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“AmaShangane, the Destroyers”: Ethnicity and national belonging in post-apartheid South Africa



Job Zwane

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology
Supervised by
Prof. Eric Worby and Dr. Nosipho Mngomezulu

University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Social Anthropology

November 2025

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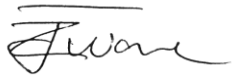

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Abstract

This thesis tackles an oft neglected area of study in South African scholarship, the question of ethnic stigma and national belonging. It aims to interrogate the question of the historical marginalisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan as a group whose status as an "authentic" or "autochthonal" cultural identity has been put to doubt. The thesis uses autoethnography, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews to survey inter-ethnic relations among the heterogeneous population mostly living in the Mpumalanga province's Thembisile Hani Local Municipality area. However, because of Covid-19 restrictions and the limitations imposed on social interactions, the thesis also relies on digital ethnography or data generated from social networking sites to extend its depth and reach. Additionally, it incorporates scholarly sources, media reports and, to a limited extent, archival material to situate its topic into a broader context beyond the research site. The thesis demonstrates that the Tsonga-Shangaan are not the only ethnic group whose members have come to see themselves as a marginalised group in South Africa. Accordingly, it interrogates the status of other similarly stigmatised groups such as the Southern Ndebele who – much like the Tsonga-Shangaan who are often conflated with their Mozambican counterparts – are also conflated with their namesakes in Zimbabwe and similarly castigated as foreign to the South African nation-state. The thesis argues that such groups are rendered prone to stigmatisation partly because they confound civic and ethnic conceptions of citizenship and belonging, rendering them betwixt and between a foreigner and citizen status. These findings shed some light on why some South Africans also feature as victims in xenophobic attacks, a question which is often glossed over or explained away as a "residue of tribalism" inherited from South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. The thesis contends that such an analytical approach reduces ethnic antagonisms to an atavism, and proposes instead that the violent treatment of foreigners and other perceived cultural outsiders in the country should be read as a corollary of emergent practices of stigmatised ethnicisation, processes which are in turn imbricated with the crisis of the nation-state, or its failure to reconcile a civic citizenship with forms of attachment which often proliferate on its margins.

Keywords: Tsonga, Shangaan, ethnicity, stigma, national belonging, xenophobia, Afrophobia

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AIPO:	African Independent People's Organisation
ANC:	African National Congress
NSA:	Ndebele Students Association
ANT:	AmaNdebele@Tuks
BRCSA:	Broadcast Research Council of South Africa
CGE:	Commission for Gender Equality
CIAG:	Cape Independence Advocacy Group
Codesa:	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
Conralesa:	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa
Covid-19:	Coronavirus disease 2019
CRL Rights Commission:	Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights of Communities
DStv:	Digital Satellite Television
EFF:	Economic Freedom Fighters
FMSP:	Forced Migration Studies Programme
FRELIMO:	Liberation Front of Mozambique
HREC:	Human Research Ethics Committee
IFP:	Inkatha Freedom Party
Kwayco:	KwaNdebele Youth Congress
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal
M-Net:	Electronic Media Network
MRCCC:	Moloto Rail Corridor Concerned Citizens
NEG:	Ndebele Ethnic Group
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organisations
NMS Clothing:	No More Slavery Clothing
NNO:	Ndebele National Organization
NTFRL:	Ndzundza Top Five Royal Legacy
PGCE:	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
Pl.:	Plural
Renamo:	Mozambican National Resistance
SABC LBP:	South African Broadcasting Corporation of South Africa Language Broadcasting Policy
SABC:	South African Broadcasting Corporation of South Africa
SADAG:	South African Depression and Anxiety Group
SATMA:	South African Traditional Music Awards
Sing.:	Singular
SMS:	Short Message Service
TNNO:	Transvaal Ndebele National Organisation
UDF:	United Democratic Front
Unisa:	University of South Africa
Wenela:	Witwatersrand Labour Association
Zanu:	Zimbabwe African National Union

Zanu-PF: Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAR: Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek
Zinla: Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

