

National Identity and Xhosa Poetry (1880 -1900)

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Introduction

On 8 May 1996 South Africa reached a milestone when more than the required two thirds majority in the Constitutional Assembly voted in favour of the new constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The argument of this article is that the new national identity which is enshrined in the new constitution of South Africa is a phase of development of a discourse that has occupied the minds of Xhosa poets as far back as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The article furthermore argues that the poems that were written during the period 1880-1900 embodied a then marginal position. However with the new dispensation the philosophy that is contained in the poems has assumed a central position of dominance.

The foregoing argument is premised on the notion that the 1996 constitution is one of a number of political and cultural texts that vary in form, i.e. verbal and non-verbal; formal and non-formal (Fender in Hart & Stimson 1993:33-38) which served, and continue to serve as media for the construction, invention or formation of a national identity.

To support its argument the article will employ an interdisciplinary approach to analyse and interpret Xhosa poetry texts (cultural texts) that were published in newspapers during the period 1880-1900. The poetry will be properly contextualised by locating it within the socio-politico-economic reality in South Africa during the period under review

Theoretical Foundations

Anderson (1983:13) suggests that nationality or nation-ness as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind which may be understood by considering carefully how they have come into historical being. The following is a proposed definition of the nation: '... it is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1983:15).

While he supports the view that nationalism invents nations where they do not exist, he however emphasises that invention is distinct from fabrication and falsity; and can be correctly assimilated with imagining and creation. Anderson (1983:16) elaborates on the inherent characteristics of the nation as follows:

The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them. Has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. It is imagined as sovereign nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state. Finally it is imagined as a community because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

Smith (1991:4) concurs with Anderson when he states that the self is composed of multiple identities and roles namely: familial, space or territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender. Analysing the causes and consequences of national identity as a collective cultural phenomenon Smith (1991:14) lists the following fundamental features:

- * An historic territory, or homeland
- * Common myths and historical memories
- * A common mass public culture
- * Common legal rights and duties for all members and
- * A common economy with territorial mobility for members.

It is the assumption of this article that the postulations by the foregoing scholars illuminate the relationship between the notion of national identity and Xhosa poetry.

The Historical Context

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1866 was followed by the discovery of Gold in Johannesburg in 1885. British interest in South Africa increased, and between the period 1868-1881, despite the formidable resistance by Africans, in particular those in the Eastern Frontier, Britain completed her scramble for colonies in Africa.

In this study of the relationship between national identity and Xhosa poetry during the period 1880-1900, the significance of the discovery of minerals lies in the fact that '... South Africa was transformed from a colonial backwater into a central prop of British imperialism' (Davies et al. 1988:7). The British imperialists also

sought to destroy the independence of the Boer republics, a conflict that culminated in Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. After the war which was won by the British, the territory which constitutes the present day South Africa was incorporated into four British colonies which finally united in 1910.

The developments, within the foregoing context, of the mining industry, marked a turning point in the socio-politico-economic history of South Africa. A grand scale of capitalist production was introduced. The wage labour system of exploitation was introduced. Large numbers of black workers were absorbed into the wage labour system. According to Davies et al. (1988:8):

Within three years of the opening of the Witwatersrand gold-field in 1886, over 17000 African workers were employed in the mines together with 11 000 Whites. Twenty years later the figure had reached 200 000 black workers and 23 000 whites.

The mining industry contributed significantly towards the development of capitalist production in agriculture and manufacturing. It is in the said industry that, many of the institutions or forms of exploitation and consequent national oppression specific to South Africa were first developed in their modern form—the migrant labour system, pass laws, job colour bars, the racial division of labour, compounds etc. The above -stated forms of oppression were extended to both the agricultural and industrial sector. Conditions for the development of capitalist production were also created throughout the South African community. Thus it may be said that the forms of exploitation and relations which developed in the gold mining industry largely shaped the development of labour practises and social relations in other sectors for a long period (Davies et al. 1988:8).

New Means of Representation

Anderson cites two forms of imaginings, the novel and the newspaper, which ... provided the novel and the technical means for 'representing' the kind of imagined community that is the nation .

Xhosa poetry which appeared in newspapers during the period 1880-1900, i.e. the first phase of the age of imperialism and the segregation phase of capitalist development (Davies et al. 1988:3) is inextricably bound to the nationalist movement of the time. Opland (in Smit et al. 1996:110) concurs with this view when he says:

Xhosa literacy history participates in a broader history of social and political developments such as the growth of mission education and the emergence of an educated Xhosa elite, the migration to urban centres, the failure of the

military option as a means of resistance to colonial encroachment and the adoption of alternative political strategies.

