abundantly clear that they embraced something that seems to destroy them and they have been burnt by it.

The above poem depicts common sentiments amongst many African writers about the role of Christianity in pillaging Africa, however, there is hope beyond the status quo as Mqgqwetho points out that whites should not fool themselves because “Kaloku lihleli ele Zulu I “Tshawe” “the Prince of Heaven’s wide awake” suggesting that there will be a day of reckoning for all the deception and injustice brought by Europeans. Again, the political and spiritual are intertwined, there is no distinction between the two, and one informs the other.

In many of his works, Wa Thiong’o exposes the role of missionary Christianity in Africa as one of exploitation and hypocrisy which in turn the colonised have imbibed and now use to perpetuate injustice and elitism in Africa. Celebrated Xhosa writer and poet, S. E. K. Mqhayi, in his most renowned poem of protest, “AA! ZWELIYAZUZA, ITSHAWE LASEBHILITANI!” “The Prince of Britain”, observes the same hypocritical nature in the dissemination of missionary Christianity among black South Africans.

Hay’ kodw’ iBritan’ eNkulu –

Yeza nebhottle neBhayibhile;

Yeza nomfundis’ exhag’ ijoni;

Yeza nerhuluwa nesinandile;

Yeza nenkanunu nemfakadolo.

Tarhu, Bawo, sive yiphi na?

(Mqhayi, 1942, p. 70-73)

Hayi, the mighty Great Britain!

Here she comes with bible and bottle;

Here she comes, a missionary escorted by a soldier;

With gunpowder and guns,

With canons and breechloader.

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

(Translation by R. Kavanagh and Z.S. Qangule, 1971, p. 16)

Here Mqhayi is interrogating the way in which Christianity came to black people in Africa. The same alcohol missionaries discouraged and abhor amongst Africans is what they brought along with the Bible. The missionary, a supposed bearer of good news, is depicted as escorted by a soldier flanked by military weapons. This apparent hypocrisy is what many African writers explicitly disdained and what made them reluctant to embrace Christianity as preached by missionaries.

Clearly, the political role of Christianity has become a major theme in many African works, and an area of contention for many African writers; yet the presence and significance of a Supreme Being is never disputed. Thus, when one reads African texts they are permeated with spirituality or the sacred and if such a significant aspect of African texts is not taken into account when analysing such texts, the dynamics or complexities of the texts are not revealed. As shown in the poems analysed thus far, Mqgqwetho does not view her writing as religious writing because the distinction between the religions and secular does not exist in a traditional African worldview. This is why she criticises the rising black elite and calls them “Nigqobok’emini kuhlwe nizincuka” “you’re Christians by day, hyenas by night...” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 51); they have created a distinction between what they profess to believe and how they live. Their professed ideology does not inform their way of life; there’s a discrepancy between what they publicly do and how they go about in private thus breaking the natural flow of the metaphysical into the material world. Mqgqwetho thus calls them “Ngenxa yelamfundo yenu magqob’oka” “Christians, because of your school education” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 224).

The missionaries were the first to introduce western schooling amongst black people and as a result the education they received was Christian. If someone was educated they were viewed as Christian but seemingly as Mqgqwetho notes, their behaviour belies their confession or the new religion they have embraced thus creating discontinuity between the spiritual and the physical realm. The implications of this in literature is that theory should not be divorced

from the context in which it the work emanates; there has to be a link between the theoretical framework and the cultural framework of a work in order to do justice to the work.

To merely read a work without considering factors that inform the text would be to falsify criticism. To view African texts that contain spiritual elements as religious texts would be a superficial and inaccurate reading of a text without taking into account the rich dynamics and complexities of the context of the work.

3.3 African Humanism

Mphahlele (2005) explains more about the “Supreme Being” according to traditional African thought and belief:

- b. The Supreme Being inhabits all space. The presence of the Being is in all humans, inanimate things, all of external nature, a presence that ensures the interconnectedness of phenomena; the organic wholeness of life. Hence the African is traditionally more a synthesist than an analyst. That is, we perceive the wholeness of events, things, humans rather than what separates them. In the new age, we have to adjust to the need to analyse, to find a balance between this and the inclination to synthesise. It is so common for a person in this culture to say, *Boteng bja motho ke Modimong* – in the innermost part of us, there God dwells (Mphahlele, 2004, p. 253).

Throughout Mqgwetho’s work she demonstrates an awareness and understanding of this perception of things as a whole and the inclination among fellow Africans to synthesise more readily than analyse, hence she urges black people to analyse and search the Scriptures for themselves, to meet her in sober debate, and to battle with what she says. This is clearly illustrated in her poem “*Induli ka Xakeka! – Eyanyukwa ngu Ntu!!*” “The hill Difficulty the black man scales” (See Annexure N for full poem) where Mqgwetho seems to be awakening the black masses and rousing them from their slumber in order for them to adopt a critical attitude and to examine the status quo. In the first two stanzas she stresses:

Bona ke! Namhlanje ndifun' uqondile
Mfondini wakuti nantso intlekele
Make uzibuze wozu undingqinele
Make kaloku nje sitwax' ukuteta

Nduli ayinyukeki! Iyatshitiza 5
Andizikukwekwa ndirola umxelo
Yiyipi okwangoku ebhadlileyo
Into eseyimile kwezabantsundu
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 94-95)

Look! Today I want you to understand
the essence of our distress.
Compatriot, wrestle with what I say,
meet me in sober debate.

The hill can't be scaled! It's slippery. 5
I won't mince words, I'll bare my heart:
up to this point in time,
just what have blacks achieved?
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 94-95)

Here Mgqwetho calls fellow Africans to interrogate the status quo and critically engage with her to see what exactly it is that blacks have achieved up to date, to track their progress if

there has been any. She turns to the African National Congress as a case in point. She calls black people to take stock instead of continuing to support an organisation that does not have their best interest at heart. She bravely points out that “Mna ke ngokwam andikunqweneli / ’Kutyafisa imigudu eseyenziwe” “But as for me, I’m not at pains/ to mock their efforts to date” and begins to point out their weaknesses: “kukutanda amawonga” “vying for status”, “Ngu mona uba libhaxa kulonduli/ Yimali iba libhaxa kulonduli.” “Envy’s an obstacle up this hill, money’s another obstacle...”, “Umanyano ulibhaxa kule nduli” “Uniting’s an obstacle up this hill” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 96). This is what Mgqwetho cites from her own analysis and she asks black people to make their own analysis and tell her if she is wrong in her findings.

Right from the onset Mgqwetho wants her readers to critically engage with her viewpoint and urges them to understand, to “wrestle” with what she is about to put forward and not just accept it, but to examine it and counter her argument. Thus, Mgqwetho seems to be working from an assumption about her readership: that they do not want to take such an approach. Hence she writes from an understanding of traditional African thought and belief which more readily synthesises than analyses. In the poem above she makes numerous sweeping statements about the struggle or “hill Difficulty” black people are facing; she is clearly provoking and jolting her readers to think deeply about their status quo, how they have come to be in the oppressed position they find themselves in and what they have done about it. This can be a shocking if not an offensive question for her readers who valued the political party as a beacon of hope towards liberation. Yet, Mgqwetho seems to criticise its very efforts up to date pointing out envy, greed, love for money and lack of unity as major concerns of the party. She concludes by saying:

Induli—ka Xakeka enyukwa ngu Ntu

Nobila negazi aninakuyinyuka

Anitandi Sizwe nitand’ izisulu

75

Nangoku kunjalo pikis’ ezo ndawo

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 99)

Sweat blood, you won't make the top
of this hill Difficulty the black man scales;
you've no love for the nation, only for bargains. 75
That's the truth. Have I got it wrong?
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 99)

The reasons she cites for why black people have not triumphed over oppression are selfish ambition, lack of patriotism and love for bargains. She asks her readers if this is not so. Not only is Mgqwetho asking her readers to interrogate black progress but she is mocking their efforts thus far. She paints the party as one riddled with envy and selfish gain and ambition. To show the strength of her point she asks the elders or "Greybeards" if she is wrong in her assessment of the situation, it shows the confidence she has in her argument and that her analysis cannot be disputed, even by the eldest and wisest in the community. She lists all the stumbling blocks to black liberation and is eager to draw out a response from her readers.

Mgqwetho goes further to point out that no matter what black people do, as long as they are divided and discriminating and exploiting those less educated than them, they will not triumph. This is clearly illustrated in stanza five where she says "Your loathing and goading of Reds/ are obstacles up this hill - / yet how you covet their cash! / Sweat all you like, you won't reach the top." Any attempts so far to overcome black oppression have been futile because selfish and personal gain is the order of the day. She suggests to her readers that unity is the only solution to any real significant change in the black situation. Internal contention is clearly depicted as having taken away a lot of time that could have been used productively; instead the nation is left in a vulnerable state. Mgqwetho builds a very strong and clear case for why things are as they are in South Africa and why in her view black people at the time had not yet achieved anything of lasting value in overcoming white domination.

Interestingly, she points out that the real enemy is not only racist and oppressive white rule; rather the situation is exacerbated by financial misconduct, exploitation of the masses and selfish ambition. In stanza seventeen she asks her readers: “Did the whites instruct you not to unite?”... “Did the whites instruct us to squander our funds?” The main argument throughout this poem clearly demonstrates that for Mqgqwetho, blacks are their own worst enemy: the masses need to interrogate themselves and their leaders and not just accept things as they are but to look at the root and critically examine and account for the status quo. She draws her readers to ask pertinent questions and provokes them to action and to really examine their condition. She clearly demonstrates the urgent need for Africans to begin to interrogate their position in the world, their role in it, as well as their implicit role in their own limitations. This process of analysis is the beginning of decolonising the African mind.

Thirdly, Mphahlele (2005) points out that:

- c. These elements of our belief system are at the centre of African humanism: the value of humankind as the centre of life. The value of being: to be, that is ultimately superior to the tendency to have (Mphahlele, 2005, p. 253).

Mqgqwetho’s work points out that the leaders of the African National Congress have adopted the foreign concept of “having” as a higher value than that of “being”. Furthermore, in African culture ancestors and elders are held in very high esteem and their wisdom and sayings are often called upon and remembered, and in Mqgqwetho’s poetry she often asks her readers to remember Ntsikana’s sayings and to seek the counsel of the seers in the land because they are seen as custodians of ancient wisdom and because of the belief that “Inyati ibuzwa kwabaphambili” “Wisdom is learnt from the elders”. In “Lunguza! Ku-ya-sa” “Take a look, dawn’s breaking” she urges “Bhek’Ezincwadini Nyange Lemihla/ Unganqandwa ngabelung’ yonke lemhla” “Go back to the books of the people of old, / and stop being stripped by whites everyday” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 234 -235).

It is no wonder then that Mqgqwetho valorises human relations, decries exploitation and stresses the importance of unity as she often says in many of her poems “unity is our only strength” and calls upon black nations to unite. Thus, the achievement of unity and the acquisition of exemplary moral character are seen as precursors to black integrity and liberation and an embodiment of traditional African belief and thought. Mqgqwetho’s poetry embodies the values of traditional African belief and thought and demonstrates their importance in Africa’s restoration. She often says “Ukumbule apo waw’uvela kona ufun’osiyazi bahlab’ezintloko” “Always recall where you come from: / seek the seers to tell you straight” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 60-61). She also recognises the lack of scrutiny as a shortfall of traditional African humanism and uses her poetry to awaken blacks to critical engagement and action and not to uncritically imbibe another’s philosophy. As she points out, “Ukudla kokucelwa kuyaqumbela” “Food from another man’s pot makes you fart” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 128), the literal translation means borrowed food makes you constipated. Thus Africans should seek nourishment and solutions for themselves As Wa Thiong’o (1987) points out:

Our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it and those committed to breaking it up; those who aim to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow [...] and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes (Wa Thiong’o, 1987 (b), p. 53).

Mqgqwetho’s poetry shows an insistent commitment to awakening the people and the defence of black territorial integrity. She often says “Lomhlaba I Afrika ngumhlaba wetu” “This land of Africa is ours” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 228). She shakes black people from their lethargy by asking them to wrestle with what she says and to meet her in sober debate, and by being what Fanon (1967) calls an awakener of the people “hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature” (Fanon, 1967, p. 179).

From the analysis of Mqgqwetho’s work thus far it is clear that Mqgqwetho does not believe in adopting “foreign gods” or “food from another man’s pot” for Africa’s restoration. She

believes that Africa is God given to Africans and that Africans should unite; furthermore she believes that the status quo will not remain forever because “the Prince of heaven’s watching”. Thus what theorists can glean from her work is the focus on Africa, seeing what is lacking and building what is required, rather than relying on theorists from elsewhere to show the way. Thus literary theorists should have Africa at the centre of their theories and as a point of departure rather than taking theories from elsewhere to read and analyse African works. As stressed before, African texts are often filled with spiritual references which are often taken for religiosity if one is reading from a western perspective. Yet, in traditional African society spirituality permeates every area of life and has direct bearing on everyday life and is not seen as “sacred” and everyday life as “secular”. Being aware of this in approaching African literature gives one insight into the cultural framework of the text rather than imposing one’s own cultural framework on a text from another culture. Thus for theoretical purposes Africa should be the focus; its culture, its values and ways of approaching and accounting for problems should be privileged.

CHAPTER 4

XHOSA POETRY

4.1 The role of the *Imbongi* in Xhosa Society

In the Xhosa language a poet is referred to as *imbongi* and his or her poetry as *izibongo*. Xhosa poetry is often referred to as praise poetry and the poet as a praise poet. Archie Mafeje (1967) describes the *imbongi* as “A praise poet who frequented the chief’s great place and travelled with him in traditional Nguni society. His distinctive feature is that he can recite poems without having prepared them beforehand” (Mafeje, 1967, p. 91). When a poet does this it is referred to as *ukubonga* which the *Kafir-English dictionary* defined as “To praise, extol loudly and impromptu by songs or orations; to praise, magnify, laud, celebrate the deeds of a chief, or the feats of race oxen, or the valour of an army” (Kropf, 1915, p. 42).

Kaschula (2002) further explains the poet’s relationship with the chief as follows: “Traditionally the most recognised *iimbongi* were those who were attached to the chiefs and who produced oral poetry in honour of the chiefs” (Kaschula, 2002, p. 3). However, *izibongo* are not limited to praising the chief and A.C Jordan (1973) was at pains to stress this point:

It must be repeated that the African traditional praise poem is not, as most white people think, just a song of praise in which the bard showers flattering epithets on his chief. The “praises of the chiefs” deal primarily with the happenings in and around the tribe during the reign of a given chief, praising what is worthy and decrying what is unworthy, and even forecasting what is going to happen: rivalries for the chieftainship within the tribe; the ordinary social life; alliances and conflicts with neighbouring tribes; military and political triumphs and reverses, etc. Thus the African bard is a chronicler as well as being a poet. The chief is only the center of the praise-poem because he is the symbol of the tribe as a whole (Jordan, 1973, p. 59 - 60).

Ruth Finnegan aptly sums up the traditional role of *iimbongi* as “praise and reproof for those then in power” (Quoted in Kaschula, 2002, p. vi). Opland (1998) highlights that it is not only the *imbongi* who composes poetry in traditional Xhosa society; in his seminal work *Xhosa Poets and Poetry* he identifies and distinguishes four types of poetic activity in isiXhosa:

In the contemporary tradition of Xhosa izibongo we must note firstly that many Xhosa speakers, especially those living in the rural areas, have the ability to compose poetry spontaneously. Secondly, many people have memorized a few significant poems, such as those of their clans, their relatives or their associates; such individuals may compose their own poems, which they memorise and repeat verbatim at each performance and which their associates might learn. Thirdly, there is 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 (Opland, 1998, p. 5).

He further categorises the four activities which form the Xhosa poetic tradition as “...general improvising, memorizing, the refined improvising of the *imbongi*, and writing” (Opland, 1998, p. 6). Opland (1998) explains that improvisation “...usually happens at social functions with many people present, events such as weddings, beer-drinking parties or dances” (Opland, 1998, p. 6). How this occurs is that “The poets feel inspired and moved by the specific occasion, and give expression to emotion through energetic verbalisation. The poetry would tend to be crude and unpolished, and would normally be uttered in a loud, high-toned voice and at a fast rate” (Opland, 1998, p. 6). Grahamstown Poet, Monde Mothlabane, tells of a similar experience: “One day I went to the Church of the Order of Ethiopia. There was an occasion there. I was just going to observe. I just got up and let go and spoke” (Quoted in Kaschula, 2002, p. 49).

On the other hand “A memoriser learns a poem by heart; whenever he or she performs, the poem is repeated with few – if any – verbal alterations. Such performers may have composed the poem themselves, they may have picked it up by listening to another memoriser repeating

the poem, or they have learned it from a book” (Opland, 1998, p. 11). Opland (1998) further explains that “women especially may memorise short izibongo for their relatives and utter them as an expression of pride or thanks” (Opland, 1998, p. 12).

Finally, the distinguishing feature of an *imbongi* is that, although many people can *bonga*, most are not *iimbongi*. To sum it up “...the imbongi is in essence merely a man particularly gifted in spontaneous poetic expression” (Opland, 1998, p. 11). Opland (1998) describes the distinct role of the *imbongi* in traditional Xhosa society as follows:

In past days, the *imbongi* was a man intimately connected with a chief, and invariably formed part of the chief’s official entourage. Wherever the chief went, the *imbongi* preceded him, shouting on *izibongo* in his praise. This he would do when the chief entered a meeting place, for example, or a court hearing, or when the chief visited neighbouring chiefs. The *imbongi* thus acted as a herald announcing the arrival of an important personage, who could be identified by his *izibongo*...he had the privilege of criticizing the chief in his poetry with impunity. ... His criticism was never intended to stir up dissent or dissatisfaction, but rather to express popular opinion and to moderate excessive behaviour. The *imbongi* thus acted as the spokesman of the people. In turn, he aroused in the people intense feelings of loyalty for the chief. He can be seen, therefore, as an important mediator between chief and commoner. His ability to arouse emotions was especially noticeable in times of war, when he inspired the warriors to acts of bravery. By constant reference in his *izibongo* to the chief’s genealogy and the history of the group, he not only acted as an ethnic history book but also moulded communal solidarity...

All this made *imbongi* an important personage in rural life. On ceremonial occasions he wore a distinctive outfit consisting of a cloak and hat of animal skins and he carried two assegais. For his services the chief would often reward him with gifts of cattle. He was a highly respected figure whose opinion was valued (Opland, 1998, p. 17).

Clearly, the role of the *imbongi* in Xhosa society is a complex one and one that is treated with great respect and reverence even today, even though the functions mentioned above have significantly changed.

4.2 The Types of *iimbongi*

Local Xhosa poet, Monde Mothlabane, categorises today's *iimbongi* into three categories:

Iimbongi zomthonyama: This is the traditional poet who only produces spontaneous oral poetry. Such a person would not necessarily have been exposed to the dynamics of education.

Iimbongi zosiba: This is the poet who writes his or her poetry; an educated person.

There is also a group of *iimbongi* today who operate within both these paradigms. In fact, it would appear that today many *iimbongi* are in a position to produce oral as well as written poetry.

(Quoted in Kaschula, 2002, p. 61).

Traditionally there was no need to categorise *iimbongi* because there were only *iimbongi zomthonyama* because oral literature preceded written literature. But with the advent of western education through the missionaries, for the first time the Xhosa language was committed to writing and thus paved the way for a new category in Xhosa poetry: *Iimbongi zosiba*. Prior to written literature, Xhosa literature and history was passed down orally and *iimbongi* produced their poetry spontaneously as if in a trance like state and no one poem could be reproduced in the same way every time. Traditionally, Xhosa *iimbongi* described an overpowering emotion that moved them to spontaneously produce poetry without any prior preparation.

The first stanza of the “Imbongi ye Zibuko” “The poet of the ford” demonstrates that Mqgwetho operated within both paradigms of *iimbongi* described above. In this instance even though Mqgwetho wanted to sleep she could not shake off the urge to write; she wrestled till dawn because of the burning issue of the ford and her outlet for this poetic outburst was putting ink to paper even though she wanted to be left alone to sleep. She writes:

1 Ndiyeke ndilale wetu No Inki

Andilalanga pezolo kude kwasa

Ndipetwe ngumva ndedwa

Wani wetu? Au! we Zibuko.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 39)

1 Ink, leave me to sleep.

Last night I tossed and turned

and fell asleep at dawn.

Why was that? Au! The ford.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 38)

Furthermore, this shows Mgqwetho's concern for issues of national significance. She was worried about the state of the nation of South Africa and her concerns exceeded those of the traditional *imbongi* which were mainly of the tribe. Mgqwetho also performed her poetry. In "Pulapulani Makowetu" "Listen, compatriots!" Mgqwetho spontaneously performed poetry at a communal gathering and did what was taboo by praising chiefs and as a result she was "Watshiswa zinduku kumataf'akwa Ngqika"/Kubonga amakosi not amabhungexe" "thrashed by kieres on Ngqika plains / for praising chiefs instead of commoners" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 80). Perhaps in this instance the spontaneous sensation that *iimbongi* often experience overtook Mgqwetho and although she knew not to praise chiefs, she could not contain herself.

4.3 Chizama: The female poet

Fanon (1967) describes the role of the colonised writer and explains that “... the first duty of the colonised poet itself is to clearly define the people, the subject of his creation” (Fanon, 1967, p. 7). A significant portion of Mqgqwetho’s poetry is solely dedicated to defining the people. Not only does she define the people but she dissects their very make up, their vices and their strengths. She knows and understands her subject and does not hesitate to substantiate her claims using examples that clearly resonated with the people of her time and now with the contemporary reader. For example, in “Induli ka Xakeka!—Enyukwa ngu Ntu!!!” “The hill Difficulty the black man scales” Mqgqwetho asks:

Ngumlungu na? Ote mansingamanyani

Sixwitane sodwa sibang’amawonga

Ndingatini betu pikis’ezo ndawo

Ngumlunguna? Ote masitye zimali

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 98-99)

Did the whites instruct us not to unite?

We stand on each other to reach above.

What more can I say? Have I got it wrong?

Did the whites instruct us to squander our funds?

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 98-99)

Mqgqwetho points out internal division, greed, always fighting with one another and squandering of funds as the order of the day amongst black people and that they cannot blame white people for that. Furthermore, she argues that the only way to overcome these is if black people unite. In the next stanza she writes that “Ngapandle kokuba konke nimanyane/ Anisokuze hai nimkwele umlungu” “if you don’t all get together/ you’ll never saddle a

white” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 98-99). Thus unity is depicted as the only way for black people to overcome racial oppression and Mqgqwetho is acutely aware of what stands in the way of black liberation.

In “Ngubani Oti Ukuvumisa Akufuneki?” “Who said there’s no need of divination?” (See Annexure P for full poem) she cites the abandonment of African customs and replacing them with European ones as a major stumbling block to liberation. She shows how black people have traded their customs to their own detriment:

Sayek’izitembu namhla siyashwsha
Sayeka nemb’ola kodwa siyashusha
Yiyo ke lemfundo siq’ayisa ngayo
Siyemnka nomfula tu —nto kwakuyiyo
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 311)

We gave up polygamy; today we take lovers.
We gave up ochre, but now we’re all drunk.
It’s all the fault of this learning we praise;
we slip downstream empty-handed.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310)

In this poem Mqgqwetho seems to suggest that what black people gave up was much better than what they gained because now they seem to be in a worse off position. For instance, giving up polygamy and taking lovers instead could seem attractive because one will not be required to show the same responsibility that would be required if one took a wife, such as paying *lobola*. But female lovers would be worse off because they will have no social measure to ensure their safety and provision as women would be in a position to in a polygamous setting. Furthermore, black people used to paint ochre on their faces which was

harmless but they washed off the ochre from their faces to show they have parted with traditional customs but in its place they embraced drunkenness. In this poem black people are depicted as sinking further and further into depravation because of a loss of traditional values and morality. This she accredits to the “learning” or education that black people praised and embraced seemingly to their detriment. In “Tsheca_Lomgibe!!” “Snap this snare” she elaborates on this saying:

Amasiko entlanga angumgibe kuwe

Inene ke nditsho kangela ken awe

Akukho ntwisento kwinto zakowetu

Seyele sazika ndifungu’amawetu:

Lamasiko asahlule no Tixo

Nandzo ke intloko kweyetu ingxoxo

Asichita konke asenz’izigede

Konyana nentombi apos’amagade.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 315)

Foreign ways are a snare to you.