Glossary of terms

Note on the glossary of terms

The prefix /*isi*-/ for example in **isi**Ndebele, **isi**Zulu, **isi**Swati, and **isi**Xhosa indicates a spoken language and/or the noun class for said language. This is the same as the prefix /*tshi*-/ in **Tshi**venda and /*xi*-/ in **Xi**tsonga. The use of the stem words without their attendant prefixes serves to denote an ethnic group, for example, the Ndebele, the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Tsonga, *et cetera*. The latter is alternatively indicated through the use of the prefix /*ama*-/ as in **ama**Ndebele, **ama**Zulu, **ama**Xhosa, **ama**Shangane, and the prefix /*ba*-/ in the case of **Ba**Vhenda, and the prefix /*vha*-/ in the case of **Vha**tsonga, sometimes also used without the /h/ as in **Va**tsonga.

amaShangane: this term is derived from the name Soshangane, a nineteenth-century Gaza Nguni king whose subjects and their descendants came to be known as amaShangane. Furthermore, the name Soshangane is derived from the Nguni term *ukushanga* which connotes, in one sense, the act of wandering from one abode to another. In another sense, however, the term connotes the act of plundering or pillaging one's enemies. It is in the latter sense that amaShangane were often identified, in ethnological records, as "the destroyers" (see Massie 1905, 64).

abezimu: the ancestors, in isiNdebele.

amazimu: cannibals, in isiZulu.

amazimuzimu: cannibals, in isiNdebele.

idlozi (sing.) /**amadlozi** (pl.): an ancestral spirits associated with the healing gift.

igedla: a traditional healer who styles himself or herself as self-trained.

ithwasana: an apprentice traditional healer or a traditional healer who is still in training.

isangoma: a fully-fledged traditional healer who specialises in divination.

inyanga: a fully-fledged traditional healer who specialises in herbs. While there might have been a clear distinction between *isangoma* and *inyanga* in the past, today the lines are blurred.

knobkerrie: a wooden club or stick with a knob on one end normally used as a weapon.

swikwembu: the ancestors, in Xitsonga.

umdliwa: used to denote an unfamiliar possessing spirit, one not blood related to the medium.

umndawu: used to denote a possessing spirit of a Ndau heritage.

umndiki:	used to denote a possessing spirit of a Mandinka or Malinke ethnic heritage (a people mostly found in Mali and The Gambia, among other West African countries).
umsamo:	a homestead shrine used to connect and/or communicate with the ancestors.
uZimu:	God, in isiNdebele.
Xikwembu:	God, in Xitsonga.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

> It would not be contentious to suggest that many anthropologists are motivated by a personal problematic as well as by mere intellectual curiosity […]. (Cohen 1992a, 220)

I was born and raised in Tweefontein, a constellation of villages in the Mpumalanga province's Nkangala region. Growing up there I had always been fascinated with the stigma attached to the Tsonga-Shangaan identity (an identity I claim somewhat).[1] My earliest experience of this stigmatised status was in my primary school days in the late 1990s and early 2000s, occurring during those annual surveys which collected, among other data, each learners' ethnic identity. To save time, teachers would record how many ethnic groups were in each class by show of hands. These were such ambivalent moments for me, and others like me, as we were presented with the option to either be truthful and risk ridicule or pass as a member of a non-stigmatised group. The latter option was especially easier for me since my surname is predominantly categorised as "Zulu", a putatively autochthonal cultural identity.[2]

As a result of these early experiences, and others later in my life, I developed an interest in pursuing, at a scholarly level, the problem of stigma attached to the Tsonga-Shangaan identity while drawing on my own and my family members' experiences. This interest has also led me to contemplate questions broadly around: the nation-state and its interpellation of citizenship; the populace and its interpellation of belonging; and the global forces that bear on both states and their citizens. In this thesis, I show that the Tsonga-Shangaan are a group that often confounds both state and popular conceptions of belonging, rendering them, to an extent, betwixt and between a citizen and foreigner

[1] I say "somewhat" here because I also identify as part of amaNgwe, a "nation" largely considered Zulu, or whose chiefly authority falls under the Zulu monarchy, but with a membership that is trans-national.