The poetry that will be analysed and interpreted in this article was published in newspapers. *Isigidimi samaXhosa (The Xhosa Express)* was published by Lovedale Press during the period October 1970 to December 1888. Another newspaper, *Imvo zabaNtsundu (Native Opinion)*, which is still in circulation, saw the light in November 1884.

Analysis and Interpretation of Texts

The Emergent Philosophy

It is within the foregoing context that Citashe (I.W.W. Wauchope), one of the African intelligentsia that was produced by the missionary institutions, locates his poem: *Yilwani ngosiba (Fight with this pen)*. De Kock (1996:63) captures the second half of the nineteenth century as follows:

Suffice it to say here, in conclusion, that for the African elite in the second half of the nineteenth century, the struggle for selfhood, which their forefathers had initially fought on the battlefields, was taken up at centres of learning such as Lovedale. It was a struggle to be conducted on borrowed terms, in a borrowed discourse.

Citashe, in the first stanza of his poem, avers that the cattle (not mentioned but understood because of the concord *ZI*—of *zimkile*) have been confiscated by the enemy. This was a practise during the wars of dispossession. The victor would forcefully or feloniously dispossess the vanquished, of their wealth. The use of the cattle-symbol in this poem is both literal and figurative. Citashe implores his country men to recover their lost national heritage, material and otherwise. But this time negotiations should be the approach—force should be abandoned. In the second stanza he states that the rights (*amalungelo*) are being lost.

This is reference to both material (i.e. land and the then recently discovered minerals, and political rights). The third stanza requests the countrymen to think in depth or broadly (*zigqale*) and confront reality or truth (*inyaniso*). They should base (*misa*) their argument (i.e. having a starting point or principle on sense, substance, reality or truth). Emotions should give way to reasoning. Citashe advocates the appropriation of the subjugator's weapon, 'literacy', to make it serve the interests of the oppressed. He says:

Zimkile! Mfo wohlanga,

Your cattle are plundered, compatriot!

Phuthuma, phuthuma;
Yishiy'imfakadolo,
Phuthuma ngosiba;
Thabath'iphepha neinki,
Likhaka lakho elo.

After them, After them!
Lay down the musket,
Take up the pen;
Seize paper and ink;
That's your shield.

Ayemk'amalungelo,
Qubula usiba,
Ngxasha, ngxasha, ngeinki,
Hlala esitulweni;
Ungangeni kwaHoho;
Dubula ngosiba.

Your rights are plundered!
Grab a pen,
Load, load it with ink,
Sit in your chair;
Don't head for Hoho;
Fire with your pen.

Thambeka umhlathi ke;
Bambelel'ebunzi;
Zigqale iinyaniso;
Umise ngomxholo;
Bek'izitho ungalwi;
Umsindo liyilo.

Put pressure on the page
Engage your mind;
Focus on facts,
And speak loud and clear;
Don't rush into battle;
Anger stutters.

While incorporating the views of scholars who have analysed the foregoing poem, namely Odendaal (1984:5) and Opland (1995:33), this article moves further, by arguing that the poem introduces a constitutional discourse which would permeate Xhosa poetry (oral and literal), and a broad range of other cultural manifestations. The poem proposes a redefinition of identity. It proposes that the African should move away and move out of the erstwhile protective refuge, the ethnic identity. Hoho (i.e. *Intaba kaHoho* or *iHlathi likaHoho*) is a forested mountain in the Eastern Cape. According to Kropf (1915:506) it is situated '... at the head of the Keiskama River in which the Gwiligwili (river) has its source'. It is said that Rarabe purchased this mountain from the original possessor Hoho, a Khoisan chief.

This venerated mountain became a symbol of Xhosa identity. It was used by warriors as a place of refuge and a fort during the wars with the British colonial armies. Recognising the futility of war, Citashe indicates that the 1880s bring to an end the noble role that was played by the *iNtaba kaHoho*' in literal and figurative sense. Citashe proposes a broader identity that transcends ethnic and racial boundaries. To him, a nation is an entity that is broader and richer than the racial and the ethnic.

An Historical Territory or Homeland

Smith (1991:14) postulates that one of the fundamental features of national identity is attachment to a historic territory or homeland. This explains why loss of land constit-

utes one of the dominant themes of the poetry of the late nineteenth century.