In truth I say so; look for yourself.

Everything’s gone that once was of value.

We’ve sunk deep, I swear by my people.

These ways drove a wedge between us and God:

those are the headings in our discussion.

They scattered us and mowed us down.

They hurled clods at our sons and daughters.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 314)

Thus the adoption of foreign ways such as European culture is portrayed as a trap for black people and she urges her readers to look around and see for themselves if this is not so. She argues that whatever was of value is now gone and foreign ways have alienated black people from God and assaulted their children. This division was common amongst black people because with the introduction of western education and Christianity, some were against these “foreign ways” whilst others embraced them. One can imagine that they also created a generational gap where young people were eager for this new learning and in embracing it they turned from the way their parents raised them and adopted European culture. Mqgqwetho specifically addresses young people and how they have neglected their parents upon receiving education in the poem “Isimbonono Saba Zali!!” “Lament of the parents”. She calls:

Bekindlebe! Wena Ntombi naw Nyana

Abazali bamangel’ u akunani

Faniselana iyinja isidenge

Umniniyo imenzela ububele.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 131)

Girls and boys, lend me your ears!

The parents complain of neglect.

Even a dog without brains

shows kindness to its owner.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 130)

Clearly, this was a widespread phenomenon that Mqgqwetho would notice it and dedicate a whole poem to it. She calls for young people to listen to her and she brings it to their attention that parents feel neglected and that the least they could do is to show kindness to them in the same way that dogs do to their owners. The way that they have neglected them is shown in the next stanza where children leave their parents presumably in search of greener pastures in the city despite their parents’ warning: “Beyala belila benganakuviwa/ Zintombi zemfundo

nonyana bemfundo” “They warned and they wept but nobody heard them,/ sons and daughters who’d all been to school./ Ha-la-la!” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 130-131). The neglect that the parents are experiencing is shown as coming from children who had gone to school, thus it is this new learning that has disturbed the natural order in the village. The children are not there now to carry out their responsibilities in the home and parents are left with no one to help them carry out the duties of running a home:

Ngawukangele xa bengasenamandla

Ngawukangele kungeko nok’amanzi

Ngawukangele kungeko nazinkuni

Ngawukangele belala bengatyanga

Camagu! Bo!!”

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 133)

Just look at them now that they’ve lost their strength,

just look at them sitting without any water,

just look at them sitting without any firewood,

just look at them hungry with nothing to eat.

Peace! Oh!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 132)

Traditionally in Xhosa culture children had different responsibilities in the home such as fetching water from the river, collecting firewood and cooking food. But now that their parents have invested their money in educating their children they are left with no strength to carry out these duties that would otherwise be carried out by their children. Because of their learning the children abandon the rural space and go to the city in search of work. Mgqwetho believes that this situation is caused by the teaching that children receive at school from the white missionaries which is said to come from the Bible. She admonishes the youth and commands them as follows:

Zilahle kwane Bhaibhile uzitshise

Abazali akufeketwa ngabo

Ngenxa yabo sakutshata siqaula

Ngenxa yabo solobola siketa.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 133)

Throw down and burn those bibles.

You don't play around with your parents:

through them we marry and separate,

through them we choose and pay dowry.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 132)

Mgqwetho points out the important role that parents play in the lives of their children even when they are adults. Mgqwetho seems to suspect that they are taught something different from what they have been taught at home such as honouring and looking after their parents and reprimands them to burn their Bibles. Seemingly for Mgqwetho, it is the new teaching and Christian education that they are receiving that is causing the youth to neglect their parents. In many instances throughout her poetry Mgqwetho notes that “Wavela umlungu kungeko zimanga /Weza nge Bhaibhile ngoko sati manga” “When the white appeared, all was normal: abnormality came with his bible (Opland (ed and trans) 2007, p. 278-279) hence she wants to burn what she deemed to be the source of all this trouble. Opland explains Mgqwetho's stance when it comes to the Bible as follows: “It is the white man's bible she rejects, not the word of God in the bible. Both black and white must recognise and not abuse the truth that resides in the bible. Blacks must accept the bible's truth, not as the white man interprets it but as blacks discern it” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. xxiv). Thus the white man's interpretation of the Bible and his teachings are what Mgqwetho finds problematic, not the Bible itself. She seems to suggest that whatever teachings black people receive should be scrutinised and not accepted without interrogating their true source.

The space that Mqgqwetho occupies as a female *imbongi* is a rarity in traditional Xhosa society; to be *imbongi* was the preserve of men and *iintsomi* (folktales) that of women. However, Mqgqwetho takes on this role of a poet with great authority and in some of her poems takes on the persona of a man to amplify her voice. Yet, she is well aware of her possibly transgressive role as a female poet and does not shy away from it. In a poem in praise of the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu*, Marshall Maxeke and his wife, Charlotte Maxeke, Mqgqwetho addresses the fact that female *imbongi* are a new phenomenon in Xhosa society:

Hamba Sokulandela,
Kuba tina simadoda nje asizange
Siyibone kowetu imbongikazi,
Yenkazana kuba imbongi inyuka
Nenkundla ituke inkosi

Hamba Sokulandela,
Nezi mbongikazi Tina sizibona
Apa kweli lo laita ne bhekile.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 3)

Go and we'll follow you:
no female poet
came from our house:
the poet who rouses the court
and censures the king's always male.

Go and we'll follow you!
We first encountered these female poets

here in this land of thugs and booze (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 2)

Thus female poets are associated with the move away from traditional values and the moral degeneration of the city which allows Mgqwetho to take on this role. In yet another poem, Mgqwetho addresses the marginalisation and silencing of women; “Pulapulani! Makowetu!” “Listen, Compatriots!” is about her journey as a poet and her contribution to Xhosa poetry and sings her own praises as a formidable female poet. In traditional Xhosa society women were free to compose and recite poems about themselves and in this poem Mgqwetho follows that tradition. In it however she mentions how she was not allowed to praise chiefs as her male counterparts by virtue of her being a woman. In the first four stanzas Mgqwetho describes her poetic prowess:

Taru! Nontsizi dumezweni ngentsholo

Nto ezibongo ziyintlaninge yezwe

Indlovu ke ayisindwa ngumboko wayo

Awu! Taru! Sikukukazi piko e Afrika.

Esikusela amatole aze engemki

5

Emke nezinye intaka eziwadlayo

Uyaziwa lilizwe nambakazi yezulu

Enqenwe nazi Mbongi zada zaxelelana.

Wugqwetele Mgqwetto lomhlaba ka Palo

Beta izizwe ngesitunzi zidangale

10

Uliramncwa akuvelwa ngasemva

Nabakwaziyo babeta besotuka.

Taru! Mdakakazi omabalaziziba

Ovumba linuka okwenyoka yomlambo

Camagu! Nawe Ndlovu edla Pezulu

15

Uzibhalile noko Inkomo zakwa Mqgqwetho.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 77 -78)

Mercy, Nontsizi, renowned for your chanting,
your poems are the nation's bounty.
No elephant finds its own trunk clumsy.
Awu! Mercy, old hen's wing in Africa!

Hen screening her chicks 5
from birds of prey,
the nation knows you, sky-python,
poets sneer but discuss you.

Turn Phalo's land on its head, Mqgqwetho,
whack nations and sap their standing. 10
Wild beast too fierce to take from behind,
those who know tremble in tackling you.

Mercy, dusky pool-tinted woman,
your stench reeks like the river snake.
Peace! Elephant browsing the tops, 15
you've made a household name of Mqgqwetho.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 77-78)

Mqgqwetho describes herself as a renowned poet with brilliant poetic skills and goes as far as saying that her poems are the nation's bounty, it is from this poem that the title of her collection was taken. In justifying praising herself so generously she points out that "Indlovu ke ayisindwa ngumboko wayo" "no elephant finds its own trunk clumsy" and continues to

identify herself as an old hen's wing in Africa. This description paints her as taking on a protective role which makes sense in the context of her body of poetry as she defends those who have been ill-treated such as black people in general but also protects her readers from political leaders who are after monetary gain by exposing their true ambitions and as discussed above even speaks on behalf of neglected parents. This is true to the role of *imbongi* in that they would praise that which is good but criticise what is undesirable.

In the second stanza of the poem she develops this idea further by painting herself as a “Esikusela amatole aze angemki/ Emke nezinye intake eziwadlayo” “hen screening her chicks/ from birds for prey” and that the country knows her for doing this. She cites that even though other poets mock her they discuss her ideas. The suggestion here is that they mock her only because they are jealous but they cannot refute her ideas because they carry clout. In the next stanza she paints herself as one who interrogates matters as she turns Phalo's land on its head. Here she makes use of a pun by using her name Mgqwetho which means to turn things inside out and that is exactly what she does, she interrogates and weighs things to discover their essence. Renowned Xhosa writer S. E. K. Mqhayi also uses the same pun on her name (See Annexure O):

Pendula ntombi ka Mgqweto
Wen' usikumbuz' imigqweto.
Mbongikazi Nontsizi pendula
Pendula ntombi yakwa Cizama
Yakwa Ncenceza kwa Ncoko.
Zixelel' intomb' ukuba ndisapila
Ndisapil' umzimba nomxelo,—
Andikuzi tengisa nangegolide
Nange perule nange Kristale
Nange jaspire nange hakinto
Hayi nakanye zinkosi zam!

(See Annexure O)

Answer, Mgqwetho's daughter,
you who remind us of contrariness.
Nontsizi, Woman Poet, respond,
respond, girl of the Chizama clan
of Ncenceza's place and Ncoko's,
tell the girls that I'm still alive,
I'm still alive body and soul—
I wouldn't sell myself even for gold,
not for a pearl, not for crystal,
not for jasper, not for jacinth,
not for anything at all, my chiefs.

(See Annexure O)

Mqhayi puns on Mgqwetho's name as she is renowned for turning things inside out to demonstrate their contrariness. He invites her to respond to his poem which was published in the paper and to engage with its content, which affirms her role as a recognised *imbongi* in Mqhayi's league. The poem Mqhayi is calling Mgqwetho to respond to is about the year 1924 and the coming year 1925. At the end of a year Mgqwetho would write about the year and review what has happened and talk about what the year to come may bring, Mqhayi had obviously noticed Mgqwetho's inclination to do that. Mgqwetho also wrote a poem about 1924 -1925 titled "Zemk'inkomo Zetafa! Zeza Nenkungu!! (1924-1925)" "They're stealing our cattle on misty plains! (1924-1925)", perhaps in response to Mqhayi's invitation. In it she laments about yet another of oppression and injustices, the last two stanzas of the poem summarise crux of the poem:

Zemk'Inkomo zetafa zeza nenkungu

Ise AFrika indyebo yabelungu

Saba nenkatazeko ke ngenxa yayo

Sangabafayo

Taru!!

Wadlula Unyaka wemnka unendaba

Zalontshutshiso zona zodwi ndaba

Impitimpiti ezipazamisa

Nokudumisa.

Camagu!!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 267)

They're stealing our cattle on misty plains!

The white man's bounty lies in Africa,

the cause of our tribulation.

And so we die.

Mercy!!

The year has passed bearing news

of nothing but persecution,

confusion confounding

our praise of God.

Peace!! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 266)

The year 1924 is described as one of injustices and oppression for black people but one of gain for white people to the extent that Mqgqwetho says that the treasures of white people are in Africa and that white people are the source of tribulation for black people. The tone of the poem is one of great sadness and slight disillusionment as the poem repeats the two stanzas above twice in the body of the poem and says the same thing in different ways, there is no

hope that things will change in the next year. Mqhayi is thus far the only poet writing at that time who engages Mgqwetho. This is possibly because many were afraid of her as she held back no punches when she disagreed; she alludes to this in stanza three where she describes herself as “Uliramncwa akuvelwa ngasemva/ Nabakwaziyo babeta besotuka” “Wild beast too fierce to tackle from behind, / those who know tremble in tackling you.” Mgqwetho seeks out her readers to engage with her and to interrogate her assertions as she often asks “Am I wrong?” or “Greybeard of ours, am I wrong?” but none seem to respond to her call, perhaps because what she says rings true and they do not have the eloquence to say it otherwise.

In stanza 5 of the ode to herself Mgqwetho mentions that “Wak’ubeka ngonyawo weva ubuhlungu/ Wahiliza ngomlomo wawisela pantsi” “you stubbed your toe and felt the pain, a slip of the tongue and they stomped on you” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 77-78). This is perhaps a reference to her attempt to appropriate the role of *imbongi* in her rural community but with no success, instead she was assaulted for doing so which she explains further on in the poem about how she was assaulted for praising chiefs instead of commoners.

A common feature of *izibongo* when one is praising others or herself is criticism or playful jesting about an undesirable physical feature or trait; in stanza 9 Mgqwetho describes herself as “Ub’hib’hinxla lwentombi esinqe sibi/ Awu! Nontsizi bulembu e Afrika/ Akusoze wende nezinto zigosho” “ungainly girl with ill-shaped frame. / Awu! Nontsizi, African moss, with bow-legs like yours you’ll never marry!” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 78- 79) Mgqwetho recognises that she is not the most physically attractive woman and that she has bow-legs which make her chances of finding a suitor to marry her very slim. Indeed, although little is known about Mgqwetho, there has been no indication that she was ever married.

4.4 New Power dynamics

The change in the socio-political landscape in South Africa in the twentieth century greatly affected black people. Furthermore, several laws were passed that forever negatively changed the lives of black South Africans. Firstly, the discovery of gold in 1884 was a major impetus behind South Africa's policies. When gold was discovered, this created a huge demand for cheap labour to mine the gold. The South African government created a poll tax system in the rural areas which demanded that black people pay tax for the land they lived on. Men were forced to leave their homes and families in the rural areas and to seek work in the mines and in big cities in order to pay the poll tax and to support their families. In the city there was a mixture of people from different tribal and ethnic groups who lived and worked together. No longer did people live according to their tribal groups as they did in their villages and there were no chiefs to govern them.

Odendaal (1983) describes this period in South African history as a time

...when previously independent African chiefdoms were incorporated into the expanding colonial political structures. White expansion was accompanied by a European system of administration and preceded or followed by agents of imperialism such as missionaries, teachers, traders and farmers who brought indigenous groups into contact with alien European political, religious, cultural and economic systems, institutions and norms. The effect was to undermine traditional relations within African societies. New forms of politics emerged (Odendaal, 1983, p. 1).

Bank and Southall (1996) explain that “A system of direct rule was imposed upon the formerly autonomous chiefdoms, the legitimacy of chiefs was deliberately undermined, and subaltern authority widely – but not uniformly—devolved upon headmen” (Bank and Southall, 1996, p. 410). The effect of this was that it changed “...the African peoples of South Africa from “self-sufficient and autonomous chiefdoms” into either communities of peasants, living on attenuated tribal lands which became increasingly dependent upon the

export of migrant labour, or wage labourers who worked for firms and farms and lived in areas owned by whites” (Bank and Southall, 1996, p. 411). As a result of westernisation and urbanisation, Kaschula (2002) explains that “There has developed a modern *imbongi* whose *izibongo* are based and moulded on the reality which the people are experiencing in the contemporary context.” (Kaschula, 2002, p. 26); the chief or kingdom to which the poet belongs is no longer the focus of his poetry.

Thus the shift in place and authority affected the subject matter of *imbongi*; his focus shifted to contemporary issues affecting their daily lives and their new shared reality. As Kaschula (2002) explains, “The *imbongi*’s role is then to interpret what is happening around them – their role is that of a political and social commentator” (Kaschula, 2002, p. 28); he defines the modern *imbongi* as follows:

... a person (man or woman), who is involved in the oral production of poetry in any given context. They often write poetry as well, using the traditional styles and techniques. Today’s *imbongi* is in a position to act as mediator, educator, praiser, and critic between an authority and those under that authority – with the acceptance of the people as well as the authority in question (Kaschula, 2002, p. 47).

Mgqwetho is an apt example of a modern *imbongi* and in line 43-44 of the poem “Ufikile! Udubulesendlwini bac’ol’i nto emnyango! Kuse beyifanisa (New Year)” “It’s here! Find-at-the-Door-What-you-Shot-from-Inside and only later identified (New Year)!” she identifies herself as such and excessively praises the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu* as one would a chief throughout her poetry. She refers to the editor, Reverend Maxeke as “Yiyo Indoda eyaz’amazibuko.” “the only man who knows the fords” and calls on the risen star to shine on Maxeke (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, 70-71). This is perhaps a reference to the biblical passage where the wise men were led by a star to the birth of the messiah. Mgqwetho could be suggesting that Maxeke is one man who is fit to lead the way to liberation for black people. In the next stanza she urges him to be a pioneer and says “Vulindlela! Kwakona nto ka Maxeke/ Ade no King George abake Isitampu” “Son of Maxeke, blaze a new trail/ Until King George sets his seal” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 70-71); Mgqwetho truly believes

that Maxeke can set a new path for black politics and be an exemplary leader who provides a credible alternative voice to the African National Congress which Mqgqwetho and Maxeke broke away from.

Mqgqwetho further demonstrates her status as a modern poet by code switching; she uses a Xhosa variation of the Afrikaans word “wag” which means wait and writes “asivari” when she says “Tina asivari Zimbongi zangoku” “We modern poets don’t lounge about” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 72-73). The Afrikaans word “ag” when used incorporated into Xhosa appears as “arha” and she uses this Afrikaans term of indifference twice in one poem; she says “sudukani bo arha ndabonelelwa” “Make way! *Ach*, I was used” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 78 -79). Later in the same poem she says “Arha hayi abhitye onke amadodana” “*Ach* shame! The young men all wither” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 80-81). Mqgqwetho also uses the English word “not” instead of hayi. She says “Kubonga amakosi not amabhungexe” “praising chiefs and not commoners” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 80-81). These instances of code switching show how urban Mqgqwetho’s poetry really is and reflective of the multilingual context she finds herself in.

The subject of Mqgqwetho’s poetry transcends ethnic and territorial boundaries. In “Lunguza! Ku-ya-sa UAmos 3: 7, 8” “Take a look, dawn’s breaking Amos 3: 7,8” she writes to all Africans and calls them to listen to their prophets who are ushering a new dawn. In the first stanza she says:

Zatsho ngentsholo nentombi Emlanjeni

Ezase matanga nase manxuweni

Ezakwa Mshweshwe no Langelibalele

Velani Amosi ke nizichazele.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 233)

From the stream came the song of the maidens

from the outposts and empty villages
of the land of the Sotho and Hlubi.
Come out, Amos, and explain it to us.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 232 -2323)

The biblical figure, Amos, is depicted as coming out from among the Sotho and the Hlubi. Thus Mqgqwetho is suggesting that there are prophets among black people and that they should come out and speak to the people about the breaking of a new dawn. These prophets are not only Xhosa as she cautions in the next stanza:

Into zangoku azinguye Nongqause
Yena wadilizintaba zama Xosa
Funda Izibhalo usimelele
I Topiya ike ifakelele
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 233)

These are not Nongqawuse's times,
who brought Xhosa mountains crashing down.
Find support in the Scriptures.
Ethiopia should get involved.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 232)

Mqgqwetho suggests that these are not the times of false prophets and cites the case of the Xhosa who experienced great tragedy because of Nongqawuse's prophecies, who prophesied that the Xhosa should kill all their cattle and the dead will arise and white people will go back into the sea from which they came. Unfortunately, many people believed her prophecies and killed their cattle and there was great death and famine among the Xhosa. So here Mqgqwetho directs the prophets to the Scriptures and references the book of Amos 3:7-8 which reads

“Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared who will not fear? The sovereign Lord has spoken - who can but prophesy?” (The Bible, New International Version). She calls the prophets to search the Scriptures and find support therein and that God speaks through them and will not speak unless through the prophets first. She says:

UTixo Uti akatembisi konke

Kuba angateta nati konke konke

Woviwa ngemilomo yaba Profete

Taru Ramnco Elinyawo Zinentsente.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 233)

God offers no hope at all

that he'll ever, ever speak to us.

He'll be heard through the mouths of the prophets.

Mercy, Wild Beast with scaly feet!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 232)

Thus the prophets are portrayed as the ones who will be on the forefront of a new dawn; they are the ones who will know and show the way for South Africa's liberation. In the same breath Mgqwetho calls on Ethiopia to get involved; she is calling for solidarity with another African country to assist in the liberation of South Africa and Africa as a whole because the dawn that is breaking as Mgqwetho discerns, is not the dawn of the Xhosa people alone or of South Africa only but of Africa as a whole, as she says “Naku ke Afrika “Lunguza Kuyasa”/ Nakuba ke abatunywa ubacekisa” “ So take a look, Africa, dawn's breaking/ even though you scorn the messengers” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 232-233). Thus African prophets, much like prophets in the Bible, are scorned but Mgqwetho argues that they will announce the breaking of a new dawn.

This shows that Mqgqwetho is not only interested but deeply concerned about Africa's liberation and engages in political matters from a spiritual stand point hence she says "Funda Izibhalo usimelele" "Find support in the Scriptures" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 232 – 233) which shows that she believes that the Scriptures themselves liberate rather than enslave Africa. Thus the space she occupies in the city frees her and magnifies her voice because she is able to speak and write unrestrained by her gender or seemingly restrictive cultural norms.

In this new world, the authority of the chiefs is replaced by political leaders. Ordinarily *imbongi* would praise and criticise a chief, but as Mqgqwetho's poem "Imbongi U Chizama" "Chizama the poet" illustrates, praise and criticism is now directed largely at social and political leaders actively involved in protest against black oppression. Mqgqwetho praises the editor of *Umteteli wa Bantu* and his wife for their exemplary leadership and fight against white domination. She salutes the editor saying "Nkosi, mhleli wo Mteteli wetu, / Wanga ungapila u bom obude, / Mzukulwana wamadoda afela kwaHoHo/ Taru, Gatyeni hamba, Sokulandela" "Sir, Editor of our *Umteteli*,/ long life to you, grandson of heroes who fell at Hoho./ Mercy! Go Gatyeni, we'll follow you" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 3 - 4). When people salute or refer to royalty they would say long live the king, and Mqgqwetho salutes Maxeke in that same manner thus conferring on him the respect and reverence an *imbongi* would on a chief. Mqgqwetho builds on this idea of Maxeke as a hero to be followed by referring to him as "Mzukulwana wamadoda afela kwaHoho" "grandson of heroes" and urges him to go on and lead the way and the people will follow him, thus Mqgqwetho pledges allegiance to him and identifies him as a leader to be followed.

Mqgqwetho salutes Marshall Maxeke and recites his clan names, as an *imbongi* would a chief. She pledges her loyalty and support to him and begins every stanza with the refrain "Hamba Sokulandela" "Go and we'll follow you" which depicts Maxeke as a worthy leader to be followed by the people. His integrity is highlighted further in stanza four where she says "Hamba Sokulandela, / Kuba akuzange kupume ntamnani/ Kowenu." "Go and we'll follow you: / no traitor came/ from your house". In this way Mqgqwetho entrenches Maxeke's status as a man of integrity whose family line has no history of traitors or bad leaders thus suggesting that people should trust him as an apple does not fall far from its tree. In stanza

seven, Mgqwetho refers to Maxeke as “Nkosibantu” “Lord of Men” thus elevating him to the status of a chief who rules over his people.