[2] In *Seeing Like a State* James Scott (1998) explains that, like the annual school survey just mentioned, "Universal last names are a fairly recent historical phenomenon" (p. 71), one which coincides with the emergence of the premodern and modern states bent on making their citizens "legible" for a range of purposes (taxation, conscription, public health, policing, and so forth) which require processes of standardisation and aggregation that Scott (1998) has called "state simplifications". However, in its simplification endeavours, sometimes the state ends up papering over the complexity of existing forms of identification, producing ossified parodies with disastrous consequences for some.

status, a position which is epitomised by their double-barrel ethnonym which encapsulates an ambivalent state of *liminal belonging*.

In South Africa, the Tsonga-Shangaan are usually a target of many dehumanising jokes; the most famous of which seeks to paint them as uncaring to their young. Despite its morally accusatory connotations, the joke also doubles as an origins myth that purports to tell how the "Tsonga" came to be known as "Shangaan" (an Afrikaans transliteration of the term Shangane). This story holds that in the "olden days" whenever the Tsonga were under attack they would flee and leave their children at the mercy of the enemy. The worst version of the joke tells of how one of the Tsonga women, during an imminent attack, was admonished by her husband for trying to rescue their small child instead of reaching for a sack of groundnuts (said to be a relished staple of the group). This story has thus produced the false etymology of the term Shangane as meaning "*amashiya'ngane*", that is, those who abandon their offspring (also see Maluleke 2017, 44; Mabaso 2018, 314). A variation of this myth tells of how the Shangaan came from a distant land, leaving their children behind, to work in South Africa.[3] This version might have developed in the late-1800s when Shangaan immigrants formed the bulk of the cheap labour force in South Africa's then-bourgeoning gold mining industry in the Witwatersrand basin.

In truth, the term Shangane derives from the nineteenth-century Gaza Nguni king Manukuza kaZikode who,[4] after his conquest and consolidation of the peoples mostly living in what is present-day southern Mozambique and south-eastern Zimbabwe, took on the name Soshangane – a menacing epithet which loosely translates to "Master Pillager" – from which the eponym "amaShangane" derives. This etymology is corroborated by a series of disparate fragments of Manukuza's seemingly

[3] In rare instances, it is said that the name is on account of them coming into South Africa, working and impregnating local girls, and thereafter leaving their offspring behind when they eventually go back home (see Chapter 8).

[4] Also spelt as Manukusa, Manukuse, and Manukosi in the literature.

lost praise poetry,[5] which mostly lauds him as a "pillager" and/or a "destroyer" of other people's homesteads.[6] One of these fragments can be found in a five-page 1938 manuscript contained in the Van Warmelo Collection archive, curated by the University of Pretoria's Department of Library Services, written in an obscure Nguni dialect.[7] I provide an excerpt of the manuscript with its corresponding translation below:

[5] This is a view held by Gerhard Liesegang (2012) who is one of the foremost historians on the Gaza Nguni state. Liesegang (2012) shows that although there are extensive praise poems of King Soshangane's successor, King Mzila, and some prominent Gaza Nguni generals such as Magudzu Khosa, only fragments of praise poetry remain for the founder of the Gaza Nguni kingdom and his chosen but deposed heir, Mawewe. Similarly, only fragments of praise poetry remain for King Mzila's successor, King Ngungunyane, who might have been viewed as a usurper and/or despot (Liesegang 2012, 9–10, 32–33, 50). Liesegang (2012) speculates that the defeat of the kingdom in 1895 and the immigration of its remnants into the Transvaal – a process which was attended by the erosion of the Nguni language – might have led to the loss of some of its oral traditions. Furthermore, Liesegang (2012) speculates that the loss of some praise poetry and the preservation of others might reflect contending interest groups who might have different and/or contending versions of history within a given society (p. 50). With regards to Mawewe, we can further speculate that his ousting would have naturally contributed to the eroding, over the years, of his praise poetry. However, it could also be plausibly argued that this erosion was deliberate since he was deeply unpopular, a fact which is corroborated by oral traditions that were recorded by European travellers and/or traders. For instance, Vincent Erskine (1869) wrote that Mawewe was deeply unpopular and was eventually deposed because he routinely killed men thought to be unfit for military service (p. 248).