According to Vilakazi (1945:289), before the unification of the four provinces to form the union of South Africa, the main grievance of Africans was the loss of their land through conquest. He says :

... the great factor in successful fighting against the government lay in the unity of clans, not in thinking in terms of blood relationship under rival chiefs, but in creating a national 'united front'.

It is in this spirit that Ntsiko lauds praises at the Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu chiefs. He celebrates the victories of African warriors over the British in the South, and the Boers in the North. These victories were never recorded by the White South African historians.

The significance of this poem is its underlying assumption that the Sotho, (Mshweshwe), the Xhosa (Sandile and Rhili) and the Zulu (Mpande) are or should be one nation. The poet demarcates a territory which he claims is the homeland of Africans and not the White imperialists (*ingcuk' emhlophe*). This is the territory that was occupied by the above-stated ethnic groups. Ntsiko says:

Vukani bantwana bentab'eBosiko.
Seyikhal' ingcuka, ingcuk' emhlophe
Ibawel' amathambo
"Mathambo kaMshweshwe
Mshweshw' onobuthongo

Phezulu entabeni.Siyarhol' isisu
Ngamathamb' enkosi
Ubomv' umlomo kuxhaph' uSandile

Ishiywe ngamendu ngunyana
kaHints. Sisu sikaRhili,
Simhlophe kukrwelwa;
Lent' ukubaleka kukufa, kusinda.
.. Inamb' esinqini,
Eshunquk' umsila,
Wasal' eSandlwana, Sandlwana,
Yaginy' okaMpande ozitho zigoso;

Yamkhuph' esahleli
Ifun' isishuba,,

Arise, ye children of Thaba Bosiu!
The hyena has howled, the white hyena,
Ravening for the bones,
Mshweshwe's bones,
Mshweshwe who sleeps on the mountain
top.

Its belly drags heavy with
the bones of kings,
Red stained is its mouth with Sandile's
blood.

By speed 'twas cheated of Hints'a's son.
Sarilli, whose belly is pale
with scratches;
For running in truth, is death and escape
The stumpy python, its
broken tail abandoned on

It swallowed Mpande's bendy-legged son
but spewed him still alive;
And now it craves for

SikaMkatshane nesikaMshweshwe

Mkhatshane's drawers and Mshweshwe's drawers.

The poet refers to the imperialist as 'ingcuk' *emhlophe*'. The hyena in African folklore is a usurper of other peoples resources. The python (*inamba*) symbolises the subjugator, which uses its military might to impose itself upon unwilling people. The poet juxtaposes the negative symbols with African tribes which bear common elements that bind them together.

Common Myths and Historical Memories

Mqhayi's poem *SingamaBritani*, (*We are Britons*), highlights common and uniting events in the history of South Africa. Jordan (1973:112) says about Mqhayi:

But Mqhayi had a double loyalty. As a Xhosa he was loyal to the Xhosa Chiefs and their ancestors, and as a British subject he had to be loyal to the British king. A poem written during the Boer War in the *Izwi labaNtu* of March 13th, 1900, shows how very sincerely Mqhayi had accepted British guardianship. Each stanza has a refrain, 'SingamaBritani!' (*We are Britons!*). Nurtured in Christianity and in the policy of the 'Old Cape Liberals', he believed that the conquest of Southern Africa by the British was the working out of a Divine purpose.

Jordan's views might have influenced Kuse (1977:22) who says:

Jabavu was suspected of harbouring sympathies for the Afrikaner Bond at the outbreak of the Boer war. Mqhayi on the other hand, had resoundingly published his profession of loyalty to Britain in *Izwi labaNtu* (3/13/1900).

The foregoing argument is used by Meli (1988:47) to explain that Sol Plaatjie's feeling of loyalty to Britain was not confined to him only. He says:

Plaatjie and his contemporaries saw their approach as a tactic. They had strong views on the oppression of their people, but perhaps the problem was that of correctly identifying the enemy. In those days, Africans thought that the Boers were the only enemy (Meli 1988:48).

While this article, to some extent, supports the views of the above stated scholars, it, nevertheless, approaches the poem from a different perspective. This is possible when one is exposed to the entire text, and also when one locates the text within its context.