Mgqwetho, not only praises Maxeke in this poem but also his wife, Charlotte, for her courageous exploits in political and social protest. She praises her as follows:

Hamba Sokulandela,
Mazi eyapuma izinto nge pass
Kwapuma izinto kwa tamb’u,
Mlungu exwayi i kati ngabula
Nojekwa.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 4-5)

Go and we’ll follow you,
Woman who protested passes;
confronted by protests
the white man quailed,
and kept his pistol holstered.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, 4-5)

Charlotte Maxeke was a well-known female figure involved in leading protests against pass laws in South Africa; pass laws sought to restrict the movement of black people in urban areas and Charlotte Maxeke led a group of women to the Prime Minister’s office to protest against pass laws. Mgqwetho praises her for this and lists her feats: protesting against pass laws, her fiery speech at Nancefield “Mazi eyateta e Nancefield yatsho/ Amadoda e Komishoni apupa/ Kakubona” “woman whose words at Nancefield/ fired the Commission/ to dream her dreams”; her dogging of the Commission to Elephant Bay “Mazi eyalandela amadoda/ E Komishoni kwada kwase *Bhai/ Indlovu ndifungu Ledi*” “woman who dogged the

Commission/ down to Elephant Bay, I swear by Lady” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 4-5). Mgqwetho clearly admired Charlotte Maxeke’s political astuteness and in this poem also urges the people to follow her by using the same refrain in each of the stanzas dedicated to her praise: “Hamba Sokulandela” “Go and we’ll follow you” thus calling the people to follow her and her husband as she portrays them as leaders who have earned their name.

In this poem Mgqwetho is praising commoners as would be expected of a female poet. Yet, even though this poem is dedicated to the praise and exploits of two political activists, Mgqwetho mentions King Sandile, pledges allegiance to him and sings his praises depicting him as one “who rumbles down Xesi’s banks,/ flits over Vece, the rock-strewn Xesi,/ shade for all, however many” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.2 line 12 - 15). What is interesting to note is that Mgqwetho does not ignore chiefs in favour of political leaders; in her worldview and poetry both have their place, she refers to chiefs with great reverence and loyalty “..lento izinkosi/ Sisicamagushelo/ Sazo izikalo/ Zaso Isizwe sazo” “... these are the chiefs/ who link us to God,/ they carry to Him/ the cries of the Nation” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 14 - 15). Thus chiefs are depicted as those with the people’s best interests at heart for whatever concerns the nation has, chiefs relay them to God for a solution.

In the poem “Imbongikazi Nontsizi u Chizama” “Nontsizi Chizama, the woman poet”, Mgqwetho reinforces the integrity of chiefs and the important intercessory role they play. In stanza nine of the poem she urges black people to give them due honour as follows:

9 Halahoyi! Kululani izihlangu
 Nifune Izibuko
 Ukuze Inkosi zenu
 Zifuman’isipehlo.
 (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.11)

9 Halahoyi! Remove your shoes

and seek a ford,
so that your chiefs can lick the cream.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 10)

In the last two stanzas of the poem she highlights the people's alienation from their chiefs:

24 Asaziwa zi Nkosi
 Nati asizazi
 Sizizinja nje zidlula
 Zigxota "amaxhama"

25 Kanti lento izinkosi
 Sisicamagushelo
 Sazo izikalo
 Zaso Isizwe sazo (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 15)

24 Our chiefs don't know us
 and we don't know them:
 we quarter the veld
 like wild dogs at the trot.

25 Yet these are the chiefs
 who link us to God,
 they carry to Him
 the cries of the Nation.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 14)

Mgqwetho not only values chiefs but sees the institution as God-given and vital in maintaining unity. She asserts this in another poem where she questions L.T. Mvabaza, the editor of *Abantu-Batho*:

14 Ngubani owakubeka

Ukuba ube yinkokeli?

Zikona nje Inkosi

Ezadalwa ngu Tixo

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 27)

14 When did you win

election to rule?

We still have our chiefs

established by God.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 26)

The move from a rural to an urban setting and the subsequent shift in power bases allow Mgqwetho to explore a myriad of subjects in her poetry yet traditional authority and history occupy an elevated and special place in her work. It becomes clear that Mgqwetho strongly believes that “Consequently, rather than traditional authority contradicting democracy, it can provide the bedrock upon which to construct new and experimental governments, including constitutional democracies” (Bank and Southall, 1996, p. 407). Thus, her view of South Africa is one that consists of traditional and other leaders who lead with integrity, who would facilitate in restoring Africa and liberating Africa. In many of her poems Mgqwetho envisions a unified strategy which includes chiefs where black people fight together and not against each other against white rule. Thus unity is held as the only way to liberation. As Mgqwetho points out:

Umanyano nje kupela lungamandla
Kuba lulo lodwa olunokusondla
Zonk'intshaba zayakoyiswa ngenxa yalo
Nentsika ze Zulu zakwapulwa ngalo
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 198 -199)

Unity's our only strength,
it alone can nourish us:
all enemies will be crushed by it,
and the pillars of heaven shattered.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 198 – 199)

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Mgqwetho argues that if black people unite nothing will be impossible for them, whatever enemy comes, unity will defeat it. Thus even in the creation of an African literary approach unity amongst African scholars is necessary to overcome cultural imperialism and monopoly over who can speak with authority on knowledge production and theories. As it stands it is the West that speaks with authority from a supposedly universal stand. Thus African scholars need to unite and share the knowledge and resources they have in order to strengthen African scholarship and to ensure that African approaches and literatures do not remain on the periphery; furthermore, African scholars should not rely on the West to lead the way in scientific inquiry and literary criticism but should create their own rigorous culture of inquiry and criticism. If African scholars unite in doing this, great advances can be made in creating an African literary criticism that is reflective of African realities.

4.5 Poet-Priest-Oracle

It is important to note that African poets “see their role as that of poet- priest-oracle, the people’s poet” and Mqgqwetho, though not fitting the gender archetype of a traditional bard, is no exception (Mphahlele, 2005, p. 148). Her poetry carries a prophetic message which “admonishes, exhorts, praises and reproaches, and the poet’s mind projects itself into the future” (Mphahlele, 2005, p. 139). A case in point is the poem “Ukuba Umntu! Akakwazi!! Ukuyongamela Eyake-Indlu!!! Angatinina Ukupata Isizwe Sika Tixo?” “If a man can’t rule his own house, how can he manage God’s nation?” In this poem Mqgqwetho is appealing for responsible leadership; she argues that “Inkokheli zimelwe kukundileka/Umfazi nabantwana bokundileka/Utsho u Timoti ndi low’ utetayo/ Lakutsho ne Zulu mhla nalo lilwayo” “If leaders behave with dignity, / women and children will too. / Timothy says: “This is me speaking.”/ So says heaven on the day of wrath” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 257 -258). Mqgqwetho believes that if leaders lead by example, the rest of the people will follow and that responsibility is shown as starting at home in the family unit first. But she argues that this is not so amongst black people, she describes the educated black elite as conceited and not wanting to help others. She admonishes them: “Kulihlazo kulidino makowetu/Kulilishwa nokunganced’amawetu/ Ube usiti wena usistyudeni/ Obani aba konke kuwe abani” “It’s a shame, my people, a scandal, / a disgrace not to help your own, / with you saying, “We’re students: / who are others compared to us?” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 257 – 258)

Educated black people are portrayed as perceiving themselves as better than other black people and special because of their education. This Mqgqwetho criticises and labels as disgraceful and scandalous. Mqgqwetho asks where exemplary leadership is as demonstrated by the biblical figure Joshua “Ezazinotando zivuke zisiva/ Ezazipata Isizwe sika Tixo/ Zindilekile zingenzi nangampoxo” “who bore love and rose from a fall/ to manage the nation of God/ with poise beyond reproach” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 257 – 258). Clearly Mqgqwetho is not satisfied at the scarcity of exemplary leaders and is longing for inspiring leaders with integrity. Mqgqwetho cites responsible biblical leaders like Hosea, Timothy and Joshua to highlight the current lack of such leaders who “behave with dignity” and show love and perseverance; she contrasts the qualities of these leaders to those of African leaders:

Ezangoku zipatene ngobutshaba
Kodwa Bantsundu bangqongwe nazintshaba
Uhlalapi lo Tixo sidlala Ngaye?
Umpefumlo wako Usesandleni Kuye Basop!!
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 258- 259)

Our leaders round on each other
while blacks are ringed by foes.
So where is this God we're toying with?
Your soul is in His hands. *Pas op!!*
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 258 – 259)

In this stanza black leaders are presented as divided and fighting each other whereas they are surrounded by enemies. The implied message here is that black people should be uniting and fighting against their enemies instead of fighting against each other. Mgqwetho cautions against divisive behaviour and reminds them that their souls are in God's hands after all; perhaps implying that he sees all and will judge accordingly. Again the idea of the interplay of the physical and metaphysical world having a direct effect on each other as discussed earlier is reinforced.

Twice in the poem Mgqwetho mentions that she is no Nongqawuse; by saying she is not Nongqawuse "who brought the Xhosa mountains crashing down", Mgqwetho is labelling Nongqawuse as a false prophet and positioning herself as a true prophet whose predictions come true and will not wreak havoc on the people. Mgqwetho aligns herself as a true prophet in the line of Ntsikana whilst discrediting Nongqawuse thus illustrating the multiple roles the *imbongi* occupies, that of poet, priest and oracle.

4.6 Ntsikana: A prototype

Throughout her poetry Mgqwetho refers to the renowned Xhosa prophet Ntsikana as an intellectual and spiritual prototype that Africans should emulate. In many of her poems Mgqwetho substantiates her views or admonitions by quoting or pointing her readers to the sayings of Ntsikana which were passed down orally and later transcribed by D. D. T. Jabavu in 1953, long after Mgqwetho had written about Ntsikana in her poetry. A constant refrain in her poems is “Didn’t Ntsikana tell you?” to point people back to his teachings: she uses Ntsikana as a model if not philosophy of how Africans should think, read and take their place in the world. For example she warns: “Nanko no Ntsikana kade akutyela zuyeke imali siqu sempundulu.” “Ntsikana warned you a long time ago, “Money’s the lightning-bird: leave it alone” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 60-61). She does this to remind Xhosa people that Ntsikana had warned them to accept Christianity and white people among them but not their economy. Thus Ntsikana sought to extract from foreign interaction and knowledge that which he saw as beneficial to Xhosa people. By portraying Ntsikana as selective of foreign knowledge Mgqwetho reveals the approach Africans should adopt to foreign knowledge and culture. They should not receive and embrace everything white people tell them without rigorous evaluation but should look to the knowledge systems and wisdom embedded in Xhosa culture.

This approach implicitly gives insight towards the formulation of an African literary theory. Africans should look at their own knowledge systems as points from which to theorise from. They should value and prefer their own cultures, rather than subjecting their own cultures to foreign standards and ways of doing things. According to Mgqwetho, Ntsikana cautioned people to scrutinise foreign knowledge and not just accept it as authority. She asks: “Akazange ukuxelelana u Ntsikana ukuba uze uqwalasele I Bhaibhile? Wazuka wena wayiyeka, wayiqwalaselelwa ngabelungu” “Didn’t Ntsikana tell you to study the scriptures? And you left the white man to study them for you” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 420). Thus Africans need to critically engage with the politics of knowledge and to carry out their own investigations instead of relying on the findings of others. Mgqwetho’s exhortations

provide a useful way of dealing with new or foreign knowledge: to subject it to scrutiny and evaluation from an African perspective.

In contrast to Ntsikana, Nongqawuse, the girl prophet who among other things prophesied that white people would be swallowed by the sea once Xhosa people had killed all their cattle and black people will be free of white rule, is painted as a false prophet and destroyer of the Xhosa nation. Whenever Mgqwetho stresses a point and wants her readers to take her seriously she says: “I don’t preach a rebirth of cattle” or “I’m not Nongqawuse who brought Xhosa Mountains crashing down.” Thus, Mgqwetho positions herself as a truth teller and a prophetic voice that should be taken seriously. This constant juxtaposition of these two major figures in Xhosa history implicitly shows that not all African approaches are correct; rather Africans should take care to come up with genuine and verified approaches to African problems.

Mgqwetho’s choice of Ntsikana as a model of an approach is appropriate and understandable. Hodgson (1997) explains Ntsikana’s significance as follows:

In contrast to later converts, Ntsikana continued to live among his own people. He adopted new beliefs, such as the doctrine of salvation in Christ, and new practices, such as regular meetings of non-kinship groups for worship and prayer. He maintained cultural continuity by filling elements of the Xhosa tradition with Christian content, most notably in his Great Hymn, [which Mgqwetho borrows from throughout her poetry] the first in Xhosa, which drew its symbols and images from everyday life (Hodgson, 1997, p. 72).

Throughout her poetry Mgqwetho mentions Ntsikana as a trusted prophet providing a way for Africans to read the Bible themselves and to think for themselves. In all the references in her poetry, Ntsikana’s words are trusted and valorised, while Nongqawuse’s are called into question and held responsible for the destruction of the Xhosa kingdom. Furthermore, Ntsikana is known as the first Xhosa convert to Christianity and is seen as the father of the Christian faith among Xhosa Christians. He is regarded with great respect as the first Xhosa

“to be Christian while remaining an African” (Mills, 1990, p. 42). Thus his advice occupies a privileged and elevated place in the minds of black people trying to find their place in a fast-changing world. Brown agrees that Mgqwetho’s “model is not white missionaries, but the Xhosa Christian Ntsikana” (Brown, 2004, p. 44).

This was also true of many early converts to Christianity; for example, when William Wellington Gqoba, a Xhosa missionary and man of letters was on his deathbed he had a vision of Ntsikana and not of a white missionary. He relayed the encounter to a friend as follows:

Ndinento endiza kukuhlebelala yona engaziwa bani kwabakufupi kum.
Ndiyafa, andiyi kupila. Indawo endiyityilelweyo
yeyokubakwakusondela, ndiya kuvaleka umqala, ndikohlwe
kukuteta. Ndite ndakubuza kuTIXO ukuba kukutini na ukuba
andenjenjalo akandipendula, koko wandibonisa umbono
osimanga. Ndingati ndityilelwe izulu, ndalubona usapho luka
NTSIKANA luqukene ndaweni nye kona, lutsho
ngeziqaqambileyo ingubo. Bendingamazinje la NTSIKANA
wembali namhla ndiyamazi (Gqoba, 2015, p. 3-4).

There is a secret I am going to tell you, a secret unknown
to people close to me. I am dying, I am not going to live. What I have
been told is that closer to the time my throat will
be blocked and I will not be able to speak. When I asked God why He
allows me to be in that condition he did not reply, instead he
showed me wonderful visions. I might say I have been shown
heaven, and there I saw Ntsikana’s family gathered together,
dressed in bright clothing. While I never knew the
famous Ntsikana, now I know him (Gqoba, 2015, p. 3 - 4).

This shows that Ntsikana became a spiritual prototype for early Christians and even those who never knew him but received his teachings. Even a century after his death (1821), in her poetry Mgqwetho holds Ntsikana up as the founding father of Christianity amongst Xhosa people and his legacy lives on. In 1926 Mqhayi wrote a historical piece on Ntsikana explaining that Ntsikana was a visionary and a prophet:

Indlela atunywe ngayo bantu bakowetu kum u Ntsikana, ibe nemibono, njengabatunywa bonke ba Komkhulu. Njengo Mosisi njengo Gidiyoni, njengaba Postile, abati xaba tunywayo kwa ke kwenziwa imiqondiso nemi bono. Ngako oko asinantloni ukuti u Ntsikana lo ngum Boni, ewe ungum Polofeti Ongcwele wose Nyangweni (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 209).

My people, Ntsikana was sent to me with visions, just like all messengers from the Great Place. Just like Moses, just like Gideon, just like the Apostles, when they were sent, signs and visions were conjured. Therefore we are not ashamed to state that Ntsikana is a visionary, yes he is a Holy Prophet of the Most High (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 208).

Mqhayi finds support in the Scriptures to show that Ntsikana was a true prophet. Mqhayi then goes further in giving an account of Ntsikana's encounter and likens it to that of Apostle Paul:

Ute esate tyu pezu kwemivalo yobuhlanti lapuma ilanga; koko lite ukupuma kwalo eli lanamhla labonisa ukuba litunyiwe kuye, kuba imita yokupuma kwalo, isuke yatsitsa esiqwini senkabi yake yenkom ekube kutiwa ngu Hulushe gama layo. Uyitatile u Ntsikana lento kwa oko kwinkwenkwe ayayi kwalapho ibamba itole. Ubuzile ukuba uyayibona na yona lento? Ilandule inkwenkwe. Kanye nge ngoko um-Postile u Paulusi wabengezelwa kukukanya, ati amadoda aye hamba naye aliva ilizwi kodwa engaboni bani, Izenzo 9:7 (Opland (ed and trans) 2009, p. 209).

While he was still leaning on the gate of the cattle-kraal, the sun suddenly rose; and its appearance that day showed it was sent to him because, as it rose, its rays spread out from the body of his ox, known as Hulushe. Ntsikana mentioned this to a nearby boy who was catching a calf. He asked him if he had seen this. The boy said no. Just like the Apostle Paul who had a light flash on him, but the men travelling with him heard a voice but saw no one, Acts 9:7 (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 208).

As shown above, Ntsikana's spiritual encounter and conversion was free of missionary intervention. In 1816 the Reverend Joseph Williams arrived in the Fort Beaufort region and heard about Ntsikana and his disciples but he was not sure if Ntsikana was worthy of being a teacher if he could not write. Ntsikana responded to Williams saying that "Eyam imfundiso ayikona kulento" "My teaching is not in this thing" meaning writing (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 210- 211). Apparently Williams would not relent and asked him to write and handed him a slate and a pencil, when Ntsikana took these two objects and the pencil touched the slate, it shattered in into pieces. In awe, Reverend Williams fell to his knees and said "Hayi sihlobo sami, ndikuqondile ukuba okunene u ngumfundisi, uyakwazi ukufundisa abantwanan" "O my friend, I perceive that you are a true minister, you are fit to teach children" (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 210 – 211). From then on Ntsikana was recognised as a true Christian and minister among the missionaries. His teachings did not contradict those of the Bible thus debunking "the pervasive, but fallacious, assumption that Christianity is a 'Western' religion" (Brown, 2004, p. 25).

Mgqwetho paints Christianity as preached by white missionaries as somewhat flawed; she makes a distinction between what the Bible teaches and what white missionaries teach. In her poetry she suggests that Christianity as preached by white missionaries serves to enslave and defile black people and that they should learn from this and never allow themselves to be defiled. This is well illustrated in the poem "Wazinyatela na? Intombi Zezwe Lako Zibe Ngamakoboka? U Nehemiah 5: 5. " Are you trampling you nation's girls to enslave them? (Nehemiah 5:5)" She asks black people the following questions:

Niyambonake u tixo wabelungu

25

Nanifunani ku tixo wabelungu

Kukona noyeka ukugxab'elela

Nina unb'inqisa ngelitye lemb'ola.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.281 - 283)

So do you see the god of the whites?

25

What did you want from the god of the whites?

He helped tie you down with the stone of ochre.

Never again mix soiled clothes with clean.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 280 - 282)

Note that Mqgqwetho does not say the God of the Bible, Mqgqwetho constantly analyses Christianity as preached by white people in Africa and weighs their teachings against the teachings of the Bible hence she always admonishes black people “Fundani Izibhalo” “Study the Scriptures” so that they are not deceived. Mqgqwetho also contrasts the teachings of white missionaries to the teachings of Ntsikana; his words are portrayed as the true utterances of someone who has searched the Scriptures and come to know God. As Fanon (1967) aptly points out:

The church in the colonies is a white man’s church, a foreigner’s church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor (Fanon, 1967, p. 7).

For Mqgqwetho, Ntsikana articulated and enacted Christianity as it should be – not as it is preached by whites or practised by educated Africans, who will not read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Mqgqwetho paints failure to do this as leading black people astray through false teachings from white people. Mqgqwetho quotes Ntsikana as saying that black people should study the Scriptures themselves instead of letting white people do it for them; this is in order to verify if what they are teaching black people is in line with the Scriptures or is extra-textual (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 421). In his seminal text *Decolonising the Mind*, Wa Thiong’o (1987a) highlights the same sentiments when he makes the following observation:

African children who encountered literature in colonial schools and universities were thus experiencing the world as defined and reflected in the European experience of history. Their entire way of looking at the world, even the world of the immediate environment, was Eurocentric. Europe was the center of the universe. The earth moved around the European intellectual scholarly axis (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 92).

This is the approach Mgqwetho decries hence throughout her poetry she awakens her readers to read critically and form their own perspectives and not just accept without verification perspectives and approaches used and passed down by Europeans. The urgency of this approach is echoed by Fanon (1967) almost fifty years after Mgqwetho wrote her poetry. He urges that “The Third World must not be content to define itself in relation to values which preceded it. On the contrary, the underdeveloped countries must endeavour to focus on their very own values as well as methods and style specific to them” (Fanon, 1967, p. 55).

Thus Fanon maintains that Africans have a wealth of significant knowledge to contribute and there is value in their approaches and perspectives as well; this is also a call to African intellectuals to demonstrate this - a call which Soga (1862) made as far back as the eighteen hundreds when he wrote an article in the *Indaba* newspaper:

Ingwevu zakowetu—neza-Sembo mazizityande izisu; ihlandzelwe pandhle yonke into. Iti into eyayintsomi ivele—iti into eyayilibli, nelivo lakudala, ivele—iti into eyaka yabonwa, yaviwa, yendziwa, ilisiko lohlanga, ipume, iye kwesositya sasekaya namhla—iye kubekwa kona. Besingenazizwena kudala? Ipina imbali yazo—yamasiko azo amabi, namahle? Besingenazi-Nkosina kudala? Bekungeko zidumileyona? Amavo ezonkosi zohlanga apina? Alele emanhchwabeni ndawonye nazona? Akukho unakona ukuvumbulula into kulomanhweba? Bekungeko zimbongina kudala? Bezibonga obanina? ...Mayivuke imishologu yohlanga lwa-Maxosa nolwa-Mamfengu, ize kusishiya nelifa elikulu lamavo. Lomavoke mazekubekwa kwesositya sendaba zasekaya... (Soga, “Ipepa le-Ndaba zasekaya” 1862, p. 9).

Our veterans of the Xhosa and Imbo people must disgorge all they know, everything must be imparted to the nation as a whole. Fables must be retold; what was history or legend must be recounted. What has been preserved as tradition must be [retrieved]. Whatever was seen, heard or done under the requirements of custom should be brought to light and placed on the national table to be sifted for preservation. Were there not several tribes before? Where is the record of their history and customs good or bad? Had we no chiefs in days gone by? Where are the anecdotes of their periods? Were these things buried with them in their graves? Is there no one to unearth these things from the graves? Were there no national poets in the days of yore? Whose praises did they sing? ...we should revive and bring to light all this great wealth of information... Let us resurrect our ancestral fore-bears who bequeathed to us a rich heritage (Translation is by J.J.R. Jolobe in Soga, 1983, 152-153).