[6] For instance, drawing from the Swiss missionary Alexandre Jaques (1938), Ximbani Mabaso (2018) explains that Manukuza took on the name Soshangane to extoll his military exploits among the disparate groups or clans who would later come to be collectively known as Tsonga. Manukuza was thus hailed as "*owa shanga imizi yabantu*", that is, "the one who appeared suddenly and devastated other people's homesteads" in his praise poetry (Mabaso 2018, 315). Similar explanations are given for King Ngungunyane's less known epithet, Mdungazwe, which is thought to mean, "destroyer of the country" (Bertelsen 2011, 465). These titles are not unique to the Gaza Nguni since fifteen-century rulers or *mambos* of the Mutapa empire in present-day Zimbabwe were hailed as *Mwene Mutapa*, that is, "Master Pillager" (see Alpers, 1970, 203), while their successors, the Rozwi empire in the seventeen-century, were similarly hailed as the "destroyers" (see Mudenge, 1972, 37).

[7] Ceko, E.M. 1938. History of Manukuza, Mawewe and Mzila, In: Dr. N. J. van Warmelo Manuscript Collection, University of Pretoria Department of Library Services http://hdl.handle.net/2263/64534 Accessed on 22 May 2024. See especially page 1.

1. *uManukuza wadla ezimanukunuku*
2. *uSoshangane omunya ngoku shanga imizi yamaPeto*[8]
3. *Umuyozi omuncinyene obiza ingonyama ingene ekaya*

Translation

1. Manukuza who devoured them while they quarrelled[9]
2. Soshangane who pillages the houses of the Portuguese[10]
3. The faint whistle that beckons the lion while it follows him home[11]

Another of these fragments is contained in an eighteenth-page 1982 interview transcript held by the University of the Witwatersrand's Historical Papers and also curated by the University of Cape Town's EMANDULO project, a digital repository of archival materials sourced from local and international

[8] The term "*omunya*" connotes the act of "sucking" and/or "suckling", but it can also be used to connote the act of "pilfering", that is, to take something without right. In the context of this poem, I believe it is used in the latter sense. While the term "*shanga*" connotes the act of "wandering" the country and/or from one abode to another. Taken together, the two terms describe the act of pilfering and/or pillaging the country.

[9] This translation is produced by approximating the term "*ezimanukunuku*" with its closest cognate "*amanikiniki*" from the expression, "*qhude manikiki, zindala zombili*", denoting infighting between two or more parties who might be equally matched in strength. Used in the context of this praise poem, the term suggests that Manukuza emerged victorious during the disintegration of the Ndwandwe kingdom and/or that he emerged victorious out of the many contenders for dominance over what was left of the kingdom after its defeat by the Zulu in 1820. However, the term "*nukunuku*" as in "*isinukunuku*" refers to an animal which is fully covered in flowing fur and is used to refer to a person who is covered, from head to toe, in ostentatious garbs. In the context of the poem, the term would therefore describe Soshangane's victories over an enemy which was richly apparelled. This description would be consistent with my conclusion that line two of this poem refers to Manukuza's victories over the Portuguese.

[10] I have translated the term "*amaPeto*" which, because of the prefix /*ama-*/, I take to be a class six noun and therefore indicative of an eponymous name denoting "the people of Peto". I think the most logical conclusion here is that "Peto" refers to Pedro, a very common royal epithet in imperial Portugal and its colonies, and could refer to either Pedro I, Pedro IV, and/or Pedro V whose reigns either coincided with the reign of King Soshangane and/or his devastating military campaigns against Portuguese colonial forces in the 1830s (see Parsons 1982, 135). Another, less plausible, possibility is that the designation "*amaPeto*" could refer to the *peitoral* amour or breastplates donned by the Portuguese army until the nineteenth century. Against this context, the term "*amaPeto*" would have meant "those who are garbed in breastplates".