Kudala zingoza sibona madoda,

Kudala kufiwa sisiva ngendaba,

Nditat'inxaxheba ndema ngaku

Kwini, Ndimi noBikitsha nento

zikaMshweshwe. Ndimi nabaTembu impi I stood with the Tembu people of Aliva.
kaAliva

Sine 'Zwi Labantu' likwa seluhtwini.

Sikup'umlisela mawuy'emfazweni,

Ibhulu malife, singamaBritani.

Ik'into kaBhula kwihlelo lenene,

Iggog'eNatala, ibulal' iBhulu

Ibulal'umFrentshi kunye neJamani.

Majamani ndini sesini robile,

Uxol'animalo niluze ngenzimba;

Namhla nitinina siseMnambiti nje?

Kodwa ke maFrentshi benisiyapi na?

Yilwani ke kambe singamaBritani.

Unyana kaBhula nguNtsendo-zimdaka,

Yinyok'enenqay'eyabonwa linyange.

NguGax'eKeptawun'akwel'eplangeni.

Limkup'eTekwini abet'enjinini.

NguGolozel'uTukela umlamb'

amaMfengu,

NguBhodla ngongadluma kuviw'

empelazwe.

We have for some time observed the
intermittent shooting, gentlemen,

We have heard the news that many are
dying;

I seized the opportunity and stood by the
Queen,

With Bikitsha and the people of
Mshweshwe

I stood with the Tembu people of Aliva.

Together with 'Izwi Labantu' amongst us.

We sent our young men to the war,

The Boer must die, we are Britons.

The son of Bhula mans the right handside
battleground,

He extirpated the Boer in Natal, killing
them.

Killing the French and Germans.

Germans we have come to understand
you

You do not have peace, you are indifferent

What do you say today because we are in
Ladysmith?

Tell me French people where were you
going?

Nonetheless carry on fighting, we are
Britons.

The son of Bhula is Ntsendo-zimdaka

He is a bald snake that was seen by the
ancestor.

One who arrives in Cape Town and boards
a ship.

Disembarks in Durban and boards an
automobile (engine)

One who squats to watch the Tugela
river of the Mfengu,

He is one who eructates with his thick
object to be heard at

furthest parts of the globe.

Yidani nive zizwe zaseYurophu,

In the end you have to understand races of
Europe,

'Soze nasiqeda' singamaBritani.

'You will never defeat us' we are Britons.

Mqhayi says that he (Xhosa) has decided to become an ally of Britain (Queen Victoria). He is joined by the Mfengu (Bikitsha), Sotho (Mshweshwe), Tembu (Aliva) and Zulu (Soze nasiqeda) clans. The Boers including their supporters who are of French and German descent are perceived as Europeans (foreigners).

The article would therefore postulate that Mqhayi's poem is living evidence of a consciousness that was emerging amongst intellectuals of the late nineteenth century, that there was a need for a redefinition of identities. Mqhayi is an individual who, while recognising the fact that he was a Xhosa (ethnic identity), saw the need for a broader national-identity that was inclusive.

The goals of the Black intellectuals of the period was freedom and equality of all South African races. But realities of the time forced them to temporarily seek protection from the British Colonial power, or to form a power bloc with the British who were less oppressive when compared with the Boers. The weakness of the interpretation of the foregoing academics lies in the fact that they seem to focus on the last line of each of Mqhayi's stanzas, at the expense of the entire poem.

Mqhayi, in the first stanza, demarcates the territory or homeland of the members of his community which have common values, ideology and aspirations. The territory covers the area that was occupied by the Mfengu, Sotho, Tembu, Xhosa and British colonials. This power bloc is contesting with the Afrikaners (then called Boers) bloc which is composed of all Dutch, German and French descendants (stanza 2). The question is why Africans chose to be allies of the British.

Davies et al (1988:6-7) explains why Blacks were optimistic about their relationship with Britain:

In the British colony of the Cape, men of property (regardless of colour) had been given a form of local self-government. Nevertheless, social relations in the Cape were also marked by a strong racism and racial patterns of power and privilege. However, under British rule, class position—the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production—rather than direct racial discrimination determined the patterns of economic and political power. A liberal ideology developed which stressed class rather than race in determining social and political relations. It also regarded British imperialism as the great progressive force in the world, and the necessary bulwark against the more brutal exploitation of the colonised by 'primitive' Boers.

In view of this exposition, Blacks, during the period under review, found themselves standing between Scylla and Charybdis (two dangers such that to avoid one increases the risk from the other, names of sea monster and whirlpool in Greek myth). I would therefore gainsay the view that Mqhayi '... believed that the conquest

of Southern Africa by the British was the working out of a Divine purpose' (Jordan 1973:112).