Soga understood the significance of recording and committing to paper African history, victories and literary heritage and spurred the development of African literature; unless this was done, future generations would not know the glories and achievements of their ancestors as well as the wealth of knowledge and ideas passed on. Cilashe's poem illustrates the transition from the battlefield, where colonial battles were fought, to the intellectual battle for truth and ideas as well as literary heritage of a people. The poem rouses the reader to action:

Zimkile! Mfo wohlanga,

Phutuma, phuthuma;

Yishiy'imfakadolo,

Phuthuma ngosiba;

Thabath' iphepha neinki,

Likhaka lakho elo.

Ayemk'amalungelo,

Qubula usiba;

Ngxasha, ngxasha, ngeinki,
Hlala esitulweni,
Ungangeni kwaHoho;
Dubula ngosiba.

Thambeka umhlathi ke,
Bambelel'ebunzi;
Zigqale iinyaniso,
Umise ngomxholo;
Bek'izitho ungalwi,
Umsindo liyilo.
(Citashe, 1882, p. 5)

Your cattle are gone,
My countrymen!
Go rescue them! Go rescue them!
Leave the breechloader alone
And turn to the pen.
Take paper and ink,
For that is your shield.
Your rights are going!
So pick up your pen,
Load it, load it with ink.
Sit in your chair –
Repair not to Hoho.
But fire with your pen.
(Translation by A.C. Jordan (first two stanzas only), 1973, p. 88)

This is a call for African intellectuals to enter the battlefield of ideas and “truth” and to interrogate the politics of knowledge as Ntsikana entreated fellow Africans to. Citashe, also known as I.W.W. Wauchope, argues that there is no longer a literal battlefield or need thereof, where Africans can fight as they did against colonialism, but the battle that remains is against imperialism. Cultural imperialism is still rampant and evidenced by the kind of knowledge that is propagated and favoured, which is knowledge from the West because the West popularised and widely disseminated their ideas through print and controlled the printing press and the kind of material that would be printed. Wa Thiong’o (1987) explains it as follows:

...the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as a wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people’s languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubt about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which is has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure... (Wa Thiong’o, 1987a, p. 3).

This cultural bomb which has created apathy amongst black people is exactly what Mgqwetho is waging war against in her work and the following stanza illustrates this:

Inyaniso masipatwe ngananinye

Inyaniso kungaviwa bantu banye

Nantso ke! Inyaniso yezi Bhalo

Napantsi ke, kweyetu imibhalo.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 197)

The truth must be treated fairly,
the truth must be heard by both sides:
the truth is there in the scriptures
and also within our blankets.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 196)

In this poem Mqgqwetho seeks to demonstrate the need for Africans to recognise the vices of Western civilisation and consequently cultural imperialism. By aligning herself with Ntsikana, Mqgqwetho refuses this blind acceptance of all things originating from the West as right and true but points to the need for scrutiny as well as prioritising African intellectual history and heroes. Hence, she goes back to Ntsikana's teachings and sayings on self-assertion and appropriation of knowledge and uses them as a basis to provide a way forward, and a point of departure from which to theorise from. In her poem "Lomzi Wakona na Sawubizana?" "Did we invite this nation of theirs? Did we invite their mighty money?" she says "Mna ke Nontsizi, ndiza kumvumisela u Ntsikana kokwam ukwazi" "I am going to interpret Ntsikana as I understand him" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 432-433) and begins to paint a picture of Ntsikana not only as a spiritual prototype but as a steward of Xhosa tradition and advancement on Xhosa people's terms. This kind of perspective and way of thinking that Mqgqwetho was advocating was one that was not very popular during the 1920s in South Africa, the period in which Mqgqwetho was writing. A lot of black people were embracing western culture and education as forward looking and distancing themselves from many African customs and ways of thinking.

It was a few decades later, during the sixties with the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement that black people began to look to themselves for their liberation and not to rely on outside assistance, that black people began to talk of uniting on the basis of their skin colour and taking pride in their blackness, something Mqgqwetho advocated throughout her

poetry in the early 1920s. For example, in the poem “Zatsha! Inkomo Nomazakuzaku!” “Something’s coming!” she calls:

Izizwe Ezintsundu mazimanyane 65
Umanyano lodwa lungamandla enu
Lulweleni nide nikangelane
Luyeke ukupepa nokudlokova.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 93)

All the black nations must merge, 65
our only strength’s in uniting:
press on until you face each other,
stop your bobbing and weaving.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 92)

Thus Mgqwetho urged black nations to look to each other and help each other and pointed out that unity is the only way to liberation and black pride; ideas that were to take root and bear fruit on the socio-political landscape long after she stopped writing: firstly, during the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement and more recently during Mbeki’s presidency and popularising of the idea of the African renaissance. In a speech at the unveiling of the Tiyo Soga memorial in 2011, Mbeki urged Africans to act as Mqhayi advised and to emulate Mgqwetho’s courage: “At a time such as this, do we not have urgent need to act as S.E.K. Mqhayi advised, and speak out, with the courage of Nontsizi Mgqwetho, against those who would recolonise our Continent!” (Mbeki, 2011, p. 11)

The impetus behind this research is the need to act and the courage to speak out against cultural imperialism on the African continent, without which the continent is at risk of being recolonised. The process of decolonisation and reconstructing African history and identity from an African perspective is an urgent one; in order to do this Africans have to be the ones

in control of knowledge production on and about the continent and the ones holding the reins in writing and rewriting an African narrative from an African perspective. Knowledge that is widely disseminated and popularised is knowledge that holds power and begins to shape the societies we live in and ultimately our realities. Thus Africans need to collect, evaluate, theorise about and publicise their own knowledge which privileges and centres African perspectives and cultural frameworks.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN LITERARY THEORY

5.1 African literary theory of interpretation

In this chapter I propose an African literary theory of interpretation and elucidate its key tenets and application through various texts. The proposed African literary theory with which to read African literature applies to not only what Wa Thiongo (1987a) calls Afro-European literature, which is "...the literature written by Africans in European languages" but to all works in African languages (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 27). This is because "The choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe" (Wa Thiong'o, 1987a, p. 4). Thus this theory takes into consideration the language, history and cultural framework from which a work originates and uses these as critical tools to analyse the text. The tenets of this theory are as follows:

The first tenet is:

- a) An Afrocentric approach: valourising and prioritising African culture, history, and innovation and holding them up with pride.

The people who write the history of a nation or a people determine the kind of story that is told about that nation. They come to their subject with their own concepts and perceptions which they use to organise and make sense of what they see. As a result, they draw from their own cultural framework and aesthetics to analyse, understand and draw conclusions about what they see and experience. For example, if in the historian's culture physical beauty is viewed as embodied in a lean figure, when they see and write about the physical attributes of

a people who hold a different standard for physical beauty they might not describe people with big figures as beautiful but use their own terms and perceptions of bigness whereas in that culture physical beauty is embodied in the bigness of a person. A case in point is G. B. Sinxo's novel *UNomsa* which was written in Xhosa and translated into Afrikaans and English; the English translation of the novel was done by P. T Mtuze who is Xhosa. In his translation of the term "inzwakazi enkulu" to describe Nomsa's mother, he translates it as "a very attractive woman" (Sinxo, 1979, p. 2). The literal translation of the term "inzwakazi enkulu" is a big woman, but because Mtuze knows that a big woman is considered attractive in traditional Xhosa society he translates it as such thus taking into account the Xhosa cultural framework of the text to inform the translation of the text thus rendering an accurate reflection of the language and culture that the work emanates from. If the text was translated by someone ignorant of the values and nuances of Xhosa culture it is possible that the work would have been translated differently thus creating an inaccurate analysis of the text thus highlighting the importance of the cultural framework in reading and analysing texts.

Another example is from A.C Jordan's translation of his Xhosa novel *Ingqumbu Yeminyanya* into English, *The Wrath of the Ancestors*. The cultural practice of *lobola* is often translated into English as the bride price and that is the common term that is used to refer to the practice, which gives the false idea that in Xhosa culture a man can purchase a bride, like one would a commodity. This is not only an inaccurate translation of the cultural practice but one that gives a negative view of the culture and its treatment of women as objects. Perhaps to correct this misconception and to offer an accurate view of the practice which is true to the culture in which it is practiced, A.C. Jordan translated the cultural practice of *lobola* as "the bride tribute" (Jordan, 1980, p. 259) thus giving a more accurate term to describe the practice using the cultural framework of the source language. The examples above show that often things are not always what they are referred to as and highlight the importance of an Afrocentric approach which favours the cultural framework that a literary work comes from and uses its descriptors and currency of assigning value and meaning to analyse texts.

Similarly, when talking and writing about history the point of view of the writer is particularly important. Archie Mafeje asks a pertinent question "Might not African history,

written, not by Europeans, but by Africans themselves, have employed different concepts and told a different story?” (Mafeje, 1971, p. 253) Here Mafeje is suggesting that the background and interests of the writer have a way of inscribing themselves onto a historical work. Thus when I propose valourising and prioritising African history I am advocating for an African account of history written by Africans from an African perspective in order to reflect an African perception and account of their own history. When S.E.K. Mqhayi writes the story of Ntsikana, he writes it to correct what had been written in history books by white people which he deems inaccurate. He corrects the misconception that Ntsikana was converted by the missionaries as follows:

Kutiwa u Ntsikana lowo likolwa labafundisi bokuqala – kutiwa wa guquka kubo. Ngabapi abo bafundisi bokuqala? Kuba u Velidyam lowo nguyena mfundisi wokuqala, ngapandle kuka Nyengana onga zange ahlale ndawo apa kweli lakowetu. Ndi ti ngabapina abo bafundisi, kuba Umfundisi wokuqala owa bonana naye u Ntsikana ngu yena wawa esiguqweni pambi ko Ntsikana, e vuma Ityala lake? Lenteto bantu bakowetu kwam, inga inge fumane yandiswe, kuba ayingeni, noxa abafundisi sebede bayishicilela nasezincwadini, inteto yokuba u Ntsikana lo likolwa labo loku qala....Ngako oko, obawo betu aba fundisi ngati kum bayisukela ikude lendawo, bapanga u Tixo igunya lake, lokuba aguqula umntu ngapandle kwabo, balenza elabo (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 211 -213).

They say Ntsikana was influenced by the first missionaries, that they converted him. Who are those first missionaries? Because Williams is the first missionary, apart from Van der Kemp, who did not stay long at any one place in our country. I say who are those missionaries, because the first missionary Ntsikana met is the one who dropped to his knees before Ntsikana, confessing his guilt? My fellow countrymen, this opinion should not be spread, because it does not fit the facts, even though the missionaries have already published in books the opinion that Ntsikana was their first convert... And so, it seems to me our fathers the missionaries are making too much of this, they are robbing God of his power, the power to convert someone without them, without their intervention (Opland (ed and trans), 2009, p. 210-212).

Thus Mqhayi’s account of the history of Ntsikana is entirely different from those of the missionaries in their books. According to Mqhayi, the missionaries have their own interests in claiming Ntsikana as their first convert. Mqhayi explains that by the time the first

missionary came, Ntsikana had already converted independent of missionary intervention and that this was a well-known fact amongst the Xhosa people. Thus valourising and prioritising an African account of history allows people to tell their own story in their own words and preserve it for future generations so that they know where they come from and the history of their people as told by them. Thus the process of Africans re-writing African history and showing alternative accounts of African history is essential in decolonising and re-awakening the African psyche. This would have an effect on the way people write, read and analyse African literary texts, with Africa at the centre.

Secondly,

- b) A love and respect for African languages and African language expressions in their various manifestations, including Africanised English and language that accurately reflects an African reality, past or present.

A lot of early writers from the Eastern Cape in the nineteenth century wrote in Xhosa. Even though they had been through an English schooling system in missionary schools and could read both English and Xhosa, they still chose to write in Xhosa. This shows that these writers loved and respected their language and wanted to express their writings in Xhosa. They rendered their stories, history and opinion pieces in their own language, in their own words and primarily for an African audience. Thus Africa was at the centre of their literary output; they were not writing to the “European centre” but writing to each other. Tiyo Soga, William Gqoba, Walter Rubusana, John Solilo, S.E.K. Mqhayi, Nontsizi Mqgqwetho, G. B. Sinxo and A.C Jordan were prolific Xhosa writers and a lot of their work has now been translated into English but they wrote in Xhosa and favoured African language expression thus creating pride and literary material for Xhosa works to be used and studied in higher domains.

G. B. Sinxo, in his novel *Umzali wolahleko* not only writes in Xhosa but also shows Xhosa women’s language of respect which is called *Ukuhlonipha* by which women show respect to their in-laws by avoiding the use of syllables from the names of their male in-laws. The eldest

female character in the novel, Gakhulu, uses this language throughout the novel. For example, her grandson disrespects her by giving her the nickname “Magxa-makhulu” which means broad shoulders, but when Gakhulu relays this offence to her son she says the grandson had called her “Madya- Makhulu”. If one is not aware of this language of respect through avoidance of certain syllables in married Xhosa women’s speech one would think that Gakhulu is lying as the grandson did not refer to her that way. Throughout the novel Gakhulu speaks in *Hlonipha*. Instead of Gakhulu saying *baleka* (run) she says *gitshima*, and uses *Ubunameka* for *ubulongo* (cow-dung) and so on. She reprimands her daughter-in-law for not using this language of respect. For example, the daughter in law, Nojaji, says “ Hayi andithethi...” which means no I do not mean, but Gakhulu reprimands her before she finishes her sentence and says “ Hlonipha, Nojaji, ungumfazi...” which means show respect Nojaji you are a woman (Sinxo, 1976, p. 3). Nojaji then changes her speech and says “Hayi, andikhulumi...” which means the same thing but she uses a Zulu word for I do not mean which is *andikhulumi* thus showing respect by avoiding syllables which form part of the names of a male in-laws.

Finlayson (1995) demonstrates how this would linguistically manifest itself in English as follows:

Robert and Grace Green have three children – William, Joan and Margaret. William marries Mary and takes her home to his family. Here she is taught a new vocabulary by Joan, her sister in-law, and where necessary is advised by Grace, her mother-in-law. This is because from now on she may never use the syllables appearing in her husband’s family names i. e (simplistically) “rob, “ert”, “green” “will” and “grace”. Thus for the sentence “Grace will not eat green yoghurt,” Mary will have to say something like “The older daughter of Smith, refuses to eat yomix” (Finlayson, 1995, p. 140).

Throughout Sinxo’s novel, Gakhulu speaks in *Hlonipha* and renders her speech in a way that is true to her traditional Xhosa context. For Sinxo to render Gakhulu’s speech any other way would be an inaccurate reflection of Gakhulu’s context. Thus by rendering Gakhulu’s speech so he is privileging African language expression in its natural form. Thus when one reads the

text they have to understand the dynamics of the language the text emanates from in order to do justice to an analysis of the work. Thus to write in your language or in a language that shows your socio-linguistic reality is to write in a manner that best represents your reality; a people's literature should reflect their reality and not someone else's linguistic fantasy.

Thirdly,

- c) A respect for spirituality and African spirituality as informing all of life, and literature being a natural reflection of this ethical centre, without a binary division of the sacred and secular.

Traditionally, spirituality in African culture was not separate from the material world; there was no sacred or secular divide. T. B. Soga explains Xhosa spirituality as follows: "UThixo lo kwakuthiwa ukubizwa kwakhe ngu Mdali uQamata"; God was referred to as Umdali the Creator and uQamata, Refuge (Soga, 1937, p. 29). Soga further states that "Kwakungeko nanto yabe ifana nolu suku lweSabatha yeNkosi", "there was no such thing as the Lord's Day or the Sabbath" (Soga, 1937, p. 29 my translation). As Soga explains there was no sacred day or special day for worship; this is because worship or respect for the Supreme Being was part of everyday life and informed one's daily conduct. Mazama explains that in African spirituality "Because Life is one, there can be no dichotomy between the so-called natural and supernatural worlds. In fact, it is generally admitted that the main difference between the world of the spirits and the world of the living is essentially one of degree of visibility, the spiritual world being largely invisible but nonetheless quite real" (Mazama, 2002, p. 221).

Thus when African writers include spiritual elements or make spiritual references in their work, they are not being particularly religious and their work cannot be exclusively classified as religious texts in the western sense. Their spirituality or worldview infiltrates and informs all of life and is thus reflected in African literature also. With the advent of Christianity and western education the idea of the physical and spiritual world being separate entities was

introduced, yet many Africans who accepted Christianity still viewed life as one and used references from the Bible to hold people to account for their actions because they believe one's belief should be manifest in one's conduct.

For example, early Xhosa writers such as Soga used the Bible to remind people that their natural actions have spiritual implications. In speaking out against Xhosa Christians' disregard for Chiefs, Soga used the Bible to correct their behaviour: "Ubukosi bomhlaba bumiswe ngu-Tixo; litsho i- Lizwi, ati kambe amakolwa abambe lona" "The chieftainship of this world was established by God. So says the Bible which the Christians claim to follow" (Translation is by J.J.R. Jolobe, in Soga, 1983, 173). By so doing Soga reinforces the idea of life as connected. Thus he reminds Xhosa Christians that they cannot divorce their beliefs from their actions; the very Bible they have embraced speaks about respecting authority and that all authority is God given. So spirituality is used to ensure uniformity and harmony between the spiritual and physical world.

Thus when one reads African texts, often they are interspersed with spirituality, which is a reflection of the traditional African worldview and not an indication of religiosity in the western sense. A case in point is illustrated in Sinxo's novel *Umzali wolahleko* where the protagonist, Ndimeni, uses a new way of irrigation in his village. When people see his new method they laugh at him and say that he is wasting his time and would not reap a good harvest. This was because he was fetching water from the river to water his crop whereas people in his village used to wait for rain to water their crop. Ndimeni would fetch water from the Thyume River for irrigation. In response to this "...ababomvu bona bathi loo nto iya kuzisa ilishwa elalini yonke" (Sinxo, 1976, 40) "... traditional Xhosa people said that it will bring misfortune on the whole village" (My translation). This illustrates that in Xhosa society one's physical actions have spiritual implications and affect not just the person performing the action but has bearing on the next person's destiny as well. Thus in African spirituality all life is sacred. When one has this understanding it becomes easier to read and analyse African texts within an African framework and to understand the dynamics that pervade the text instead of imposing a western and or religious framework in reading and analysing African literature.

- d) A critical approach to knowledge, the politics of knowing and verifying them according to rigorous African scholarship with Africa and African philosophy as a point of departure.

A critical approach to knowledge would entail questioning the origins of that knowledge and the process of arriving at such knowledge. Knowledge that is taken for granted as true or presented as scientific should be scrutinised and not held up as infallible or value free. The suppositions and system of reasoning that one applies and the conclusions that one arrives at are often informed by one's ideological predisposition and interests, hence the need for a critical approach to knowledge. Indigenous knowledge systems should also be considered and evaluated for whatever merit they may contain. The different systems and processes of knowing or arriving at alternative conclusions should be given fair opportunity to be developed and used to theorise from and to enter the body of knowledge instead of being a remote appendix in the body of knowledge.

In Mgqwetho's work, often when there is a situation that needs intervention she relies on various sources of knowledge and decries relying solely on western sources of knowledge. She cries: "Pulapula! Intombi zezwe lakowenu; ziza kuhlolwa ngo Gqirha abamhlophe bezinye Izizwe, isimanga sento ke eso, esingazange sibonwe ngapantsi kwe Langa" "Listen, the young women of your land are now being examined by white doctors from other countries, an extraordinary thing, never before encountered under the sun" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 308-311). Mgqwetho notes that young women have abandoned their own traditional African doctors who used to examine them and they are now examined by white doctors from other countries. Mgqwetho argues that there were legitimate African "gynecological specialists", women who specialised in examining young women, but now their skills and knowledge have been devalued and replaced by those of foreign doctors, who are deemed superior. Mgqwetho admonishes black people saying: "Masiyeke ukuthi oGqirha betu ngaba Hedeni" "Let us stop calling our doctors heathen" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 308). Mgqwetho thus illustrates the need for different knowledge systems to be valued and

for multiplicity of knowledge sources, rather than relying on and accepting one way of seeing and reasoning as superior.

This is well illustrated in Sinxo's *Umzali wolahleko* where the character Zinkobe Jomsini dubs himself Dr Zinobee Jameson. This name change comes as a result of his move from his rural home emaGqunukwebeni to Port Elizabeth (Sinxo, 1976, p.27). Zinkobe Jomsini was a famous herbalist but he realised that in the city people consult doctors and if he changes his name to Dr Zinobee Jameson, it would carry more credibility and prestige than operating as ixhwele, a herbalist, because of the credibility associated with English and western medicine and the devaluing of African names and doctors. Thus Jomsini is not masquerading as a doctor but he is a traditional African doctor who knows more value is assigned to English names and western educated doctors and takes full advantage of this epistemic injustice.

5.2 African Literary Theory: A Reading

The following section will offer a reading of Mgqwetho's work, particularly the poem "Ngubani Oti Ukuvumisa Akufuneki?" "Who said there's no need for divination?" (See Annexure P for full poem), using the proposed African literary theory to analyse the poem. Firstly, it must be noted that Mgqwetho wrote all her poetry and prose in Xhosa except for the only article she wrote in English which was titled "The History of Dingaan's Day" and published in *Umteteli wa Bantu* on the 15th of December 1923 (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. xxi). Though very little is known about Nontsizi Mgqwetho's background and life in general, one can glean from her writing that she had received formal schooling which was under the control of missionaries because the South African government only took over the reins of education in 1953, long after Mgqwetho had stopped writing and submitting her poetry to *Umteteli wa Bantu*.

Having received missionary education which was in English, Mgqwetho was therefore capable of writing in both English and Xhosa as her article in English demonstrates.

However, Mqgqwetho chose to write in Xhosa although she was writing in a multilingual newspaper and to a diverse audience. She chose to write in her mother tongue (Xhosa) and to express herself in an African language, though expressing herself in English would have reached wider readership. As discussed in previous chapters, although Mqgqwetho wrote in Xhosa, she would use some Afrikaans and English words in her poetry. This was reflective of the context she found herself in and her work was true to her sociolinguistic reality. She uses Xhosa-rised versions of Afrikaans words such as “sibhonti” for “bont” (Coloured people), “O Royibatyi” for “Rooi baadjie” (Red jackets) and “nikisi” for “niks” (nothing) thus her linguistic expression is reflective of her social context in Johannesburg and every now and then she makes use of the languages at her disposal.

The focus of Mqgqwetho’s poetry is Africa; in her writing Africa and Africans are at the centre of her analysis and she does not address anyone else who was at the time not deemed African. Thus her work can be labelled as Afro-centric in nature and approach as she writes about Africa and the history and condition of Africa and Africans in an African language and never changes her subject: Africa is her sole concern. Thus Mqgqwetho’s work can be deemed to be valourising and prioritising African language expression and history.

In numerous poems Mqgqwetho refers her readers to Ntsikana and often asks “Didn’t Ntsikana tell you?” By asking modern readers so she is referring them to oral history because at the time Mqgqwetho was writing Ntsikana had died a century earlier in 1821, and certainly her readers would not have heard Ntsikana say anything to them. Ntsikana never received any formal schooling and thus did not write anything down. All that Mqgqwetho refers to as Ntsikana’s words is what was passed down orally. Thus Mqgqwetho is assigning value to orality and African oral history about Ntsikana and she expects her readers to know this history, and at the same time she writes Ntsikana and his teachings into textual history thus offering a different account of Ntsikana and his teachings than the ones missionaries offered in their books. Mqhayi wrote his revisionist history of Ntsikana in 1926, six years after Mqgqwetho had started reintroducing Ntsikana and his teachings into African memory through her prose and poetry.