[11] I arrived at this translation by approximating the seemingly unintelligible terms "*umuncinyene*" to its closest cognate "*omuncanyane*" and the term "*umuyozi*" to "*umulozi*". The latter translation was the easiest to produce since it simply indicates that the word is rendered in the *ukuthefula* style, or the older manner of Nguni speech wherein /y/ is substituted for /l/.

collections.[12] The interview was conducted by Dumisa Dlamini with Bongani Mkhatshwa, a man who claimed to be descended from Mawewe kaSoshangane. Since these fragments were collected comparatively recently, they are presented in a much clearer Nguni dialect. I provide an excerpt of the transcript with its corresponding translation below:

1. *Iqhawe elaphuma ngehla komuzi,*[13]
2. *noyise uLanga lingakambikeli*
3. *USoshangane ushakazis'imizi yamadoda*

Translation

1. The hero who exited at the back of the homestead,
2. not having even told his father Langa[14]
3. Soshangane who scatters the homesteads of other men[15]

The etymology of the term Tsonga – or its Tonga and Thonga variants – is however subject to debate. Nevertheless, there is consensus that the term was used as a pejorative to define those who fell beyond the sphere of Gaza Nguni suzerainty. In South Africa, the terms Tsonga and Shangaan have mostly been used interchangeably or in hyphenated form since the early 1960s.

[12] Dumisa Dlamini interview conducted by Bongani Mkhatshwa, 1 July 1982, transcript contained in: Bongani Mkhatshwa, notebook 1 http://emandulo.apc.uct.ac.za/metadata/SWOHP/267/11098/11099/index.html Accessed on 22 May 2024. See in particular page 5.

[13] In the original transcript this line appears as, "*Liqhawe liphuma ngehla kwemuzi*," on page 4, which I take to be a grammatically incorrect rendition.

[14] This line in the poem, as well as in the larger transcript from whence it has been sourced, presents a seemingly inaccurate version of Ndwandwe genealogy, presenting Soshangane as the half-brother of Zwide, making him Soshangane kaLanga instead of the more accepted and mainstream view that Soshangane was the son of Zikode, the half-brother of Langa. In fact, Mkhatshwa makes the claim that Soshangane was the son of LaZikode of the amaNgwe people, the prefix /la-/ in the latter name is a feminine subject concord which denotes, in this version, that LaZikode was the mother of Soshangane and not his father.

[15] The term "*shakazisa*" does not seem to be current in isiZulu and isiSwati vocabularies. The closest I could get to was the word "*sakazisa*" which denotes the act of "*scattering*" and/or "*smashing*". It is not inconceivable that the term "*shakazisa*" is a grammatically incorrect rendering of "*sakazisa*", especially in light of the fact that the interview transcript is littered with similar grammatical and spelling errors.

Research problem and rationale

The negative stigma attached to the Tsonga-Shangaan identity has often been attributed to xenophobic sentiments and explained away as "residual tribalism" from country's colonial and apartheid past. South Africa has indeed struggled with xenophobia since the 1994 transition into democracy. In most xenophobic attacks there have always been reports of South African citizens being counted among the unfortunate victims. These South African victims are usually of a Tsonga-Shangaan heritage. In fact, the term *iShangane* has become synonymous with the term *iKwerekwere* (the latter of course being one of the most common pejorative term for non-nationals of African descent). Other derogatory but less current slurs include terms such as *abantu bakaMugabe*, *amaZizimbane*, and *amaGirigamba* (see Tafira 2018, 24, 27–28; Ndhlovu 2020, 103–04). However, the terms *iShangane* (sing.) and *amaShangane* (pl.), seem to be the most current of South Africa's ethnophaulic or group-directed slurs, a fact which can be discerned from their everyday use to describe persons and/or goods believed to be of poor status and/or quality, for example *maShangane wors* to refer to cheap and poor quality sausage, *maShangane mealie meal* to refer to cheap and/or poor quality maize flour, and *maShangane bag* to refer to the checkered red-white-blue bag manufactured from cheap plastic materials which has come to be associated with itinerant immigrant traders (see Figure 1), rendering it an apt marker for a transient social existence (Maluleke 2005, 131; Chasi and Lowane 2016, 46; Mabaso 2018, 317; Huang 2019, 541–42).[16]