Common Mass Public Culture

According to Smith (1991:11)

... nations must have a measure of common culture and a civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind a population together in their homeland. The task for ensuring a common public, mass culture has been handed over to the agencies of popular socialisation, notably the public system of education.

The education clause (29) delayed agreement on the Draft Constitution Bill. This demonstrates clearly the importance of education in the life of a nation. The debate about education rights was first placed on record by Gqoba in his long poem '*Ingxoxo, enkulu ngemfundo*'. The poem registers a protest against discrimination by White Colonialists against Blacks, in the spheres of politics, education, economy, and also socially.

The poets acknowledge the positive aspects of European culture. One of the characters in Gqoba's debate, Qondilizwe, who argues in favour of White colonialists, says :

*Aba bantu bapesheya,
Bonke bonke sebhela,
Bajanelwe kubulelwa
Siti bantu abamnyama,
Okunene babefike
Site tyiki bubudenge;
Basizama ngale mfundo,*

*Mandiqale ngalendawo
Yelikete lale Mfundo
Anitsho na kule ngxoxo
Ukuni kwangale mfundo,
Yona, yona iyanikwa;
Ninonyana, bayatitsha
Bayabala, bayaqwela,
Abagqitwa, ngamagwangqa
Sekusel'ibala lodwa?*

These people from overseas
All, just all of them,
Should be thanked,
By us Black people,
The people from overseas
They found us swimming in stupidity;
They tried to civilize us with education
(Rubusana p. 90)

Let me start with this question
Of discrimination in Education
Don't you say in this discussion
That with the very education
Yes it is offered;
You have sons who are teachers
They can count, they excel
They compare well with White children
Only the colour makes a difference

*Xa kunjalo yiyipi—na?
Enekete, nenzani—na?*

If it is like that where is discrimination?
What are you actually criticising?
(Rubusana p.99)

Funizulu protests against discrimination in the field of education. He is not satisfied with the quality of education that is offered to Blacks. According to him the curriculum should include classical languages as well. Remuneration for teachers who have equal qualifications and experience should be the same, irrespective of their colour. He says:

*Intó apa ezimana
Zisibiza zimalana,
Zemihlaba, zozindlela,
Zomahlali, nokufunda;
Iyimfundo yantoni na,
Ngoba mona ukwangaka?
Sekukade sibabona
Benekhwele benomona*

Things that always
Ask for money from us,
In respect of property and roads,
Forestry and education;
What for is this education
Where there is so much jealousy?
We have been watching them
They are envious they are jealous

*It'inteto yamagwangqa,
Yoluhlanga lwapesheya
Koluhlanga lumunyama,
Si-Latini, si-Hebere,
Ezo nteto nesiGrike
Kwaba ntsundw'azifanele,
Babebangwa ke lel' kete*

Whites say,
The race from overseas
To the Black race,
Latin, Hebrew and
Those languages and Greek
Should not be taught to Blacks
The cause is discrimination.

*Bengagqitwa ngabe Lungu,
OTitshala abamnyama
Yintapane yewangala,
Bafundiswa ngamagwangqa;
Ngabafunda iminyaka,
Bazuziswa mapetshana,
Bakugqatwa ngamagwangqa
Kwakungati ngezomini
Bese kwasezikolweni,
Bakuvuzwa kanobomi,
Bakungen' emsebenzini.
Benikiwe umsebenzi
Woku titsha, nokutini,*

Not surpassed by White
Black teachers
They are many of them
Are taught by Whites
Those who have studied for many years
They are provided with certificates,
After examinations by Whites
Those days we thought
When they were still at school
They will earn good remuneration
When they are employed
But when they get the jobs
Of teaching and so on.

*Suke kata elikete,
Ngalo apa sibambeneyo,
Kodw'abantu befundile,
Beqqibile beqwebile,
Suk'umvuz'ube yintshenu.*

Then jealousy surfaces,
The issue that we are debating,
People who are educated
Who are qualified
To receive a meagre salary.