The sub-title of the poem “Ngubani Oti Ukuvumisa Akufuneki?” “Who said there’s no need for divination?” is “Namagqira Etu Ngaba Hedeni?” “And that your doctors are heathens?” A diviner in Xhosa is referred to as *igqira* (now *igqirha*) from which the Xhosa word for a doctor (*Ugqirha*) is derived. Thus in this context diviners were basically viewed as African doctors. But with the advent of Christianity and westernisation, African doctors and their methods were viewed with suspicion by the missionaries and they were called heathens. In this poem Mqgqwetho uses the Bible as basis for her argument and asks who said there’s no need for divination because in the Scripture passage that she refers to (1 Samuel 28: 8-20), after the prophet Samuel had died, Saul expelled all mediums and spiritists from Israel, but as he was preparing for war against the Philistines he saw the Philistine army and was terrified and asked God what to do but God did not answer him by dreams or prophets. Then Saul asked his servants to find him a woman who was a medium so that he could go and inquire of her. Saul had to disguise himself because he had driven out all the mediums in the land and was now in desperate need of their expertise. Eventually his servant found a woman for him to consult and Saul vowed not to kill or punish her. The woman conjured up Samuel the prophet who told Saul of his imminent defeat and death.

Mqgqwetho uses this passage to argue for legitimising different ways of coming to knowledge and for people to not undermine traditional African doctors. Mqgqwetho chooses this biblical passage to show that Saul consulted a medium that was able to know his future and that of Israel which the prophets of the day could not tell him. She concludes her reference to this biblical passage by saying “U Tixo izinto wazidala ngokuzazi: Engabuzanga kuti ke ukuzenza Kwake” “God created things according to his own plan without consulting us about the creation” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 308-309) thus implying that traditional African doctors are not heathen as many Christians at the time were told to believe. In the first stanza Mqgqwetho argues that “Satshabalalake ngokuswel’igqira” “We perish for lack of diviners”. Here Mqgqwetho argues that the reason Africans are perishing is because they have rejected their diviners who are traditional sources of wisdom. Mqgqwetho uses the Bible as her reference point to advocate for the restoration of diviners, thus privileging African knowledge and tradition as legitimate and valuable sources of knowledge which should be utilised.

Although Mgqwetho received missionary education, as can be seen with her familiarity with the Bible and the major Christian text, *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was translated into Xhosa by Tiyo Soga as *Uhambo lomhambi*, Mgqwetho approaches this knowledge with great scrutiny. She does not accept the reading of the Bible as taught by the missionaries and seeks to critically read the Bible for herself and encourages black people to do the same and uses Ntsikana's words "Fundani Izibhalo" "Read the Scriptures" to emphasise her approach. Thus Mgqwetho reads the Bible and draws links with what she reads and what is happening on the African continent. She likens Saul's initial rejection of diviners with that of the white missionaries but through her reading of the Bible she comes to the conclusion that diviners are a legitimate source of knowledge and that diviners themselves were created by God. In the third stanza she argues "Sati namagqira angaba hedeni/ Sisenza u Tixo ngoko umhedeni/ Yena owadala zonke ezizinto/ Woyisa no Saule ngoko ngayo lonto." "We called our doctors heathens, / making a heathen of God/ who created all these things/ and convinced Saul of the fact" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310-311). For Mgqwetho God is the source of all knowledge and any knowledge traditional doctors have is portrayed as coming from God and thus carries value but she argues that by rejecting African doctors and calling them heathen Christians are rejecting and making God himself heathen.

Mgqwetho believes that it is this view that Christians hold that has led to traditional African doctors being rejected for foreign doctors to the detriment of traditional African society hence she says "Sati namagqira angaba hedeni/ kodwaw wonke Umzi usaya eweni/ Onke amaxoki asezikolweni/ Onke namagqwira asezikolweni" "We called our doctors heathens, / while our every village slides down the cliffs. / All our liars are in school, all our witches are in school" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310-311). Mgqwetho attributes the deterioration of the lives of African people to privileging one way of knowing over another and centering western knowledge as the only legitimate source of knowledge and she calls the school people who have done this liars and witches because despite this acceptance of foreign knowledge black people's lives continue to "slide down the cliffs". Mgqwetho argues against the devaluation and rejection of African spirituality and knowledge as heathen, this shows her respect for African spirituality and indigenous knowledge systems and her literary work is a natural reflection of that.

Among the Xhosa people when black people accepted Christianity they had to accept European culture as well; the two were synonymous and packaged as one. The missionaries urged black people to leave their customs behind because they were deemed heathen so they had to exchange African customs for European ones. Mgqwetho illustrates this cultural conversion as follows:

Sayek'izitembu namhla siyashwsha
Sayeka nemb'ola kodwa siyashusha
Yiyo ke lemfundo siq'ayisa ngayo
Siyemnka nomfula tu—nto kwakuyiyo
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 311)

We gave up polygamy; today we take lovers.
We gave up ochre, but now we're all drunk.
It's all the fault of this learning we praise;
We slip downstream empty-handed.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310)

Mgqwetho faults western education for the abandonment of African values and portrays black people as gaining nothing better from this exchange instead she portrays black people sinking deeper and deeper into drunkenness and poverty. Mgqwetho cites black people's adoption of European culture as what has left them impoverished. She posits

Masiko sangena kumzi wase mzini
Sacasa nenkosi seza emlungwini
Sachita nemfuyo konke kwapelela
Tu—nto isasele sipokopalala.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 309)

We entered the house of foreign custom;
turned on our kings and went to the whites,
scattered our stock to the winds,
emptied our bins. Nothing's left.
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 308)

Because of this rejection of African custom and knowledge Mgqwetho suggests that black people have rejected their very life source: their customs. Black people are portrayed as empty handed with nothing left to offer. Mgqwetho concludes by saying "Asihlali ntweni, akuko masiko/ Ziti Izanuse landan'amasiko." "We lack the truth, we lack tradition". / "Track your traditions," say diviners" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310-311). Mgqwetho's work suggests that once people return to tradition they will be restored. She advocates a return to tradition and traditional sources of knowledge and cites diviners as providing this direction thus giving her readers a chance to consider what she has said and if it contains any truth, to turn from their wayward ways and return to tradition.

Thus a reading of Mgqwetho's work shows how she valorises African culture and history. African customs are portrayed as the very fibre of society whose rejection leads to depravity and poverty. Mgqwetho privileges African language expression by writing in an African language and including phrases from other languages which reflect her socio-linguistic context in Johannesburg, thus her work is an accurate reflection of the cultural milieu she is writing in. Mgqwetho centres Africa's wellbeing and restoration as her main concern: she writes about African customs and knowledge as carrying the keys to the wellbeing of black people. A return to African sources of knowledge be it Ntsikana or the ancient sage or diviners is advocated using biblical passages thus the spiritual occupies a holistic place in her worldview. Mgqwetho critiques the politics of knowledge which she argues have led to the systemic devaluation of African sources of knowledge and processes of inquiry hence she calls for multiplicity of "truths" and equal treatment of knowledge coming from Africa, as she often says "Inyaniso masipatwe ngananinye/ Inyaniso kungaviwa bantu banye/ Nantso

ke! Inyaniso yezi Bhalo/ Napantsi ke, kweyetu imibhalo” “The truth must be treated fairly, / the truth must be heard by both sides: / the truth is there in the scriptures /and also within our blankets” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 196).

The illustrations above show the value of African culture, languages, history and knowledge in reading and analysing African texts. An understanding of how they have been devalued and marginalised in knowledge production and in literary analysis is imperative in order to understand and revisit African texts. The proposed approach empowers the reader and critic to read African texts in context and to also re-read African texts against their past misreadings because of the foreign paradigms which were imposed on African texts thus leading to superficial and false criticism of the works.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Concluding Remarks

This thesis began by contextualizing historical accounts of African people, their history and literary production albeit from western records. It noted that because of European invasion and cultural imperialism, the natural development of African literary production and theory was forever changed. With the arrival of missionaries and western education, Africans were taught European literature and aesthetics. This led to the first African authors patterning their creative works after “European” religious texts such as the Bible and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. This can be seen in how the first literary works in Xhosa were translations and adaptations of biblical stories. The first biography in Xhosa was written by John Knox Bokwe in 1906 and based on the Old Testament prophet Nehemiah, the Xhosa title was *Indoda yamadoda* (A man’s man or a man among men) and the following year the first Xhosa novel was written by S.E.K. Mqhayi and was based on the story of Samson and was titled *USamson*.

Because the missionaries introduced western education, education and Christianity came hand in hand, thus the education and proselytizing mission were intertwined. Africans who received missionary education were identified as Christians; in her poem “Ingxoxo yo Mginwa ku Magqoboka!” “A Red debates with Christians⁶” Mqgwetho criticises educated Africans saying that they are only Christian through their education and this she argues manifested in their behaviour - she called them “Christians by day, and hyenas by night” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.50 line 18). Because of their hypocritical behaviour Mqgwetho comes to the following conclusion:

⁶ Mqgwetho makes intertextual reference and borrows heavily from William Wellington Gqoba’s “Ingxoxo enkulu yomGinwa nom-Kristu” (A great debate between a heathen and a Christian) (1887-8).

Onk' amabhedengu asezikolweni

Onke namasela ase zikolweni

Onke namagqwira asezikolweni

15

Ningabokusikwa ndifung' u Nontsizi.

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 51)

All our crooks are in school,

all our thieves are in school,

all our witches in school:

15

by Nontsizi, I swear you should all be expelled!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 50)

Thus education amongst Africans was conducted from a western perspective with the aim to “civilise” the Africans who were seen as barbaric, and their ways outdated and in need of extermination. Thus European invasion and occupation was not merely about territorial invasion or land occupation but about occupying the African psyche and ridding it of its very Africanness which was largely seen as evil and backwards, and filling and civilising it with a European world-view. Western thought, dress, culture and aesthetics were held up as what Africans should aspire to and ought to become under European influence and tutelage. Thus the African in the European education system was constantly aware of the supposed “backwardness” of his culture and thinking which was in need of salvation.

Mgqwetho points out “Nentombi azisagidi ngalubambo/ Sezik'aba nje kupela onomamtasi” “our girls no longer dance with bare breasts: / today they cut their fancy capers” (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 114-115). Suddenly, what was considered beautiful and natural such as girls dancing with bare breasts, was said to be backward by missionaries and had to be concealed. Thus some Xhosa Christians began to internalise and acquire European aesthetics and standards of beauty and decency. When John Knox Bokwe describes the custom of Xhosa people painting red ochre or brownish clay on their faces and exposed parts of their

bodies to protect them from the sun, he describes this custom with harsh criticism. He writes “...before the clay has been rubbed off their appearance is hideous and unnatural” (Bokwe, 1914, p. 1).

One wonders when this custom and its effects became hideous and unnatural in Bokwe’s sight. This is not assuming that all Xhosa people viewed all things in the same way and in a positive light as if in the past all was perfect and harmonious before colonialists came. As Chinweizu (1975) points out:

In contemporary African literature there have so far been two dominant attitudes towards the African past: romanticism and critical realism. The vague romanticism of the negritude school is notorious. In reaction to colonial insults the negritude poets salve their wounds with extravagant nostalgia for a vaguely conceived past...were our ancestors a parade of plaster saints who never, among themselves, struck a blow or hurt a fly...? On the other hand, critical realism, because it does not spread a gloss of sanctity on the past, does not extol every aspect of it. It is content to praise what it sees as praiseworthy, and to dispraise what it sees as not praiseworthy. It thereby treats out past like any other valid era of culture (Chinweizu, 1975, p. 54- 55).

The critical realism approach gives a more balanced view of history and culture. There are good things and deplorable things in every culture and the goal is to present in African history and literary output a more nuanced view of African society past and present, without glorifying the past as perfect and a type of ideal state, while at the same time not seeing the African past and culture as barbaric and undesirable. Kolawole (2004) gives a good illustration of how when speaking about culture in Europe it is presented in positive and desirable light but when speaking of African culture and tradition it is depicted as backward and with no real relevance or value to draw from for the present or future.

Long after the demise of colonialism, the African psyche is still battling with accepting itself and viewing itself as capable of independent scientific and theoretical explorations without a lead from the West. The works of Frantz Fanon, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Sindiwe Magona, Alice

Walker, Chidi Amuta, Es'kia Mphahlele and Steve Biko amongst many others have been instrumental in changing the way Africans see themselves by making them understand how they came to see themselves, their language, culture and beliefs, and to seek ways to recover and rebuild their image. This is the process that Wa Thiong'o aptly refers to as decolonising the mind. The African approaches to literature as elucidated by Swanepoel (1990) show that African theorists and writers need to move away from looking to Europe or the West for literary and theoretical approaches to writing, and begin looking for and finding their own voice and cultural framework as a point of departure. Pertinent questions raised in this research pertain to:

Where do we find ourselves in this conglomeration, if not labyrinth of theories, approaches and criticisms? What should the attitude be towards the selection of appropriate theoretical models? How could we raise the relevance of our research and the reliability of our findings? To what extent should the uniqueness of African culture be reflected in our approaches and findings? (Swanepoel, 1990, p. 67)

By examining the work of Mqgqwetho, the research traced the first philosophical response to European invasion, education and Christianity amongst the Xhosa people. Through the framework provided by Ntsikana, the questions above were explored. Peires explains why Ntsikana and his contemporary Nxele resonated with such contemporary significance:

The sudden expulsion of the Xhosa across the Fish River in 1811-12 created a practical and conceptual crisis which the traditional political authorities were unable to resolve. [Thus] Two commoners, Nxele and Ntsikana, emerged in this vacuum, each proposing his own solution to the problems posed by the white irruption. Although these responses were religious responses, they were neither irrational nor incomprehensible. Xhosa religion had long functioned as an instrument for the control of the material world. By incorporating selected Christian concepts with the Xhosa World-view, Nxele and Ntsikana were able to provide the Xhosa with acceptable explanations of past events and prescriptions for future action (Peires, 1979, p. 61).

In this study Ntsikana's response is articulated as providing a model for how Africans should approach foreign knowledge and concepts. This critical approach to knowledge with Africa at the centre is what Mqgqwetho articulates and highlights in her poetry as Ntsikana's ideology. Whenever Mqgqwetho puts an argument forward regarding current challenges, she demands this critical engagement from her readers and her work is not exempt from the scrutiny she invites her readers to apply. She often says "Pikis'ezondawo ngwevu yakowetu" "Fault these points, Greybeard of ours" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 310-311); "Make uzibuze wozu undingqinele" "Compatriot, wrestle with what I say" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 94-95) and "Make kaloku nje sitwax'ukuteta" "meet me in sober debate" (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 94-96). Thus Mqgqwetho's work provides a framework for meaningful engagement and a desire for rigorous debate and to subject all forms of knowledge to such scrutiny. As Chinweizu points out, African writers "...are not interested in the uncritical glorification of the past" (Chinweizu, 1975, p. 48) but seek to preserve an accurate and realistic picture of the past from an African standpoint.

Though Mqgqwetho's approach emanates from a traditional African perspective, it takes into account other world-views, holds them under scrutiny, sees what is valuable and useful in them in an African cultural context and thus formulates a conceptual framework of how to approach new knowledge. The key tenets of an African literary theory posited herein provide a framework to rediscover and perpetuate African intellectual heritage by studying literature from an African cultural framework which considers an African worldview, oral tradition and spirituality as crucial factors in reading, analysing and presenting African literary works. Other knowledges should not be discarded by virtue of not originating from Africa, but should be held under rigorous scrutiny for any value they may contain and a healthy exchange of ideas and concepts explored, albeit with an African conceptual framework as the centre and point of departure.

Annexure A

Saxulutywa!—Ngamatye Omsebenzi!!

Bona ke! Namhlanje ndifun' uqondile
Mfondini wakowetu nantso intlekele
Balwa ngomsebenzi, sisate manga
Nawe ke namhlanje ngaw' yeka amawonga.

Nezidenge e Africa mazitete!— 5
E Dekapolis izidenge zateta
E Jeriko zakangela nemfama
Mazibone namhla nezetu imfama.

Nenkokeli mazivuke e Afrika 10
Zingapili ngamatambo naludaka
Zenze isikalo apa zikumbule
Lenzala ye Afrika ite rerelele.

Makowetu! Ibuhlungu lenyaniso
Namhlanje yezimini zalo mbuso
Waduda unetemba lezi Bhalo 15
Wati lahlani eyenu imibhalo.

Nandzo—izigebenga! Nango—namasela
Ndakuvumbulula mna ndonosela
Naxulutywa ngamatye ngabapambukeli
Abadla e Jordani bengaliweli. 20

Inyaniso masipatwe ngananinye
Inyaniso kungaviwa bantu banye
Nantso ke! Inyaniso yezi Bhalo
Napantsi ke, kweyetu imibhalo.

Inkokeli mazilale ngemihlana 25
Ziyeke lento yokube ziqulana
Kuliwa ngomsebenzi akungazintonga
Ipi? Ke eyenu? Ngawuxele ke ntanga

Nabiza! Imali isinga nesinga
Yenzeni ke namhla? Ngaw' xele ke ntanga 30
Sacikoza nje sada sagqitisa
Yalala—ingqondo yokuzipilisa.

U Yehova Esimema ngako konke
U Yehova Esibiza ngama Conke
Ukutsho ke nditi kule yomsebenzi 35
Sakude—Sifunde! Udalwe nge Lizwi
Camagu!

Balwa ngomsebenzi, akungazintonga
 Namhla nje ke nawe ngaw' yeka 'mawonga
 Anikoyikina? Ukuzek' ityala 40
 Nayeka Izizwe sambete izandla?

Umanyano nje kupela lungamandla
 Kuba lulo lodwa olunokusondla
 Zonk' intshaba zakoyiswa ngenxa yalo
 Nentsika ze Zulu zakwapulwa ngalo. 45

Kunini kodwa sigqora ukuteta
 E Dekapolis nezidenge zateta
 E Jeriko zakangela nemfama
 Mazibone! Namhla nezetu imfama
 Camaguni! Mazulu!! 50

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, 197-199)

Our efforts stone us!

Look! I want you to understand
 our misfortune today, compatriot:
 we're amazed they compare achievements!
 Won't you stop vying for status?

May the dumb speak in Africa! 5
 The dumb spoke in Decapolis,
 the eyes of the blind were opened in Jericho:
 may our blind regain their sight today.

May leaders emerge in Africa,
 stop living on bones and scraps 10
 and cry out here at the prospect
 of Africa's children arrayed in rank.

My people, there's pain in the truth:
 this regime controls our lives today.
 It thrashed us through trust in the scriptures, 15
 saying "Lay your blankets aside!"

See all those killers and thieves:
 what I exposed knocked you flat.
 You were stoned by strangers
 who splash in the Jordan without crossing over. 20

The truth must be treated fairly,
 the truth must be heard by both sides:
 the truth is there in the scriptures

and also within our blankets.

May our leaders see eye to eye,
stop putting each other down:
efforts not weapons win battles.
Tell me, fellow, what you are doing. 25

Day after day you ask for donations.
To what end? Please tell me, fellow. 30
Our silver-tongued speeches droned on and on,
dulled our senses, set us snoring.

While Jehovah opens his arms to us,
while Jehovah beckons us close to him!
This is the point: you were made by the word, 35
so we'll learn of your efforts on judgement day.
Peace!

Efforts not weapons win battles:
stop vying for status today.
Aren't you afraid that you stripped the nation, 40
left it naked with only its hands for cover?

Unity's our only strength,
it alone can nourish us:
all enemies will be crushed by it,
and the pillars of heaven shattered. 45

How long must we keep on repeating:
the dumb spoke in Decapolis,
the eyes of the blind were opened in Jericho:
may our blind regain their sight today.
Peace to you! Heavens! 50
(Opland (ed and trans) 2007, 196 -198)

Annexure B

Imbongikazi No “Abantu-Batho”

UQEKEKO LUKA MAXEKE! NOKUYA KWE MBONGIKAZI:—

1 Timbilili! Watsho okade elele
Wabuya wavuka
Timbilili! Watsho okade eneta
Intaka yendada zase Afrika. 5

2 Hawulele! Nto ka Mvabaza
Namhla isikumba se Congress

- Ngati sisongwa
Sisombuluka.
- 3 Kudala! Mvabaza ndakubonayo 10
Uyimazi elubisi luncinanana
Olungasafikiyo
Nase zimvabeni.
- 4 Hawulele! Hule! 15
Wena “Abantu-Batho”
Wawuba uyakusala
Negama lobugosa.
- 5 Umteteli wa Bantu 20
Kudala akubonayo
Uyimvaba engenawo namanzi
Eyode izale onojubalalana.
- 6 Abantu bayapela 25
Kukufunzwa eweni
Kuba abanamnyangi
Obabhulel’imiti.
- 7 Imbongikazi iyile? 30
Ndandizakukusukela pi?
Kuba kwelopepa lako
Ndoginywa yimilomo yengonyama.
- 8 Ndiyazi wena Mvabaza 35
Akuvumani nelanga
Kuba waqel’ nyanga
Into ohamba nayo
Paul’a Mfundi.
- 9 Imbongikazi iyile? 40
Akusazi Mvabaza isi-Xosa
Kaufunde kwakona izibongo
Zoqekeko lwe kongressi.
- 10 Iminyanya yakowetu 45
Ayibambani neyexelegu
Ndanditeta ukutini
Xa ndandisitsho?
- 11 Wena Mvabaza uluyengeyenge 45
Olweza lupetwe ngesikotile
Lwafika e Rautini
Lwabona soluyi nkokeli.
- 12 Akuyiyo ke Inkokeli

Nakanye wena Mvabaza Ungumrwebi Elona gama lako.	50
13 Yekana no Mfu. Maxeke Ngu Tixo oseke elapepa Ebona ukupela kwabantu Kukufunzwa eweni.	
14 Ngubani owakubeka Ukuba ube yinkokeli? Zikona nje Inkosi Ezadalwa ngu Tixo.	55
15 Akuyazi wena Mvabaza Nendalo ka Tixo Naku nam soundenza Imbong'kazi ka "Abantu Batho"	60
16 Uyavuya wena weza Nembongikazi e Ngqushwa Ukuba mayizokukwenzela Isonka e Rautini Sakubona	65
17 Sifunze! Kakubi Sifuna! izibuko Abantu bayapela Kukufunzwa eweni.	70
18 Hawulele! Hule! Funz'eweni base Jeppe Abamemeza ingqina Kodwa bengayipumi.	75
19 Zinani ezinkokeli Lento zingafiyo? Zimana zibulalisa Abantu baka Tixo namakosi Yimpi ka Beyele	80
20 Yatshona! I-Afrika Ngofunz'eweni Utsho obonga engqungqa Engcwabeni lika yise Hawuhule	85
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.25- 29)	

The woman poet and *Abantu-Batho*

Maxeke's split! And the woman poet joined you!