[16] Although it has its origins in mid-twentieth century Japan and Taiwan, the checkered red-white-blue bag is popularly known around the world as the "China bag" because it has since been mass-produced in mainland China (Huang 2019, 540). Despite its permeation of contemporary art and high fashion (ibid.), the China bag is similarly stigmatised in Nigeria where it is colloquially referred to as the "Ghana Must Go Bag", a name that traces its roots to the expulsion of West African immigrants from Nigeria in the 1980s. It is said that when the immigrants – half of whom were from Ghana – were desperate to pack up their belongings in hurry to make their departure before the announced government deadline enforced through threat of violence, they made use of this infamous bag (Huang 2019, 542). Also see "GHANA MUST GO: The ugly history of Africa's most famous bag" by Shola Lawal, *Mail & Guardian* 4 April 2019 https://atavist.mg.co.za/ghana-must-go-the-ugly-history-of-africas-most-famous-bag/ Accessed on 5 April 2024.



Figure 1: A woman crosses a river while carrying a baby at her back and balancing a China bag on her head (Art: "The ease of the Hippo, 2013" by Bienco Ikete https://africanah.org/dan-halter/)

As I noted above, the most dominant scholarship on this question subsumes the phenomenon within a discourse about xenophobia and attributes it to histories of apartheid and/or colonial violence. I argue that this view implicitly suggests that violence is absent in pre-colonial African societies, that it is an aberration only introduced by colonial settlers whenceforth it propagates itself and is thus reflected in present-day ethnic antagonisms. This view also ignores pre-colonial and early colonial histories of internecine violence and undermines the ingenuity of Africans to manage and move beyond histories of mutual ethnic violence, often forging broader forms of identification whose cohesion is necessarily undergirded by said histories.[17] Furthermore, this view tends to overstate the ability of colonial

[17] Chapter 5 expands on this point and gives a comprehensive discussion on how indigenous healing traditions – where healers are often possessed by the spirits of slain warriors belonging to historically hostile groups – have played a major role in fomenting and coordinating ethnically diverse anti-colonial resistance movements.

administrators and their subordinate functionaries to manipulate ordinary Africans towards more parochial forms of ethnic affiliation.[18]

Research questions

The study investigates:

(a) The historical and present sources of the stigma attached to a Tsonga-Shangaan identity (i.e. how are specific stereotypes about the Tsonga-Shangaan selected, in what way are they important to those who peddle them, are they rooted in fact, and do they have any functional objectives)?[19]

(b) How have those designated as Tsonga-Shangaan responded to this stigma?

(c) What is the relationship between the stigmatisation of some groups and national belonging; how does the case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa help us think through this question?

Summary and significance

This study has as its aim to contribute towards filling the lacuna in the literature on South African ethnic groups where much of the focus has historically been concentrated on the Zulu and the Xhosa, while other groups have largely been given a passing treatment. Consequently, this study gives a focused treatment of the question of Tsonga-Shangaan ethnicisation, both in its historical and contemporary manifestations in much of the southern African region, but particularly in South Africa.

[18] For example, Isak Niehaus (2002) writes about Shangaan ethnicity in the period roughly between the mid-1930s to the mid-1990s, where ordinary people espoused notions of ethnic identification that were openly at odds with those of homeland elites and colonial and apartheid administrators, embracing broader forms of ethnic identification that privileged incorporation with their Basotho neighbours in what Niehaus (2002) calls an "assimilationist paradigm" rather than a segregationist "tribal paradigm" promoted by the apartheid state (pp. 581–82). Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2014) writes similarly about Rand-based migrants from Zebediela (a constellation of villages in what is today the Capricorn District Municipality in the Limpopo province) throughout the 1930s to the 1970s, arguing that these migrants crafted and embraced broader forms of identification that were usually at odds with those prescribed by the government and/or local elites. While Clyde Mitchell (1956) showed a long time ago that ethnicity is always shifting and context-specific, and therefore not an atavism.