Rauk'Emsini argues:

*Sithetha nje kukhw'iBhondo
Ebuqili buyindoqo:
Ifungele, ibhinqele
Ukuthi ePalamente,
Ezi mali zifundisa
Olu hlanga lumunyama,
Mazihluthwe, maziphele.
Ngamani na law'anjalo?
Eyona nto soba nayo,
Imihlaba selinabo,
Oozigusha, noozinkomo.
Zonk'izintw'ebesinazo,*

There is currently a Bond
Which is cunning and artful
It has vowed
To raise in Parliament
That the finances that educate
The Black race,
Should be withdrawn and stopped.
What kind of people are these?
What shall we possess
The land now belongs to them,
Sheep, cattle
All that we used to own,

*Sibulele ndawoni na?
Nale voti ikwanjalo,
Kukhw'ikhetho kwanakuyo,
Asivunywa kany'impela
Thina bantu abamnyama.*

For what should we be thankful?
The vote is also like that,
There is discrimination
We are not allowed
We Black people.

Jordan (1963:67) summarises the great debate on education as follows:

There is an interesting variety of participants and therefore a variety of opinions, left, centre and right, shading into each other. In this long discussion, no one says that the Blacks are getting a square deal from the Whites. The best defense that the extreme right can put up is that things are not so bad, and that if the ingrates will only exercise patience, the best is yet to be. The last speaker, Ungrateful, who admits that his eyes 'have been opened' to the 'good things' that the white man brought them, and brings the Great Discussion that covers 1800 lines to a close by telling the participants to 'go seek learning' and 'love the White people'.

Hence, the argument of this article, that the early writers seem to be battling to bring the South African races together. The school was therefore identified as one of the

instruments of cultivating a common culture and civic ideology, and common aspirations and ideas.

Common Economy with Territorial Mobility

Smith (1991:10) points out that one of the fundamental features of national identity is a common economy with territorial mobility for members. He says:

Concurrent with the growth of a sense of legal and political community we may trace a sense of legal equality among the members of that community. Its full expression is the various kinds of citizenship that sociologists have enumerated including civil and legal rights, political rights and duties and socio-economic rights (Smith 1991:10).

The politico-economic scenario in South Africa in the late nineteenth century is vividly captured by Hofmeyer (1994:11) in her discussion of the history of Mokopane in the Transvaal. According to her what had previously been a kingdom was converted into a rural location in 1890. This transformation in the socio-economic order was implemented by the South African Republic Location Commission which travelled through the Transvaal either dispossessing chiefdoms entirely or penning them into absurdly small areas of land .

According to Hofmeyer the outcome of the land dispossession, amongst other things, was that migrancy, which up until the 1890's had been voluntary, became more of a necessity. These socio-politico-economic changes affected the entire country in deeply profound ways. The growth of a sense of economic equality among the Africans in the late nineteenth century is discernible in Gqoba's long debate '*Ingxoxo ngemfundo*' (A debate about education).

One of the characters in the debate, Rauk' Emsini angrily argues:

*Ndincamile ndonakele
Mz' wakowethu okunene
Ngamadoda athethile
Abebonga amagwangqa.
Kanti noko lon'ikhethe*

*Noko sebelikhanyele
Likho lona okunene
Kwiinto zonke ngokumhlophe
Fan'selana sekuphi na
Umnt'omnyama esebenza*

I have given up, I am devastated
Truly my countrymen
Men have spoken
Praising the Whites.
Contrary to what they said, discrimination
prevails
Though they deny it
It is true that it prevails
In all affairs it is noticeable.
Everywhere
A black man can work,

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*Ekholisa, seleqwela
Won'umvuzo uyintshenu*

*Okunene kuth'we khunu
Oligwqangqa uyinkosi
Nakuw'phi na umsebenzi,
Fan'selana esidenge
AbaNtsundu bemqwelile.
Nangengqondo bemdlulile,
Kuphelile wozuziswa
Umvuzo owangala
Kwanegunya lokuphatha
AbaNtsundu, abamnyama*

*Kwanelizwe xa lifile
Bomiselwa izidenge,
'Zingazange ziyibone
Lento kut'wa iyimfazwe
Bapatisw'okwabatwana
Ngezahokwe betyatyushwa;
Bat'we cintsi ngeqoshana
Bengo Vula ozindlela,
Amagwangqa etyetyiswa.*

*Kwi-ofisi kukwanjalo
Abantsundu tu, nto, nto, nto*

And satisfy all, and excel
When it comes to the salary it is meagre

It is true that he is underpaid
The white man is the chief/head
In all types of jobs
Even if he is stupid
And is outdone by Blacks.
And surpassed in terms of intelligence,
In the end he will receive
A huge salary
And power to rule/manage
The Brown , the Black

Even when war erupts
They will be led by stupid people
Who have never seen
The thing that is called war
They will be treated like children
And be flogged with whips
And be given small remuneration
Though they construct roads
To enrich the Whites.