- 1 "Timbilili!" says the sleeper,
suddenly awakened.
"Timbilili!" says the marsh bird,
drenched in rain. 5
- 2 Hawulele! Mvabaza,
the blanket of Congress
has often been rolled up;
today it's unfurled again.
- 3 Mvabaza, I've long had my eye on you, 10
cow yielding dribbles of milk
lacking the strength
to reach the milksack.
- 4 Hawulele! Hule!
Abantu-Batho, 15
you thought you'd retain
the title of guardian.
- 5 *Umteteli wa Bantu*
saw right through you:
you're a sack without water 20
left to breed tadpoles.
- 6 Our people are spent,
urged over the edge,
lacking healers
to administer cures. 25
- 7 The woman poet joined you?
Where did we talk?
In that paper of yours
I'd be torn in the jaws of a lion.
- 8 I know you well, Mvabaza: 30
you shun the day,
preferring the moon
as travelling companion.
Reader, take note!
- 9 The woman poet joined you? 35
Mvabaza, plain Xhosa eludes you:
please reread my poem
on the split within Congress:

- 10 “Tramps’ ancestors
are no match for mine.” 40
Just what do you think
I meant by those words?
- 11 You tremble, Mvabaza, like jelly
served on a plate;
a Joburg Johnny-come-lately, 45
an overnight leader.
- 12 You’re no leader, Mvabaza,
and you never will be,
all you can claim
is the status of shopkeeper. 50
- 13 Leave Reverend Maxeke alone:
It was God who founded that paper
seeing our people wasted,
urged over the edge.
- 14 When did you win 55
election to rule?
We still have our chiefs
established by God.
- 15 Mvabaza, you’re blind
to God’s creation, 60
wanting me woman poet
of your *Abantu-Batho*.
- 16 You brag that you brought
the woman poet from Peddie
to earn your bread 65
in Johannesburg!
- That’ll be the day!
- 17 We stumbled in starting.
We seek a ford.
Our people are wasted, 70
urged over the edge.
- 18 Hawuleleh! Huleh! From Jeppe
they urge us over the edge,
they egg on the troops
but stay home themselves. 75
- 19 How come these leaders
never get killed?
They send to their deaths
God’s people and chiefs.

They're Bailey's agents. 80

20 In urging us over the edge
they're sinking Africa.
I chant this dancing
near my father's grave.

Hawuhule! 85

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.24-28)

Annexure C



The original photograph is held in the William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand, as item A2945/E.7. See Peter Limb (ed), *The people's paper: a centenary history and anthology of Abantu-Batho* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), figure 3, for the full photograph, and page 216 for Opland's identification of Mgqwetho.

Annexure D

[Uqekeko lwe Congress]

Pulapulani! Nizakuva!
Uqekeko lwe South African
Native National Congress,
Ingelulo oluka Rev. Maxeke B.A.,

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Hawulele! Hule!
Ndanditshilo mna Nontsizi,
Iminyanya yakowetu
Ayibambani neye Xelegu. | 5 |
| 2 | Siyapuma egusheni.
Sidiniwe kuncwela
Ukuba Siyancwela
Ingab'asinanyani. | 10 |
| 3 | Uqekeko luka Maxeke?
Walulibala ke nawe
Mfondini wakowetu
Olwe National Congress. | 15 |
| 4 | Namhla Sigagene
Tyapile wenjenje
Utyile amanyala
De ndakufumana. | 20 |
| 5 | Kaukwezele!
Nto ka Makgatho (President)
Nandzo intlantsi
Namhlanje ziq'ug'umba
Hule! Bo.' | 25 |
| 6 | Uti u Xego-Dala
Isizwe simangele
Kuba i National Congress
Seyidliw'amaq'ashu. | |
| 7 | Abantu bayapela
Kukufunzwa eweni
Ndindim ngendimlumela
Nowalat'izibuko. | 30 |
| 8 | Ha-la-la! Sasitshilo
National Congress
Boze bona bakubone
Oc'ul'ukunyatela. | 35 |

9	Kaukangele ke Uqekeko lwako Kwanokummangalisa Kokutyatyambileyo,	40
10	Yi Cape Native Congress! Bantu Union! Zulu osebenzela ekaya! Ne Zibuko esingazi ngomso.	45
11	Yiyipina ke kuzo Eginyisa amate Nenika abantu itemba Lokubuyiswa kwe Afrika?	
12	Uti oka Maxeke B.A., Yatshona i Afrika Ngo Funz'eweni base Kapa Kunye nabase Jeppe.	50
13	Uti u Xego-Dala Wase zibukweni Namhlanje makaguxane Amaxok'omabini.	55
14	Kuba o Funz'eweni Bashumayela Abangakwamkeli ku Congress Bakwenze indaba ze sizwe.	60
15	Imkile i Natal Congress Ngenxa yabo Imkile kwane Free State Nantsiya ne Koloni izintlantlu ngentlantlu.	65
16	Uti ke yena oka Maxeke (B.A.,) Ungasemoyeni Imikwa yabo kudala Ayikangela wancama.	
17	Uti oka Maxeke (B.A.,) O Funz'eweni abasazi Nalapo mabapate Bayeke kona.	70
18	Bati oka Maxeke Utengisa nge sizwe Kanti kudala bona Basitengisa kuqala.	75

19	Yatshona i Afrika ngabo Kuba nenkanunu ze Congress Nandzo zigquma Ziqekezisa amabandla.	80
20	Uti ke oka Maxeke (B.A.) Umdala okade ubalisa Namhla o Funz'eweni Uyabotula ezintabeni.	85
21	Hawulele! Hule Latsitsa namhla ibhunga Igazi lase Bhayi Libuya nezimanga.	
22	Sifunze! Kakubi! Sifuna! Izibuko! Asikusela ezadungeni Ngokoyik'ukuteta.	90
23	Isizwe asiwafuni amaramnca Avele ngomx'ak'emngxunyeni Angenantlonipo ngumntu Nangatembekiyo.	95
24	Vuka! Nto ka Makgatho Wapepeza na Umoya? Ungawazi apo uvela kona Nalapo usinga kona?	100
25	I-Congress iqekezwa Ngo Funz'eweni base Jeppe Abamana beyipanda Bexel'amahlungulu.	105
26	Uti ke oka Maxeke (B.A.) Uyayicima namhlanje Imisebenzi yabo Njengelifu eligqingqwa!	
27	Itsha nganina Indlu ye Congress? Azi babebone ntonina Osivuma-ngamehlo.	110
28	Lumkelani! Iyatshona Inqanawe ye sizwe Nina nisalibele Kukuqwit'ezidosheni!	115

29	Bekungekonto ikakade Ibingade igqite nto Kubantu abazicingela Ukuba bangabantu bodwa	120
30	Vuka ke Nto ka Makgatho Ufune Izibuko Nango umoya ukuq'ola Wevumba elitshonisa Inqanawe ye sizwe. Camagu ke! Mahlala bemsusa!	125

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.17 - 23)

[The split within Congress]

Listen! You'll hear
of the split within Congress,
graver than any
Rev. Maxeke, B.A. might have caused.

1	Hawulele! Hule! Nontsizi foresaw it. Tramps' ancestors are no match for mine.	5
2	Tired of snipping, we came out of our holes: you might as well lie as snip at an issue.	10
3	Maxeke's split? Neighbour, you're blind to internal dissension in National Congress.	15
4	Today we're a team: you've done a good job, exposing the filth before I could reach you.	20
5	Stoke up the fire, President Makgatho! Watch the sparks swirl up today. Hule! Bo!	25
6	The ancient of days says the nation is stunned: National Congress is chomped	

	like corn on the cob.	
7	Our people are spent, urged over the edge. I'd carve the meat for a guide to a ford.	30
8	Halala! As we said: National Congress, envious watchers would grind you to dust.	35
9	Please consider your internal split: your bloated body comes as a shock.	40
10	Cape Native Congress and Bantu Union! The ford's struck by lightning: our future's cloudy!	45
11	Which one of the two appeals to the people, raises their hopes of Africa's return?	
12	Maxeke, B.A., says Africa's scuppered when Cape Town and Jeppe urge us over the edge.	50
13	The ancient of days calls out at the ford: he'll stand toe to toe with both liars today.	55
14	Without leave from Congress they urge us over the edge, they preach their sermons and grab the headlines.	60
15	And as a result Natal Congress walked out, and the Free State walked out, and the Cape's splinters splinter.	65
16	Maxeke, B.A., speaks out. Long he stood downwind watching their antics,	

	and in the end he turned his back.	
17	We're urged over the edge, says Maxeke, B.A., by those who run blind, with no home to turn to.	70
18	Maxeke, they claim, is selling the nation; but they sold it off a long time ago.	75
19	They scuttle Africa: down there the big guns of Congress are roaring, pounding away at their very own ranks.	80
20	Thus Maxeke, B.A., ancient teller of tales. He forces down today those urging us over the edge.	85
21	Hawulele! Hule! The boil came to a head today, wonders erupted like pus mixed with P.E.'s blood.	
22	We stumbled in starting! We seek a ford! We won't bury our heads, afraid to speak out.	90
23	The nation's ill served by those heroes who lurk in their lairs like wild beasts, heedless of others, betraying our trust.	95
24	Wake up, Makgatho, the air's in motion! Why can't you tell where the wind comes from or where it's blowing?	100
25	Congress is split by those in Jeppe urging us over the edge, crows who pick it over, scratching the ground for seed.	105
26	Maxeke, B.A., speaks out. Today he swathes all their deeds	

in a baffling mist.

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 27 | Why is Congress
put to the torch?
Where are the visions
of those in sympathy? | 110 |
| 28 | I'm warning you all!
The nation's sinking
while you look down,
fumbling for matches! | 115 |
| 29 | There could not be
a matter more grave:
there are some who believe
they alone are the people. | 120 |
| 30 | So wake up, Makgatho,
and seek a ford:
you're getting a whiff
of the stench that sinks
the ship of the nation.
So peace, it's up to you! | 125 |

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.16 - 22)

Annexure E

Amaqaba! Pulapula

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Taru Mhleli ngesituba sezi mbongi
Ndisahleli ndingumfana andimbongi
Ndingumpati tunga lezi Nxiba-Mxaka
Makabhekabheke onka magqob'oka. | |
| 2 | Taru Mhleli ngesituba sezimbongi
Ndiko noko ndisahleli andimbongi
Ndililo iqaba eli linyontyayo
Bikela mawenu uti ndim otshoyo. | 5 |
| 3 | Ati amogqob'oka singabahedeni
Kodwa wonke umzi usaya eweni
Naputum' umlungu zenibe babini
Kodwa lon' Ilizwi lifike sinani. | 10 |
| 4 | Zemnka zihlepuka kwanento zo Ngqika
Nezandundu zityabuke kukuxoka | |

Ngenxa yalemfundo yenu magqob'oka Nigqob'ok' emini kuhlwe nizinc'uka.	15
5 Sinengqungqutela tina bomaqaba Siko sisahleli sisaziv' indaba Kwezontlanganiso zenu asibangako Zicas' amaqaba ngohlobo lungako.	20
6 Ndiko ndisahleli ndim lowu ntyontyayo Bikela mawenu uti ndim otshoyo Ndiyinto ndateta kwasekuveleni Agqusha ma Tshawe adlale nkundleni.	
7 Zipambili ncwadi zetu bomaqaba Sinimmangalele kotshona nenkaba Namhla sifikile siza kunenzela Kuba sazalwa ke ukumnka komhla.	25
8 Mna ndonityela kokwam ukwazi Kuba kude kutiwa ninolwazi Namhlanje napuse nolwasekofini Nditsho ke mna qaba lasемаqabeni.	30
9 Naqala ngeratshi kungeko zimanga Nenza ke Ilanga ngoko lati manga Sada sanoyika tina bo maqaba Ningajongani nomr'ajana weqaba.	35
10 Namhla izwi lenu lisezaqwitini Nishiywe yimfundo iselutulini Ngenxa yeliratshi lenu magqoboka Makapike ke oqele ukupika.	40
11 Aninaluncedo kuti ninezote Nisenza inkuni zokuba manote Sitsho tina ntombi zama kota-mbola Xa sipike nani singatshabalala.	
12 Wena ke gqoboka udalwe nge Lizwi Azi akunayenake Umkumbuzi U Mushe wopuma kuti nilibele Avule indlela isaninqabele.	45

Camagu!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.225 - 227)

Reds! Listen

- 1 Editor, thanks for the poets' column.
I'm still here, a young man and no poet;
I carry the milkpail to arm-ringed celebrities;
let all Christians glance behind them.
- 2 Editor, thanks for the poets' column. 5
I'm here, still alive and no poet.
You'd better believe I'm still a Red:
tell your people I'm the one talking.
- 3 Christians call us heathens
but every home's unstable. 10
When the Word appeared we were together,
but you chased the whites to join them.
- 4 Ngqika himself broke away,
cheeks chafed from his lies.
Christians, because of your school education 15
you're Christians by day, hyenas by night.
- 5 Just like always, we Reds come together,
sitting here, swapping news.
We never enter your meetings,
where the mood is so hostile to Reds. 20
- 6 Here I sit, to be sure, just like always,
tell your people I'm the one talking.
I'm someone of consequence; I spoke at my birth:
in the courtyard princes stamped and frolicked.
- 7 We Reds have made a statement, 25
preferring charges against you;
today we've come, we'll do this for you,
for we were born at the setting sun.
- 8 I'll give you advice though I don't know much:
for a long time you claimed to know everything. 30
Your milk's all dried up, you've none for your coffee,
that's my opinion, a Red among Reds.
- 9 Celebration began before fighting ceased:
the sun gasped in amazement.
When we Reds stood slackjawed, 35
you didn't mark our threadbare blankets.
- 10 Today your voice is drowned in a whirlwind,
Christians, your learning's down in the dust,
all because of this pride of yours:

- can a seasoned debater dispute this? 40
- 11 You're past any help; you make us puke:
you use us as kindling to warm yourselves.
That's what we say, we girls who smear ochre;
we'd rather die than dispute you.
- 12 Does no one remind you, Christian, 45
that you were made by the word?
While you're wasting time, Moses will come
to clear the path you still can't tread.
Peace!!
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.224 - 226)

Annexure F

Yayisenzelwa Ntonina i Bhaibhile? *Ama Roma 15: 4.*

Ngokuba konke okube kubhaliwe pambili, beku bhalelwe okwetu ukufundiswa, ukuze siti ngawo umonde nolwonwabiso lwezi Bhalo sibe netemba. Yiva ke! Akazange ukuxelelena u Ntsikana ukuba uze uqwalasele i Bhaibhile? Wazuka wena wayiyeka, wayiqwalaselelwa ngabelungu; andigxeki mlungu ke ngakuba nditsho: kodwa ke xa kutiwa: “Funa wawuya kufumana,” akutshiwo ke ukutiwa mawufunelwe ngomnye umntu: Yiva ke!

- 1 Hai ukuhlala wodwa umzi
Nokungenwa kwamasango alomzi
Obantu babenikwe intsikelelo
Namhla simanga ngumzi wembandezelo.
- 2 Halahoyi Afrika nalo ivumba 5
Linukisa okwenyoka yomhlaba
Anditini nge Bhaibhile tatusiba
Zonk' incwadi pambi kwayo ziyagoba.
- 3 I-Tiyopiya make ifakelele
Ifunde izibhalo isimelele 10
Kudala sisitsho sigqibe amazwe
Ngexesha lendlala nexesha lemfazwe.
- 4 Pindela kwasemva ap' uvela kona
Apo no Ntsikana wayolela kona
Akukoyikina ukuzek' ityala 15
Wayeka isizwe sambete izandla
- 5 Wapulwana Afrika nje ngesitya
Esinga nandziweyo sona isitya
Limnke ngenyani nelizwi e Afrika

Ndayibona imfene emazinyo amdaka. Izwi nabelungu kade lafikayo Sixakwe yonanto makube kuyiyo Liko ngaku Tixo, kuti ligalele— Ndixakiwe kanye nganindikwelele, Baduda benetemba lezi Bhalo Lahlani pantsi eyenu imibhalo Namhla kuti banje ngentaba zemb'ola Balwa nezizwe zonke zibakwelela.	20 25
6 Make sikumbule “Imihla” yo bawo, Siwabandeze lamanxiwa ka Tshiwo Yayinge mnyama kade ingqondo yetu Yakulo Ngubencuka kweza kowetu.	30
7 I Tiyopiya make ifakelele funde izibhalo isimelele Mna andifuni ukunikohlisa Kanene ama Xosa niti ayakohlisa	35
8 Lento iyi Bhaibhile yingwe ye Tunzi Nase zintsizini zonke zake u Menzi Entabeni u Moses yamfunqula Yatoba imbokotwe watsho wazula.	40
9 I-Tiyopiya make ifakelele Ifunde izibhalo isimelele Vukani ke nifakane imilomo Andishumayeli luvuko lwankomo.	
10 Xa ningabantu ngenivisan' indaba Ezinibonisa ngobume bomhlaba Zonke ezizinto zad[a]lwa ngelizwi Zakupela zonke kusale ilizwi. Yiva ke!! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.421 - 423)	45

Why was the bible created?

(*Romans* 15: 4)

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by patience and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. Now listen! Didn't Ntsikana tell you to study the scriptures? And you left the whites to study them for you. I'm not mocking the white when I say that. But when it's written "Seek and ye shall find," it doesn't mean that someone else must do the finding for you. Listen then!

- 1 Oh the homestead standing alone
with easy access through its gates,
whose people once had plenty,
now a sign of oppression.

- 2 Halahoyi, Africans, something stinks 5
like the ground snake, fouling the air.
I don't tell the scriptures "Try writing again":
all other books bow before it.

- 3 Ethiopia should get involved,
find support in the Scriptures. 10
For a long time we've said so criss-crossing the land
in times of famine and times of war.

- 4 Go back to where you came from,
to Ntsikana's final words.
Aren't you afraid that you stripped the nation, 15
left it naked with only its hands for cover?

- 5 Africa, have you been trashed
like a plate of little worth?
Truly the word is departing from Africa:
I saw a baboon with dirty teeth. 20
Long ago the whites brought the word
but recent events confuse us:
over there it's with God, over here it flogs us.
I'm quite confused: I'd better scam.
They danced with their faith in the scriptures: 25
"Discard your striped woollen blankets."
Today they're like our abandoned clay pits:
all nations gave way to their onslaught.

- 6 Let's remember the days of our fathers,
seal Tshiwo's deserted villages. 30
When you lived with Ngubengcuka
your mind was never black.

- 7 Ethiopia should get involved,
find support in the Scriptures.
As for me, I don't wish to mislead you 35
(In truth you said the Xhosa mislead).

- 8 This bible's a shade-screened leopard
in all the Creator's sorrows as well,
it helped Moses up the mountain,
dropped a grindstone and set him spinning. 40

- 9 Ethiopia should get involved,
find support in the Scriptures.

So wake up and talk the same language,
I don't preach a rebirth of cattle.

- 10 If only you people shared the news 45
of what you see of life in this land.
The Word created all these things,
when all is gone, the Word will remain.
Hear then!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.420 - 422).

Annexure G

Ukutula! Ikwakukuvuma!!

Taru! Mhleli ngesituba sezi Mbongi
Ndisahleli ndingumfana andi mbongi
Ndingumpati tunga lezinxibamx'aka
Into elwa ngezulu induku zihleli.

Taru! Mhleli ngesituba sezi Mbongi! 5
Ndiko noko ndisahleli andi Mbongi
Kodwa noko amazwi makagqalwe
Ukutula! Ikwakukuvuma!!

Taru! Mhleli ngesituba sezi Mbongi!
Asinakutula umhlab' ubolile 10
Xa ndikubonisa ubume bomhlaba
Angabhekabheka onk' amagqoboka.

Ukutula! Ikwakukuvuma
Xa ungatandi ukuhlala ujanyelwa
Ungapendula kwabezinye imvaba 15
Akulunganga ukukonza unomkanya.

Lemiteto idlula eka Moses
Lihasa kuwe eliza ngokutula
Litupa lengwe lanyatel' esangweni
Kuba ngokutula! Bati uyavuma! 20

M'sukufukama pezu kwenyaniso
Uti utula ubukankany' u Krestu
Yena Mfo wateta lalinye wagqiba
Kanti utembele ku Mkosi we Zulu.

Ukutula! Ikwakukuvuma! 25
Okwabonwa ngu Elijah entlango
Owati akubuzwa watinteleka

Waxela umlambo onesiziba.

Tet' ungoyiki Afrika kusakiwe
Abhubhe siduli obhubha siduli 30
Babekungxenga kuba usisaqaka
Ndlovu edla, ibiyelwa ngocingo.

Taru! Afrika Nkomo zetola letu
Apo zikona inkomo zama soka 35
Olala ngemva ingwenya ngapambili
Kwakonakala ukutshona kwelanga.

Lemiteto idlula eka Moses
Isenze kanye saba sebudengeni
Sesifana negusha ngokuba mdaka 40
Nabasaziyo basahlula ngopawu.

Gquba! Ungatuli Mdaka we Afrika
Boguqa bakedame nabalwa nawe
Lovangeli yabo yokusikohlisa
Mina ingangam ndigaqe ngedolo.

Lingasiposa ne Zulu siyimamela 45
Kub' inomkonto obuye usihlabe
Iyahanahanisa kumntu Ontsundu
Iwugqwetile ke lomhlaba ka Palo.

Kauve!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 159-161)

Silence implies consent

Editor, thanks for the poets' column.
I'm still here, a young man and no poet;
I carry the milkpail to arm-ringed celebrities;
clubs are at hand but I fight with lightning.

Editor, thanks for the poets' column, 5
I'm here, still alive and no poet,
but pay heed to my words:
silence implies consent.

Editor, thanks for the poets' column,
we can't sit silent, the country's rotten: 10
if I exposed the state of the country
the Christians' jaws would drop.

Silence implies consent!

White eyes sear us on entering a church,
but we're free to worship someplace else: 15
it's no fun to pray looking over your shoulder.

The laws outnumber those of Moses!
They dish out your portion if you sit silent:
it's the tracks of a leopard across your yard.
If you sit silent they say you agree. 20

Don't smother the truth,
mouthing Christ sitting silent:
He uttered one word then held his peace,
for the hosts of heaven were ranged behind him.

Silence implies consent! 25
Elijah learnt that in the desert:
when invited he couldn't move,
like a river dammed with debris.

Browsing Elephant hemmed in by fences,
Africa, speak while your people yet live. 30
If whites have a fit, well then let them die:
they thought you a low-yielding cow.

Bless you, Africa, calf of our herd,
source of dowry for bachelors
who bask on their backs while crocs bask on their bellies, 35
but just wait till the sun goes down!

Laws outnumbering those of Moses
have hobbled us in bemusement:
all dusty sheep may look alike
but the shepherds can tell them apart. 40

Dark One of Africa, don't sit in silence,
quell your foes with a roar of defiance!
This gospel of theirs, designed to deceive us,
stands as tall as I do down on my knees.

Heed its word and heaven's lost: 45
it's a spear that wheels to stab us.
The hypocritical cant of the white man's gospel
turns Phalo's land on its head.

Please hear!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 158-160)

Annexure H

Pulapulani! Makowetu

Ndiyigxotile i Kresmesi, no Nyaka Omdala kwano Nibidyala ngezibongo. Ndizaku zibonga mna ke ngoku ndandule ke kwakona ukuqala into entsha.

Camaguni!

- | | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Taru! Nontsizi dumezweni ngentsholo
Nto ezibongo ziyintlaninge yezwe
Indlovu ke ayisindwa ngumboko wayo
Awu! Taru! Sikukukazi piko e Afrika. | |
| 2 | Esikusela amatole aze engemki
Emke nezinye intaka eziwadlayo
Uyaziwa lilizwe nambakazi yezulu
Enqenwe nazi Mbongi zaxelelana. | 5 |
| 3 | Wugqwetele Mgqwetto lomhlaba ka Palo
Beta izizwe ngesitunzi zidangale
Uliramncwa akuvelwa ngasemva
Nabakwaziyo babeta besotuka. | 10 |
| 4 | Taru! Mdakakazi omabalaziziba
Ovumba linuka okwenyoka yomlambo
Camagu! Nawe Ndlovu edla Pezulu
Uzibhalile noko Inkomo zakwa Mgqwetto. | 15 |
| 5 | Taru! Nontsizi bulembe e Afrika
Obuyepuzela emazantsi namaza
Wak'ubeka ngonyawo weva ubuhlungu
Wahiliza ngomlomo wawiselwa pantsi. | 20 |
| 6 | Taru! Nontsizi bulembe e Afrika
Ozihluba izibongo ekuhlени
Zitsho nentaba zelizwe zikangelane
Xa wapuka imbambo macala omabini. | |
| 7 | Taru! Mdakakazi ngqele ese Lundini
Enje ngayo Imibete yase Herimone
Ndakhubeka ndibheka emlungwini
Awu! Ndeva sendibanjwa ngamadindala. | 25 |
| 8 | Taru Mbongikazi Flamingo ka Vaaibom
Esunduza inyawo xa isukayo
Esunduza inyawo xa ihlalayo
Zipume izilo zonke zigcakamele. | 30 |

- 9 Taru! Dadakazi lendada ze Afrika
Ub'hib'hinxalwentombi esinqe sibi
Awu! Nontsizi bulembu e Afrika 35
Akusoze wende nezinto zigoso.
- 10 Taru! Mbongikazi piko le Afrika
Sudukani bo arha ndabonelelwa
Taru! Somikazi lomti wekiwane 40
Ubonga noko side sipel' isoya.
- 11 Taru! Nontsizi bulembu e Afrika
Izishumane mazambat' amabhayi
Kuba ayaziwa Iminyanya yakowenu
Akungetshati ungabhinqi zik'ak'a
- 12 Zipi Intombi zenu Izwi liyintoni 45
Sigqibe lomhlaba sifuna ukwenda
Salahla amak'azi salahla amakaya
Namhla sizizigudu kwa namabhungela.
- 13 Imfundo yintoni bapi onyana benu 50
Bagqibe lamazwe befun' inikisi
Yona nto ifunwa zintaka inkuku
Kusa ziqondele kuhlwe zingay' boni
- 14 Taru! Nontsizi ntsasa enemizila
Egqibe izinga zonke iprofetesha
Awu! Taru! Sanusekazi se zibongo 55
Nalo neramncwa liwabhul' amaphiko.
- 15 Taru! "Chizama!" Odlalinyama rwada
Ayaziwa neminyanya yakowenu
Mazibuye ke! Indlovu zidle ekaya
Zingalala ezindle zilahlekile. 60
- 16 Taru! Nontsizi intombi ka Sandile
Mntana wenkosi kwinkosi zakwa Ngqika
Kubonga amakosi not amabhungexe
Watshiswa zinduku kumataf' akwa Ngqika.
- 17 Awu! Taru! Nontsizi bulembu e Afrika 65
Ntokazi etsho ngentlombe ezimnandi
Zitsho zidume nendonga ze Afrika
Arha hai abhitye onke amadodana.
- 18 Mhlana wafa Nontsizi losibekela 70
Hashe lenkumanda loba lilahlekile
Awu! Taru! Nangaye u Ntsikana
Owayegqibe zonke izinga eprofetesha.

- 19 Camagu! Sinungunungu Esingcwele
Nantso ke into eyatshiwo ngu Ntsikana
Yobomvana abarola ngamadolo 75
Beza nobugqi bela ngela Mampondo.
- 20 Lalinywa zinqwelo zomlilo elobawo
Abe u Ntu engenandawo yokulima
Canaguni! Mazulu! Camagu Mhlaba
Camagu! Ke Langa! Camagu! Nawe Nyanga. 80
- 21 Nini amagosa awasipeteyo
Yinyusen' ingxelo iye ko Pezulu
Nisitetelele nide nicokise
Soya pina? Ngwenya enesiziba.
- 22 Sitshatshela Esikulu se Afrika 85
Nanko u Ntu esiza enenyembezi
Vumani! Siyavuma! Kwi Ngqongqo Yomnqamlezo
Siyavuma! Ewe ngenyani! Siyavuma!
- 23 Awu! Yatsho Imbabala yolwantinge
Ezivutulula zimise nenkowane. 90
- 24 Gqob'ha empandeni
Nalo izwe loyihlo
Lusisivivinya sayo imishologu.
- 25 Watsho Umavelelunguzwa ngabe
Nduku into ekangelwa 95
Nangumbane kube situkutezi.
Camagu!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.77 - 81)

Listen, compatriots!

I sent Christmas, the old year and the new year packing with praise poems. Now I'm going to sing my own praises, and then I'll pass on to start something fresh.

Peace to you all!

- 1 Mercy, Nontsizi, renowned for your chanting,
your poems are the nation's bounty.
No elephant finds its own trunk clumsy.
Awu! Mercy, old hen's wing in Africa!
- 2 Hen screening her chicks 5
from birds of prey,
the nation knows you, sky-python,
poets sneer but discuss you.

- 3 Turn Phalo's land on its head, Mqgwetho,
whack nations and sap their standing. 10
Wild beast too fierce to take from behind,
those who know tremble in tackling you.
- 4 Mercy, dusky pool-tinted woman,
your stench reeks like the river snake.
Peace! Elephant browsing the tops, 15
you've made a household name of Mqgwetho.
- 5 Mercy, Nontsizi, African moss
sipping moisture from under the ripples,
you stubbed your toe and felt the pain,
a slip of the tongue and they stomped on you. 20
- 6 Mercy, Nontsizi, African moss,
you strip poetry bare to the bone
and the nation's mountains swivel
as you sway from side to side.
- 7 Mercy, Dusky, Drakensberg snow 25
like morning dew on Mount Hermon.
I blundered in going to whites:
Oh I felt the cops' cuffs on me!
- 8 Mercy, woman poet, Vaaibom's flamingo,
which thrusts its feet forward for take-off, 30
which thrusts its feet backward to land:
all creatures come out to bask in the sun.
- 9 Mercy, duck of the African thickets,
ungainly girl with ill-shaped frame.
Awu! Nontsizi, African moss, 35
with bow-legs like yours you'll never marry!
- 10 Mercy, woman poet, wing of Africa.
Make way! *Ach*, I was used.
Mercy, starling perched in a fig tree,
your poems dispense with feminine wiles. 40
- 11 Mercy, Nontsizi, African moss,
let old maids screen their bodies in bodices
for no-one knows your ancestors:
without skin skirts there'll be no weddings.
- 12 Where are your daughters? What do you say? 45
"We roamed the countryside searching for marriage,
we turned our backs on home and dowry,
today we're exploited in exile homes."

- 13 What's education? Where are your sons?
They roamed the land in search of *niks*,
chickens scratching for scraps,
eager at dawn, at dusk empty-handed. 50
- 14 Mercy, Nontsizi, striped gold-breasted bunting
that piped its prophecies through the thornbrakes;
Awu! Mercy, poetic diviner,
watch out, the wild bird's flapping its wings. 55
- 15 Mercy, Chizama, who eats her meat raw;
no-one knows your ancestors.
May the browsing elephants make it home:
they're lost if they sleep in the road. 60
- 16 Mercy, Nontsizi, Sandile's daughter,
child of the Ngqika paramount.
You were thrashed by kieres on Ngqika plains
for praising chiefs and *not* commoners.
- 17 Awu! Mercy, Nontsizi, African moss,
woman, the walls of Africa throb
with the sound of your lovely parties:
Ach shame! The young men all wither. 65
- 18 The day of your death will darken, Nontsizi,
the commando's horse will lose its way. 70
Awu! Mercy! And you, Ntsikana,
who piped your prophecies across the thornbrakes.
- 19 Peace, Awesome Saint!
Ntsikana mentioned this:
little red people down on their knees,
casting spells right up to Mpondoland. 75
- 20 Fiery tractors tilled the land of our fathers
and the black had no place to plough.
Peace to you, Heavens! Peace to you, Earth!
Peace then, Sun! And peace to you, Moon! 80
- 21 You keep our final accounts,
bear your report to the One on High,
plead our case in elegant terms.
Where can we go, pool-screened Crocodile?
- 22 Mighty Champion of Africa,
the black approaches in tears. 85
"Agree?" "Agreed! By the Drum of the Cross!
Agreed! Yes, in truth, we agree!"

- 23 Oh! These are the words of the scabby eland:
mushrooms flourish in the flakes it sheds. 90
- 24 Carry on scooping the cask:
there lies the land of your ancestors,
harassed by evil spirits.
- 25 These are the words of the nervous object
of spies armed to the teeth, 95
who watch her even with lightning.
Peace!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.76 - 80)

Annexure I

Wabutwana—Afrika? Njengezitungu—Zesanda?

- Hlaziya Yehova imihla yetu
Njengo kwamandulo ko bawo betu
Ungaba usicekise mpela na?
Kayakulu Lilumlela abantwana.
- Naku siyabona sesingamangqina 5
Xa ngaba kunjalo kup' ukwalamana
Konyana nentombi zetu siluhlanga
Lwezizwe zintsundu ngapantsi kwelanga
- Izililo xa ndilapo makowetu
Ningetuki nganicinge ngezwe letu 10
Nitete ngelidala ngelika Hintsa
Amagama Enkosi ayandipazamisa.
- Wabutwana njengezitungu ze Sanda
Nobutyakala kuwe buye busanda.
Vusa Inimba yakuma kowenu 15
Yakulo Ngubencuka kweza kowenu
- Yabonani makowetu sibandala
Nenyaniso yasiposa kwakudala
Inyaniso iquletwe zizi Bhalo
Napantsi ke kweyako imibhalo. 20
- Amaxesha obumnyama agqitile
Nezamini zobudenge zipelile
Masizake sakudwatywa zezinye
Kuba sakuxakeka xa singebanye.

Nabutwana njengezitungu ze Sanda Nobutyakala kuni buye busanda Entlalweni nembambano ninjani? Namaratshi okungazi anjani?	25
Ubuzwe ke xa kunjalo bubupina? Ikaya ke xa kulapo lilipina? Siyashiywa silibele kukugxeka Imnke ke kupele yona i Afrika.	30
Amagwangqa amanyene ngabamnyama Nama Kula nama Tshay'na ngokumnyama Nabutwana njengezitungu ze Sanda Nobutyakala kuni buye busanda.	35
Umanyano nje kupela lunga "Mandla" Kuba lulo lodwa olunokusondla Zonk' intshaba zakoyiswa ngenxa yalo Nentsika ze Zulu zakwapulwa ngalo.	40
Kuninina makowetu sikonkota Sipikisa abantu besiqongqota Sizwe sini sona esi silubisi Lungasafikiyo nase zimvabeni	
Namhla i Afrika itshelwe sic'eko Azi kwabadala yena akaseko Onyusa ne "Ngxelo" iye ko Pezulu Atshise ne "Dini" ngonyana omkulu Camagu!	45

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 249-251)

Are you bundled for threshing, Africa?

Jehovah, replenish our days on earth,
as you did in the time of our fathers.
Did you forsake us forever,
Great Place for weaning children?

Now we're something the cook tosses out,
condemned for intermarriage;
to our sons and daughters we're all one nation
of black people under the sun.

5

Those are the wailings, my people! Take heart! Consider our country, speak as of old in Hintsá's voice. (The names of kings confuse me.)	10
Are you gathered in bundles for threshing? Your recklessness is rampant. Induce birth pangs in your people as in Ngubengcuka's time.	15
You see, my people, we're old, truth threw us long ago; the truth is found in scriptures and also within our blankets.	20
The days of darkness are done, the age of ignorance over: let's formulate plans for our future, or we'll struggle along one by one.	
Are you gathered in bundles for threshing? Your recklessness is rampant. How do you live in constant strife, in ignorance and conceit?	25
Living like this, can you have a country? Living like this, can you have a home? As we idly bicker we're left in the dust and Africa slips through our fingers forever.	30
The whites are united against the blacks, the Coolies and Chinese against the blacks. Are you gathered in bundles for threshing? Your recklessness is rampant.	35
Unity's our only strength, it alone can nourish us: all enemies will be crushed by it, and the pillars of heaven shattered.	40
We bark for you, my people, confronting those who pick us clean. What nation is this whose milk lacks strength to reach the milksack?	
Today Africa yields no milk. Is there no one among the elders to bear this report to the One on High, to burn his first son as sacrifice?	45

Peace! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 248-250)

Annexure J

Maibuye! I Afrika! Awu!

Kade simemeza naso isijwili sako ke Afrika! Ntsimi ye Afrika,
Wadliwa zintaka ke wahlakazeka umi kodwa wena ungazange umke
Amazwi atshile kuk'uk'waza wena sigqibe lamazwe sikwaz' inikisi,
Yonanto ifunwa zintaka inkuku kusa ziqondele kuhlwe zingay' boni.

Simi ngama Kapa simemeza wena simi ngama Bhai simemeza wena, 5
Simi ngama Rini simemeza wena zikwako ne Tasi zinonodyuwana.
Siselel' ukufa sibuyisa wena sikubamb' amehlo siti awuboni,
Umnke ke impela ubuyele emva xa sikubuyisa ngalo ishwangusha.

Uti Maibuye? Makubuye wena izizwe zomhlaba zix'witana ngawe,
Zipuma e Node zipuma e Sude kwas' empumalanga nase ntshonalanga. 10
I Afrika ihleli ayiyangandawo kangela enc'eni wofik' isahluma,
Kangel' imitombo yamanz' isatsitsa kangela yonk' into imi ngendlela.

Woz' ufe na gxebe ungeko entweni wake nyizililo uti maibuye,
Makubuye wena woshukuma nomzi zihambe nendaba zime nge Jeriko.
Kautsho! Afrika kwakumlambo mnina ap' umnt' engazinto ati maibuye, 15
Kuba ndibonanje sinempau zonke esihamba ngazo zasebudengeni.

Simi ngama Monti sikony' izililo simi ngama Dike sikony' izililo,
Sezizw' ezintsundu ngapantsi kwelanga u Satan adane kutshone nenkaba.
Aninaluthando! Animanyananga ningab' onxazonke abangenacala,
Nikwango ntamnaniopembabeshiya niyek' amawenu nincedis' umlungu. 20

Nikony' izililo? Niti maibuye nopala nisopa makubuye nina
Akuko nasiko lakumisa umzi akuko bukosi akuko ntwisento.
Seninje ngenkumbi zisele kwezinye nashiywa bubuzwe nashiywa bubuntu
Nashiywa yimfuyo zonke ezo zinto senizixolisa ngo Cimizingqala.

Uti maibuye? Makubuye wena wonwaya intloko ulila ngabani, 25
Nanko no Ntsikana kade akutyela zuyeke imali siqu sempundulu.
Mfondini wotutu lwakud' e Afrika wazonela ngani? Pambi koYehova,
Nalo ke ne China lize ngemitombo nalo ke ne Kula lize ngama empty.

Ukony' izililo? Makubuye wena sala ukutyelwa sabona ngolopu.
Ukumbule apo waw' uvela kona ufun' osiyazi bahlab' ezintloko. 30
Taruni zinduli zase South Afrika baf' abantu benu! Lemk' izwe nezizwe
Sikala ngakona siti maibuye ivuse inimba yakuma kowayo.

Taruni zintlambo zase South Afrika Taruni matafa! Ezwe lako wetu
Nanko senilinywa zinqwelo zomlilo zipala ngecala njenge nkunzempfene.
Buya M'afrika yaqengqelekana yonke iminyaka umindaweni nye. 35
Hleze zingatotywa kwanemvula kuwe hleze nezibeto zifise usapo.

Camagu ke Langa! Camagu ke Nyanga nini amagosa awasipeteyo,
Yinyusen' ingxelo iye ko Pezulu nisitetelele nide nicokise.

Camagu! Awu!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 59-63)

Come back, Africa! Awu!

For a long time now we've been calling, Africa.
Hear our wailing, Garden of Africa!!
Your crop was consumed and scattered by birds,
but you stood firm and never left us.
Our voices are hoarse from imploring you;
we track through nations, appeal to phantoms,
nothing more than chickens' scratchings,
eager at dawn, at dusk empty-handed.

We call to you from Table Bay,
we call to you from Algoa Bay, 5
we call to you from Grahamstown,
clutching satchels crammed with half-jacks;
drunk to death we call you home,
we cover your eyes and proclaim you blind,
you go right back to where you came from
as we call you home from the depths of depravity.

You say "Come back"? *You* must come back!!
You're profit to all the earth's nations,
they come from the north, they come from the south, 10
from the east and from the west.
Africa stayed! She's nowhere else:
look how the grass continues to sprout.
Look at the springs still bubbling with water.
Look all around, it's all in its place!

Will you go to the grave with nothing achieved,
raising your cry, calling "Come back"?
If *you* come back first the nation will rise
and news of its stirring will ring out to Jericho.
But tell us, Africa, where else in the world 15
can any old fool say "Come home"?
From my point of view, we bear all the signs
as we stumble along in stupidity.

From the Buffalo's banks we raise our cry,
from the Tyhume's banks we raise our cry
for all the black nations under the sun,
so Satan's ashamed until his guts bust.

You display no love, display no togetherness,
you sit on the fence, won't take a stand.
Nothing but sell-outs, you set fires and run,
betray your own people to bolster the whites. 20

Are you raising a cry, saying "Come back"?
You'll cry yourselves hoarse: *you* must come back!
Gone are our customs for setting up homesteads,
monarchy, values, nothing is left!
You live like locusts left by the swarm,
you've lost all pride, your sense of a nation,
lock, stock and barrel, everything's lost:
you seek balm in the bottle that blots out all pain.

You say "Come back"? *You* must come back!
You scratch your head in search of a scapegoat. 25
Ntsikana warned you a long time ago,
"Money's the lightning-bird: leave it alone."
Child of the soil of far-flung Africa,
what have you done to so offend God?
Here the Chink sells you malt for your home-brew,
there the Coolie buys up your empties.

Are you raising a cry? *You* must come back!
Spurn advice and you'll come a cropper.
Always recall where you came from:
seek the seers to tell you straight. 30
Mercy, South African hills, while your people die
strangers cart off your country!
With cause we cry, saying "Come back"
to induce birth pangs in her people.

Mercy, South African valleys,
peace, plains of our land,
look how you're ploughed up by steam locomotives
rocking along like bull baboons.
Come back, Africans! Or will rolling years
leave you marking time 35
while rain falls elsewhere
and plagues strike your family?

Peace, Sun! Peace, Moon!
Stewards of our Protector,
bear the report to the One on High,
plead our case in elegant terms.
Peace! Awu!!
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 58-62)

Annexure K

Vumisani! kwi Nyange Lemihla!!

Hai! Ukuhlala kwawo wodwa Umzi
Obantu babenikwe Intsikelelo
Amasango etu onke akanamntu
Nababandezeli basuke bayintloko. Camagu!

Halahoyi! Afrika nalo ke ivumba 5
Linukisa okwe nyoka yomlambo
Intsikelelo zagxotwa yintonina
Namasiko sekusa siwafanisa.

Panda pantsi uxele amahlungulu 10
Intsikelelo zasishiy' elubala
Ndingatini betu kungeko nanye nje
Kwinto zakowetu engabisasele.

Amasiko etu anxietywa ilokwe 15
Yinkohliso yodwa nobumenemene
Kwakutatwa izitembu tina siyashweshwa
Ukuze singaqondwa ngawo amaqaba.

Ax'entsa intlombe zix'entswa nasiti 20
Sigqobok' emini kuhlwe sizinc'uka
Sixakiwe konke kuba sinxazonke
Nabalandelayo bobeta besotuka.

Akukonto kuyiyo ngapantsi kwelanga
Konke ngamampunge awo amampunge
Tu! Nto! Nabuzwe! Sesinjengenciniba
Ipete ubukosi konke elutulini.

Sasifudula sisitya sihluta 25
Sasifudula sinemfuyo eninzi
Umhlaba lo ngezomini zobawo
Ingwe yetunzi—Umfusa wapakade

Ngalo maxesha imvula zazisina 30
Ngalo maxesha amasimi ec'uma
Naso! Isiprofeto sika Ntsikana
Tina siwugqwetile Umhlaba ka Palo.

Lomzi wobawo wawumxhelo mnye 35
Kodwa kunjalo usesebunyameni
Kodwa ke tina mpi yamagqoboka
Sigube u Satana usisinkwabalala

Ze nezeitixo zibe sagqoboka

Zisenz'amalunga ahamb' Iremente Siti xa sivuma—Nkosi sihlange Siti sakupuma maye sich'itane.	40
Bhekan' ezincwadini ze Nyange Lemihla Isibhalane esabhala masiko Njengebhadi libhadula ukufuna umtombo Ngawubhadule nawe ufune amasiko.	
Intsikelelo zagxotwa yintonina Nezik'ulu zetu zonke zati qutu Tu! Nenkosi sekulaula inkunkuma Tu! Miteto bate cwaka abo gaga.	45
Vumisani nonke kwi Nyange Lemihla Nilibulele nilandlalel' uk'uko Akuko nto kuyiyo ngapantsi kwelanga Semka namampunge awo amampunge.	50
Hom! Yenzani isijwili nesikalo Nikumbule ukuba niyinzalo apa Eyashiywa ke ngobawo entilini Yaza yaba sisisulu sezizwe.	55
Akuko nto kuyiyo ngapantsi kwelanga Semka namampunge awo amampunge Imkile nemfene ebindizimasa Ukuba ndinomntu ngeyeyiputuma.	60
Intsikelelo zagxotwa yintonina Nentombi azisagidi ngalubambo Sezik'aba nje kupela onomtatsi Zemka! Inkomo notixo basemzini	
Sasifudula ngezomini zobawo Sisitya neziqamo zasendle Kodwa namhla osezantsi ngosezantsi Oya kudla iqumbe ngapezulu.	65
Ndoda ecingayo yivake Ubeke amehlo ngasemva Biza inkumbulo ivuke Ixele intlalo endala,	70
Yayama emsimelelweni Upulapulise indlebe Yolul' amapiko usinge Ngasemaxesheni akude.	75
Uzeke kwakona indaba	

Zemihla yo Palo no Tshiwo. Camagu!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 113-117)

Consult the ancient sage!

Oh the homestead standing alone,
whose people once had plenty,
its gates now unattended,
its oppressors in control. Peace!

Halahoyi! Africans, something stinks 5
like the river snake, fouling the air:
where are our onetime blessings?
Now we're estranged from custom.

Scratch the earth like crows:
our blessings led to the scrapheap. 10
I tell you, nothing that once was ours
survives to sustain us today.

Our customs are dressed in tatters,
deceit and delusion are all we maintain:
Reds keep a number of wives, 15
but we keep our secret lovers.

They dance in courtship, and so do we,
Christians by day, hyenas by night,
we're caught between two worlds:
the next generation will gaze slack-jawed. 20

There's nothing of value under the sun,
all shadows yield to shadow.
The nation is gone! Its head in the dust,
like an ostrich confronted by force.

Once we had plenty to eat, 25
once we had plenty of stock;
this land in the days of our fathers
was a shade-screened leopard—dark beast eternal.

The falling rain watered those years,
the fields in those years flourished. 30
Ntsikana's words have now come to pass:
we've upended Phalo's land.

This home of our fathers throbbed with life
while still a domain of darkness;
but then we joined the Christian brigades— 35
crushed Satan to his astonishment.

Our gods also thought we'd converted,
a moral church congregation.
Inside we sing, " Lord, we've gathered,"
outside we snarl "Slit his throat!" 40

Look in the books of the ancient sage,
the scribe who inscribed our customs;
please journey in quest of your customs
like a springbok in quest of a spring.

Where are our onetime blessings? 45
All our great men have gone to ground:
our chiefs have gone, replaced by trash;
our customs have gone, our princes sit mum.

Go and consult the ancient sage,
spread out a mat and thank him; 50
there's nothing of value under the sun:
we flit from shadow to shadow.

Hom! Raise your cry and lament.
Remember you are the children
your fathers left on the battlefield; 55
you've become the prey of nations.

There's nothing of value under the sun:
we flit from shadow to shadow.
My baboon companion took to its heels:
won't somebody bring it back? 60

Where are the blessings we once received?
Our girls no longer dance with bare breasts:
today they cut their fancy capers.
Strange gods are stealing your cattle!

Back in the days of our fathers 65
we'd gather the fruits of the veld;
today if you're down you're out,
at the top you eat and prosper.

So listen, thinker,
cast your eyes back, 70
kindle your memory,
talk of old ways,

lean on your staff,
prick up your ears,
spread your wings, 75
consider times past,

and bring us the news once more
of the days of Phalo and Tshiwo. Peace!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 112-116)

Annexure L

Ikona na Intaba Oyaziyo? Kwezi Zimiyo Eyaka Yafuduka?

- 1 Intaba eyafudukayo “Mayibuye”
Nabo abantu Bako bazizantanta
Beqonda mhlope kuba Ilizwe eli
Limile kodwa lona ngonapakade.
- 2 Taru! Afrika Hobekazi Afrika 5
Ndlov’ enemixaka yiyo Imirozo
Esuka Emhlabeni yati ngqu ngamazulu
Ube noko ungumceya ongangenizembe
- 3 Sikonyizililo siti mawubuye
Wada wafanelwa yimb’ol’ ungayiqabi 10
Sixakiwe konke kuba kumke tina
Njengenkomo zetafa zimka nenkungu.
- 4 Taru? Afrika Hobekazi Afrika
Sigcaw’ esinoboya sakwa Mtirara
Intlombe imnandi Emagqobokeni 15
Ati “Buya” wena engabuyi wona.
- 5 Saqela kakade tina magqoboka
Ukuboni Sibi kwiliso lomunye
Namhlanje Afrika sikwenza Ihlati
Lokutwala onke amatyala etu. 20
- 6 Kanti ke no Yesu waye watwele nje
Waye ngumntu etyunyuzwe lubetelo
Waye ngu Lizwi waza waba Yinyama
Ukuze Ngaye sitwale Isits’aba.
- 7 Niti ke i Afrika mayenzenjani 25
Ingateti nje ingevi kwanokuva
Ayina mona ayibangi mawonga
Ayityi nazimali zabantu bayo.
- 8 Upi yena lo Tixo simtandazayo
Nalo simtandazayo asingowetu 30
Sakwenzela intlants’ eziq’uq’umbayo
Ziq’uq’umbela Intaba yase Yuropu.

- 9 Nabo ke ubulumko bo Tixo wabo—
Ntu bhinqela Indyebo yase Zulwini
Tina zesibhinqele eye Afrika
Zezakwa Faro ke ezo Izilumko. 35
- 10 Ezaziti—tshisa izitena ngenc'a
Litshone Ilanga ungabonanganto
Nangoku kunjalo nakuti Bantsundu
Kusa siqondele! Kuhlwe singaboni. 40
- 11 Buya ke! Kumbula u Tixo wako
Umb'oli wenqanawa ziqekeka
U Tambo Dala okade bemqongqota
Mabamqongqote namhlanje e Afrika.
- 12 Buya ke! Utabatele ekuqaleni 45
Kumbula Umtundezi wako uneqenqa
Akutundeze ku Lwandle Olubomvu
Ukudla kokucelwa kuyaqumbela

Kauve!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.127 - 129)

Show me the mountain that packed up and left

- 1 "Come back," mountain that left.
There are your people frantically scrabbling,
knowing full well that this country
will stand to the end of time.
- 2 Mercy, she-dove of Africa! 5
Distinguished elephant commanding an army
stretching from earth to the skies,
tall as an ironwood safe from the axe.
- 3 We raise our cry, saying "Come back!"
Though you disdain it, ochre suits you. 10
We're befuddled because we're adrift,
like plains cattle lost in the mist.
- 4 Mercy, she-dove of Africa!
Furry spider of Mthikrakra's place!
Christians still favour courtship dances, 15
they say "Come back" but *they* don't come back.
- 5 We Christians tend to see
the mote in another's eye.
Africa, today we make a forest of you

- in which to conceal all our sins. 20
- 6 And yet even Jesus, who bore our sins,
was a man, cracked on the cross;
He was the Word, and He became flesh:
through Him we wear a crown.
- 7 What do you want of Africa? 25
She can't speak, she can't even hear;
she's not jealous, not vying for status;
she hasn't squandered her people's funds!
- 8 Where is this God that we worship?
The one we worship's foreign: 30
we kindled a fire and sparks swirled up,
swirled up a European mountain.
- 9 This is the wisdom of their God:
"Black man, prepare for the treasures of heaven
while we prepare for the treasures of Africa!" 35
Just as the wise men of Pharaoh's land
- 10 commanded the Jews: "Use grass to bake bricks,"
leaving them empty-handed at sunset,
so it is for us black people now:
eager at dawn, at dusk empty-handed. 40
- 11 So come on home! Remember your God,
a borer of holes in cracked ships,
Ancient Bone which they sucked for its marrow:
may it still yield them marrow in Africa.
- 12 So come back! Make a fresh start! 45
Remember the Crutch you leaned on as lepers,
let Him lead you dryshod through the Red Sea.
Food from another man's pot makes you fart.
Please listen!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.126 - 128)

Annexure M

Yeyapina Lemfundiso? Mateyu 28: 19-20

Hambani! Niye kuzenza abafundi zonke intlanga: Nizifundise egameni lo Yise nelo Nyana nelo Moya Oyingcwele, nifundise ukuba bazigcine zonke izinto endiniwisele umteto ngazo. Sifunde ntonina ke tina kubelungu? Yiyipina ke lemiteto yawiselwa abelungu ngu Somandla, ukuba bayifundise tina ukuze siyigcine? Yile mfundiso yo Tsalitoro na o Kesare belilizwe? Asinakuyibona ke mos ne ndlela esinga ezulwini, ukuba ngaba kunjalo: Hayikona!

Ubusuku bunzulu xa kuza kusa
Zinga xokozela nenkuku kuyasa
Irabaxa nempato ibika “Intsasa”
Ngoko ke Afrika lunguza kuyasa

Camagu! 5

Kudala zinqoza sibona madoda
Kudala kufiwa sisiva madoda
Kukutshwa nabantu besiye 'mfazweni
Nezwi lika Tixo likwa seluhlwini

Yin' nale! 10

U-Kafile makafe singama Britani
Tina sonihluta intlaka emlonyeni
Asikanenzi nto singama Britani
Itole lemfene likula esizini

Niyabeva! 15

Kudlalwa ngo Tixo ngendlela emnyama
Nobuhedeni ngenyani busahluma
Sadlala ngo Tixo wetu kubelungu
Namhla izwe letu yinqu yeshologu.

Taru Afrika zwe lembango-mbuso 20
Zincinane nendaba eziyi nyaniso
Awu sagqutyelwa ngumququ we sanda
Salahla no Tixo sahamba sisenda

Qiqqa!

Ukony' "Izililo" umzi we Afrika 25
Zipi i Bhaibhile namhla magqob'oka
Namhlanje ifute lomlilo wazo
Ngati lidla indiza kwabeza nazo.

Latsha ilizwe linga tshiswa Mdali 30
Ngenxa yentshutshiso nguban' ongalili
Izizwe zomhlaba nandzo zixwitana
Ngetambo lomhlaba ziyagxagxisana.

Lomhlaba i Afrika ngumhlaba wetu
Besiduda six'entsa nobawo betu
Angakohliseki noze nge nqanawe 35
Kaloku lihleli ele zulu i "Tshawe."

Namhla ngezwe letu sisezintanjeni

Esanikwa lona kwase kuveleni
Wavela umlungu kungeko zimanga
Weza nge Bhaibhile ngoko sati manga. 40

Akayi shumayela wacambalala
Sabon' ukuti konke sotshabalala
Kanti kulapo basihlamb' imizimba
Ancama maxego abhinqa ahamba.

Elo nxebe e Afrika libuhlungu 45
Elafika ne Bhaibhile yabelungu
Namhlanje asizazi nenqu zetu
No Tixo wetu wasishiya mu tu.

Namhla i Afrika itshelwe sic'eko 50
Azi kwabadala yena akaseko
Onyusa nengxelo iye ko Pezulu
Atshise ne Dini ngonyana omkulu

Camagu!!

(Mgwetho, 2007, p. 401-403)

Where does this teaching come from?

(Matthew 28: 19-20)

Go and make disciples of all nations. Teach them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, teach them to obey all those things I commanded you as law. What have we learnt from the whites? Which are the laws the Almighty commanded the whites to teach us to obey? Is it the teaching of Hertzog and the Caesars of this country? If that's the case, we just can't see the way to heaven. Oh no!

The night is deep before the dawn,
the roosters' racket heralds dawn.
Our rough treatment brings in the dawn.
So take a look, Africa, dawn's breaking now.
Peace! 5

For a long time, men, we occasionally see,
for a long time, men, we hear of the slain.
Our people were seized and sent off to war,
with the word of God as a battle cry.
What's this? 10

"We're British: the Kaffirs can die!
We'll rip the candy from your mouths.
We didn't touch you: we're British!
A baby baboon's no stranger to misery."
Do you hear? 15

God is the toy of black behaviour,
paganism's rampant.
We toyed with God while whites looked on:
today our country's affliction itself.

Mercy, Africa, strife-torn land! 20
There's little indeed we can take for the truth.
Awu, we're covered with chaff from the threshing-floor!
We cast off God, went in search of a wife.
Think about it!!

The homestead of Africa raises a cry. 25
Christians, where are your bibles today?
Now their fiery breath
scorches those who received them.

The land is aflame and the Creator's not guilty. 30
Who doesn't weep in the face of oppression?
The nations on earth tug at each other,
waste themselves for a bone of earth.

This land of Africa's ours,
we frolicked and danced with our fathers.
But those who came by ship shouldn't fool themselves: 35
the Prince of Heaven's wide awake.

We're shackled today because of our country,
handed to you in the act of creation.
When the white appeared, all was normal:
abnormality came with his bible. 40

There was nothing slack in his preaching:
we saw we were totally routed.
But when he washed the clay from our bodies
our old men despaired, took their blankets and left.

That's a grievous wound in Africa 45
brought by the white man's bible.
Today, we don't know who we are
and our God has completely forsaken us.

Today, Africa yields no milk. 50
Is there no one among the elders
to bear this report to the One on High,
to burn his first son as sacrifice?
Peace!!

(Mgwetho, 2007, p. 401-403)

Annexure N

Induli ka Xakeka!—Enyukwa ngu Ntu!!

- | | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Bona ke! Namhlanje ndifun' uqondile
Mfondini wakuti nantso intlekele
Make uzibuze wozu undingqinele
Make kaloku nje sitwax' ukuteta | |
| 2 | Nduli ayinyukeki! Iyatshitiza
Andizikukwekwa ndirola umxelo
Yiyipi okwangoku ebhadlileyo
Into eseyimile kwezabantsundu | 5 |
| 3 | Nantso ke ne African National Congress
Esasiyibonga kwapuke nembambo.
Sebehamba ke beyibuza kwakuti
Besiti kanene kodwa yatshonapi | 10 |
| 4 | Akunakupikwa ndilusizi ukutsho
Ziko inyaniso kulo mbuzo wabo
Mna ke ngokwam andikunqweneli
'Kutyafisa imigudu eseyenziwe | 15 |
| 5 | Kodwa eyona tyefu endiyibonayo
Ityafiswa kukutanda amawonga
Azinasidima into zomntu ontsundu
Zipetwe ngabantu abanamakwele | 20 |
| 6 | Lenduli—ka Xakeka ixake cwaka
Kudala mu siyinyuka siba manzi
Ayinyukeki konke kumntu ontsundu
Imbhinqisa kupela ngelitye lembola | |
| 7 | Ngu mona uba libhaxa kulenduli
Yimali iba libhaxa kulonduli
Ngoko ke sixakiwe kukuyinyuka
Pikisa ezondawo ke ngwevu yakuti | 25 |
| 8 | Umanyano lulibhaxa kule nduli
Sesaxakwa nokulutsholozela
Luzinkomo zetafa zimka nenkungu
Mahlungulu amnyama nendlela zawo. Tina ke! | 30 |
| 9 | Induli—ka Xakeka enyukwa ngu Ntu
Safela ezantsi madoda nganitsho
Yiyipi eyonanto nimise yona
Kumalinga ezinto esewenziwe | 35 |

- 10 Ukungavelani—Nokungaxabisi
Amaqaba kulibhaxa kule nduli
Siyifuna qo kodwa imali yawo
Nobila nisoma aninakuyinyuka 40
- 11 Umanyano nje lwenene lungamandla
Yintoni emandla angangomanyano
Kunini kodwa sigaula siteta
Sesingati satwasela ezingeni
- 12 Ixakile lenduli ukuyinyuka 45
Ipahlwe zizingwe kwanezingonyama
Yendele! Yazika! Ihlahlwe liqina
Eliyile mali imbhela 'mawetu
- 13 Yiyipi eyona de namisa yona
Kwezi ziman' ukuwa zibhukuqeka 50
Yintoni ukungati ningamaqeya
Ati ukulala aquluselane
- 14 Inzima le nduli inyukwa ngu Ntu
Inzima yapantse yoyisa no Mkrestu
Waxap' amagwebu wasibhongobhiya 55
Wati nzwi nendlebe enyuka Lenduli
- 15 Nangoku kunjalo nakuti Bantsundu
Singabo nxazonke intw'engenacala
Sibambene ngento esingayaziyo
Kaloku ezetu zityiwa zirwada 60
- 16 Yiyipi okwangoku ebhadlileyo
Into eseyimile kwezabantsundu
Ninan' ukwenjenje nibantu bangaka
Nashiya Isizwe? Sambete izandla
- 17 Ngumlungu na? Ote masingamanyani 65
Sixwitane sodwa sibang' amawonga
Ndingatini betu pikis'ezo ndawo
Ngumlunguna? Ote masitye zimali
- 18 Maluf'olufayo sidinwe kuncwela
Ngapandle kokuba konke nimanyane 70
Anisokuze hai nimkwele umlungu
Xaningenayo nje nentsimbi yomqala
- 19 Induli—ka Xakeka enyukwa ngu Ntu
Nobila negazi aninakuyinyuka
Anitandi Sizwe nitand' izisulu 75
Nangoku kunjalo pikis' ezo ndawo

- 20 Salah! amasiko akuko nto i'nto
 Zandile nengqola kule nzala
 Senditshilo kuni ukuti Lenduli
 Sopala sisopa asinakuy'nyuka. Siyavuma! 80

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.95 - 99)

The hill Difficulty the black man scales

- 1 Look! Today I want you to understand
 the essence of our distress.
 Compatriot, wrestle with what I say,
 meet me in sober debate.
- 2 The hill can't be scaled! It's slippery. 5
 I won't mince words, I'll bare my heart:
 up to this point in time,
 just what have blacks achieved?
- 3 Take the African National Congress:
 we once burst our ribs in its praise. 10
 Now we go round in search of it:
 "Has anyone seen where it's gone?"
- 4 None can deny, I'm sorry to say,
 these questions have some point.
 But as for me, I'm not at pains 15
 to mock their efforts to date.
- 5 Vying for status is lethal poison
 internally sapping Congress.
 Undermined by the envious,
 black people strive in vain. 20
- 6 This hill Difficulty's beaten us,
 we've tried and tried to scale it:
 it can't be scaled by blacks
 strapped with the millstone of custom.
- 7 Envy's an obstacle up this hill, 25
 money's another obstacle:
 and so we battle to scale it.
 Greybeard of ours, am I wrong?
- 8 Uniting's an obstacle up this hill,
 so, burdened, we no longer praise it, 30
 like plains cattle lost in the mist,

black as crows in our ways. That's us!

- 9 Why, my good man, are we slumped at the foot
of this hill Difficulty black people scale?
You've set your hand to many things 35
but which of them persist?
- 10 Your loathing and goading of Reds
are obstacles up this hill—
yet how you covet their cash!
Sweat all you like, you won't reach the top. 40
- 11 Unity's our only strength,
what has more power than unity?
How long must we hack away at this,
like novice diviners in groves of mimosa?
- 12 This hill frustrates attempts to scale it, 45
lions and leopards ring it;
the hill stands firm, our people slip
on slopes with carpets of cash.
- 13 You've set your hand to many things
which continue to list and sink. 50
You've all turned into Hottentots
snoring their heads off, arse in the air.
- 14 This hill the black man scales is steep,
it nearly daunted Christian;
his mouth frothed with a sloven's foam, 55
his ears stuck out as he scaled this hill.
- 15 And so it is for blacks today:
we sit on the fence, we won't take a stand.
We don't even know why we squabble,
but we bolt our fruit before it's ripe. 60
- 16 Up to this point in time,
just what have blacks achieved?
How could you turn your back on the nation,
with only its hands to cover its nakedness?
- 17 Did the whites instruct us not to unite? 65
We stand on each other to reach above.
What more can I say? Have I got it wrong?
Did the whites instruct us to squander our funds?
- 18 Whatever, nitpicking tires us:
if you don't all get together 70
you'll never saddle a white.

You don't even have the bridle and reins!

- 19 Sweat blood, you won't make the top
of this hill Difficulty the black man scales;
you've no love for the nation, only for bargains. 75
That's the truth. Have I got it wrong?
- 20 Our customs abandoned, we're left empty-handed,
in this generation apostasy's rampant.
I've said it before: scratched and bloodied,
we won't make the top of this hill. Agreed! (Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p.94-98)

ANNEXURE O

This appendix is from the Opland Collection of Xhosa Literature. The extract below was written by S.E.K Mqhayi and in it he explicitly invites Mqgwetho to respond to his writing.

1) Imbongi ye Sizwe Jikelele, "U-1924 no 1925," *Imvo zabantsundu* (13 January 1925), 4, reprinted as "Ukufa nokutwasa komnyaka" in S.E. Mqayi, *Imihobe nemibongo yokufundwa ezikolweni* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1927), 16-20 with the exclusion of the following lines:

Pendula ntombi ka Mqgweto
Wen' usikumbuz' imigqweto.
Mbongikazi Nontsizi pendula
Pendula ntombi yakwa Cizama
Yakwa Ncenceza kwa Ncoko.
Zixelel' intomb' ukuba ndisapila
Ndisapil' umzimba nomxelo,—
Andikuzi tengisa nangegolide
Nange perule nange Kristale
Nange jaspire nange hakinto
Hayi nakanye zinkosi zam!^[1]

^[1] *Imihobe* omits this and the preceding ten lines starting with *Pendula ntombi ka Mqgweto*.

Answer, Mqgwetho's daughter,
you who remind us of contrariness.^[1]
Nontsizi, Woman Poet, respond,
respond, girl of the Chizama clan
of Ncenceza's place and Ncoko's,
tell the girls that I'm still alive,
I'm still alive body and soul—
I wouldn't sell myself even for gold,
not for a pearl, not for crystal,
not for jasper, not for jacinth,
not for anything at all, my chiefs.

[1] Mqhayi puns on Mgqwetho's surname and the plural of the noun *umgqwetho*, which Kropf defines as "perverseness" ([1899] 1915: 133). Mgqwetho herself was fond of punning on her name in the lines . . .

The translation, by Jeff Opland and Peter T. Mtuze, is taken from S.E.K. Mqhayi, *Iziganeke zesizwe: occasional poems (1900-1943)*, in progress.

ANNEXURE P

Ngubani Oti Ukuvumisa Akufuneki? Namagqira Etu Ngaba Hedeni? *Eyokuqala ka Samuel 28: 8-20.*

U Saule wabagxota Ezweni bonke ababeneshologu no Siyazi: Waza ke u Yehova wamqumbela kakulu: Wamtumela ngemikosi eyoyikekayo kunene yama Filistiya—awati akuyibona u Saule wangcangcazela, namadolo abetana kukoyika: Wabhayiza u Saule Ezweni efuna o Siyazi abaya waye bagxotile, ukuba bazo kuvumisa, bamvusele u Samuel Umnyanya wakubo, utete no Yehova: U Samuel ke waseyefile ngeloxesha:—Naku ke! U Tixo izinto wazidala ngokuzazi: Engabuzanga kuti ke ukuzenza Kwake:—

Taru Afrika inteto zizimb' o
Mondli ebulawa ngabakowabo
Satshabalalake ngokuswel' igqira
Wanga wonke Umzi sowungamagqwira.

Masiko sangena kumzi wase mzini 5
Sacasa nenkosi seza emlungwini
Sachita nemfuyo konke kwapelela
Tu—nto isasele sipokopalala.

Sati namagqira angaba hedeni
Sisenza u Tixo ngoko umhedeni 10
Yena owadala zonke ezizinto
Woyisa no Saule ngoko ngayo lonto.

Semnka nalemfundo sayenza igugu
Semnka nemicepe yotywala bomlungu
Abe yen' umlungu ecase obetu 15
Pikis' ezondawo ngwevu yakowetu.

Sati namagqira angaba hedeni
Kodwa wonke Umzi usaya eweni
Onke amaxoki asezikolweni
Onke namagqwira asezikolweni. 20

Sayek' izitembu namhla siyashweshwa
Sayeka nemb'ola kodwa siyashusha

Yiyo ke lemfundo siq'ayisa ngayo
Siyemnka nomfula tu—nto kwakuyiyo.

Aze namaqaba abe sagqob'oka 25
Sisenz' amalunga awa ke evuka
Sakufa sivile tina magqob'oka
Sigqob'ok' emini kuhlwe sizinc'uka.

Abazali betu bona bayintoni 30
Sabashiya njalo sival' ezindlini
Yiyo ke lemfundo siqayisa ngayo
Kwanalempucuko nisifunze ngayo.

“Masibuye” siyakatywa yimfundo 35
Isibelekile yaba njengofudo
Onke namasela asezikolweni
Kanene—tina siti siziz' tyudini?

Izwi lika Tixo lona liyinene 40
Silipete kodwa ngobumenemene
Asihlali ntweni, akuko nasiko
Ziti Izanuse landan' amasiko.

Siyavuma!!
(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 309 - 311)

Who said there's no need of divination?

And that your doctors are heathens?

(I *Samuel* 28: 8-20)

Saul expelled from the country all those inspired by spirits, as well as sages. Then Jehovah was swollen with anger at him, and sent the fearsome armies of the Philistines to attack him. And when Saul saw them he trembled, and even his knees knocked in fear. Saul scoured the country in search of the sages he had expelled, to divine and raise his ancestor Samuel to speak to Jehovah. Samuel was long dead by this time. So then! God created things according to his own plan without consulting us about the creation.

Mercy, Africa, Nursemaid slain by your sucklings!
The way you speak defines you.
We perish for lack of diviners
as if every home housed a witch.

We entered the house of foreign custom; 5
turned on our kings and went to the whites,
scattered our stock to the winds,
emptied our bins. Nothing's left.

We called our doctors heathens,

making a heathen of God 10
who created all these things
and convinced Saul of that fact.

We're borne off by this schooling we valued,
we're borne off in ladles of white people's liquor,
though the whites turn their backs on yours. 15
Fault these points, Greybeard of ours.

We called our doctors heathens,
while our every village slides down the cliffs.
All our liars are in school,
all our witches are in school. 20

We gave up polygamy; today we take lovers.
We gave up ochre, but now we're all drunk.
It's all the fault of this learning we praise;
we slip downstream empty-handed.

Will the Reds ever be Christian? 25
We pose as just, so they waver.
Though lively we Christians will die:
we're Christians by day and hyenas by night.

And what then of our parents?
We just left them shut in their homes. 30
It's all the fault of this learning we praise
and this culture you ram down our throats.

We must come back! Schooling kicked us,
lugged us on its back like a tortoise.
All our thieves are in school— 35
and yet we say we're students?

The word of God's the very truth
but we've treated it inconsistently.
We lack the truth, we lack tradition.
"Track your traditions," say diviners. 40
Agreed!!

(Opland (ed and trans), 2007, p. 308- 310)

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