In the office it is like that
Blacks, nothing, nothing
(Rubusana 1911:103-104).

Rank Emsini protests against racial discrimination. He claims that Black people, in all spheres of life, are ill-treated undermined and exploited by the White authorities.

Common Legal Rights

According to Smith (1991):

... what we mean by 'national' identity involves some sense of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community.

What emerges from the poetry of late nineteenth century is that Africans were excluded from the political institutions, and that they did not enjoy even the

basic human rights. In 'Esomnt'ofelweyo' Citashe (1888) mourns the loss of voting rights by Blacks in the Cape Province.

*Ndikhohlwe nalapho ndizimela khona,
Kufe nentliziyo, ndiphele amandla
Ndiswel' imilomo ayab' iliwaka,
Ixel' elihlazo likhulu kangaka,*

I do not know where to hide myself,
My heart is dead, I have lost all the energy,
I wish I had one hundred mouths,
To tell about this disgraceful act.

*Kuwe ke ufuna ukuv' isizathu
Ndililel' icebo loKhaka-ka-mpethu,*

To you who would like to know the cause;
I mourn the success of the plan of the
traitors

Elonge ivoti yabantw' abaNtsundu.,

Which revoked the voting rights of the
African people.

Babulal' uhlanga; bakwenzile ukwenza.

They are killing the nation; what they have
done is extremely detestable.

Vilakazi (1945:289) observed :

About 1900 the Glen Grey Bill, the Transvaal Law 24 of 1895, the Orange Free State Squatters Law and the National Poll Tax, all impressed on the minds of the Africans that *they had lost all their freedom of the past*, and that the *land* no more belonged to them as they had always thought it did .

Writing in *Imvo zabaNtsundu* of 06 June 1895 Govo expressed his anger at the Introduction of the Glen Grey Act :

Unani lo mthetho sinyanzelwa ngawo?

What shall we benefit from this law that is
imposed upon us?

Unafa lini na singalizuzayo?

What shall we inherit from it?

Onk'amalungelo singawavinjwayo

We are deprived of all rights?

Matatu kuphela esiwaphiweyo

We are provided with only three

Kungen'intolongo kuthotyw'imivuzo,

The prison, and low remuneration, and

Kwanobuncekevu, kwinto zolu lawulo

Marginalisation in all matters pertaining to
governance.

*Uyintoni lo mthetho, khanitsho
mawethu?*

What is the nature of this piece of
legislation? Tell us countrymen.

Uyinunu nunu, kulo mzi untsundu?

It is designed to injure/hurt Blacks?

Siti simangala ube unyanzelwa?

We protest but the law is imposed upon us.

Vukani bantsundu ze nitunge inqu,

Wake up Black people stop making jokes

Kunomcimbi namhla ugqith'inkanunu
Yon'ine nqubela kwanesihlabane
Lo mteto lo mteto awunamfesane.

The matter is more harmful than a canon
which destroys and shoots dead
This law this law is merciless.

Mayibe kanti ikhaya liphi na?
Kuphela na gxebe oku kukhuselwa
Zezi zirafu na nale miteto na?
Ukuba kunjalo, kogqita nokufa.

Where is our home?
Is this what is meant by this protection?
Is it these taxes and laws?
If it is so, it is more than death.

Vukani bantsundu nime ngazw'inyawo
Gxothani umshologu usiwe kowawo
Tina abantsundu asibakowawo.
Vukani kwangoku ningade nibhilwe.

Wake up Black People, stand on your feet
Send the evil spirit back to its home
We Blacks reject it.
Wake up now before the bill is piloted.

The upper house poet appeals to his people to close ranks and resist the imposition of the Glen Grey Laws. The law is not acceptable to Blacks who view it as draconian and oppressive. Meli (1988:3) describes this law as follows:

The Glen Grey Act was another instrument in this process of enslavement. It is introduced as tax which, in the words of the mine owner, Cape politician and arch-imperialist. Cecil Rhodes:

... removed Natives from the life of sloth and laziness, and made them contribute to the prosperity of the state and made them give some return for our wise and good government.

The poets seem to reject the pretexts that were put forward by the colonialists. They clamour for a single code of socio-politico-economic rights for all members of the community irrespective of race, colour or creed.

Conclusion

This article argues that the new constitution is a climax of a discourse, the constitutional discourse, which has permeated the works of Xhosa poets since the introduction of racial capitalism in South Africa, i.e since the beginning of the process of proletarianisation of the Black people of South Africa. The article argues that the nascent capitalism which saw Black South African's as cheap labour for more profits, destroyed the national identity project.

The socio-politico-economic changes that were brought about by the discovery of gold and diamond during the last quarter of the nineteenth century furthermore, sent clear signals to the black intellectuals of the time that the 'settler's'

stay in the country was permanent, and also that ethnic oriented conflicts had to come to an end. They realised that the approach of fighting the coloniser was futile, and should therefore be substituted with an approach of co-existence and co-operation.

The poems that are analysed and interpreted contain a clear message to all and sundry, that, South Africa, which was clearly demarcated as the area that was occupied by the Sotho, Zulu, Xhosa, 'Afrikaners', British and other smaller ethnic groups, was perceived as belonging to all who live in it. Xhosa poetry reflects that this consciousness, which was elaborated by the freedom Charter of 1955 and the South African Constitution of 1996, was conceived as early as the 1880's.

The idea that South Africa should move towards a common culture, and that of promotion of shared sentiments and aspirations, can also be observed during this period. The desire for equality in the field of education, and the desire by Black parents for their children to be exposed to languages of power of the time, viz. Greek, Hebrew, Latin and so on also shows how Xhosa poets wished to participate not only in national but also in international cultural affairs.

To be South African, according to Xhosa poets of the late eighteenth century meant common legal rights.

To be South African, meant full participation in the economy of the country.

Simultaneous with the programme of creating a national identity, during the period under review, there was a move towards Black identity. This was seen as a necessary step that would enable Blacks to resist both British and Afrikaner racism. The threat by Afrikaner (Boer) nationalism which was ethnic and strongly anti-Black seems to have caused anxiety amongst Blacks, who in turn formed their own Bond.

*Ndev'incwina nemigulo yeBond'eNtsundu
Lath' ixhwele nesanuse kwakwenyel' imisila.*

I heard groans and sickness of the Black Bond
And the indigenous doctor and specialist were
overwhelmed by fear (Mqhayi in Rubusana 1911:499).

Due to the military strength of the Boers, some Xhosa poets seem to be persuading their people to consent to protection by the Colonial power, Britain. In his poem: 'National Anthem' Gqoba says :

<i>Gcina Thixo wethu</i>	God protect us
<i>Thina maAfrika</i>	We Africans
<i>Thixo wethu</i>	Our God
<i>Sipe ukuzola</i>	Give us calm
<i>Ukukonz'okuhle</i>	To serve diligently

Gcina Thixo wethu
Ukumkanikazi
Thixo wethu.

Protect, our God
the Queen
Our God (Imvo Jan. 23, 1899).

But Britain, according to other poets, proved to be oppressors instead of protectors. The assumption of this article, therefore, based on issues that are raised by the poets, is that interest in capital which triggered the process of proletarianisation of African people by the colonial power, superseded their interest in human rights and the welfare of Africans, resulting in failure of the national identity project, as its success also depended on its support and acceptance by the colonialists. As Meli (1988:3) points out:

The process of proletarianization of Africans was also conditioned by essentially coercive or extra-economic factors; the continued existence of the pre-capitalist sector, and the institutionalization of migrant labour, low wages and many other disabilities. The Africans' position was determined by the profit motive of the mining capitalists and also by the greed of white miners.

What is significant is the central role that the erstwhile marginalised Xhosa poetry can play in the new South Africa at this crucial period of creation/formation of a new nation with a new national identity. In line with the poets of the late eighteenth century the modern poet can play a significant role in bringing respect and recognition towards customs, traditions and values of the diverse cultural and language groups of South Africa and simultaneously enhance the consciousness about the need for national unity, which supersedes ethnic and racial interests. To the politician, the elected representative of the people, the message from the poetry of the late 19th century is that the stern eye of the poet who has exposed the 'injustices of the past' and struggled to close the racial '... divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights', will never be silent when the people's socio-politico-economic rights are violated. To the South African the voice of the poet says '*Ungangeni kwaHoho*' (Do not seek refuge in Hoho). Move beyond the narrow ethnic and racial identities and embrace the broader and accommodative national identity.

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