[19] I would like to stress that stereotypes are mostly a means to an end for those who peddle them and therefore do not always reflect real and objective traits of those they purport to portray.

The golden thread that runs through the thesis is its contention that acts of Tsonga-Shangaan stigmatisation should be read as a corollary of emergent processes of stigmatised ethnicisation. Thus far this problem has been subsumed into a discourse about xenophobia and attributed to histories of colonial and/or apartheid violence. Such an approach proffers historicist and/or epochal readings of contemporary ethnic antagonisms. I argue that the select targeting of the Tsonga-Shangaan warrants a focused study in view of other ethnic groups who were equally impacted by, and/or implicated in, histories of mutual ethnic violence, who nevertheless seem immune to similar acts of stigmatisation.

In my attempt to disentangle the question of Tsonga-Shangaan stigmatisation, I have relied on both traditional and less traditional research methods in anthropology such as participant observation, autoethnography, and semi-structured interviews. These research tools helped me map inter-ethnic relations within the research site as well as gather life histories that produced insights into the subjective experiences of those who find themselves at the receiving end of stigmatising practices. I have also consulted a large corpus of secondary sources ranging from government research reports, media reports, archival documents, as well as scholarly sources from an interdisciplinary canon. The careful perusal of said material has helped me situate my research into its proper theoretical as well as historical context. I submit that this study has the potential to shed some light on why some South Africans feature as victims in xenophobic and/or Afrophobic attacks.

Thesis outline

Chapter 2 – Researching self and others: On methods, ethics, and methodology

This chapter gives an account of how research for this thesis was undertaken. While the study made use of traditional methods in anthropology such as ethnography and participant observation, it also made use of less traditional approaches such as autoethnography which entails the incorporation, in the research process and output, of data obtained from the researcher's lived experience and/or derived from their socio-cultural context. The selection of the latter approach was informed by my positionality as a person of a Tsonga-Shangaan heritage. Nevertheless, the chapter argues that an autoethnographic

approach does not necessarily denote a native informant perspective. Following Strathern (1987), I contend that what defines autoethnography should be the incorporation, in the research output, of concepts derived from the field in ways that inform theory.

Chapter 3 – Challenging the invention thesis: The post-constructivist turn in ethnicity studies

This chapter reviews the literature on the subject of ethnicity. It discusses the different approaches that have been put forth to elucidate the concept ranging from primordialism, constructivism, and what some are beginning to call "post-constructivism". It argues that while constructivist scholars were instrumental in challenging, and moving us beyond, primordialist or essentialist conceptions of ethnicity, they have tended to overstate the authority and influence of colonialists and missionaries in their ostensible invention of tradition on the continent, while conversely underrating the agency of ordinary Africans in shaping and determining the version of tradition that appealed to their sensibilities as well as served their interests. However, rather than a claim that Africans were solely responsible for the version of ethnicity that emerged out of the colonial encounter, post-constructivists argue that the latter version was a product of an interplay of indigenous and colonial voices.

Chapter 4 – The Tsonga-Shangaan as a marginalised ethnic group in South Africa

This chapter discusses the historical factors that gave rise to a Tsonga-Shangaan identity in South Africa. It argues that the emergence of this ethnic consciousness has been explicated from the point of view of constructivist scholars who have tended to emphasise the role of colonial administrators and missionary ethnographers in its crafting while occluding the role played by ordinary Africans in shaping its ethnic content. Such a conception has meant that acts of Tsonga-Shangaan ethnicisation in post-apartheid South Africa have been explicated through a similar constructivist lens. Accordingly, this chapter challenges this trend in scholarship on the Tsonga-Shangaan, especially the attribution of Tsonga-Shangaan marginalisation in post-apartheid South Africa to the machinations of colonial and apartheid administrators, or the lingering effects of their social engineering endeavours. It proposes,

instead, that this marginalised status should be studied as a corollary of emergent processes of stigmatised ethnicisation.

Chapter 5 – Atoning for the sins of our forebears: (Pre)colonial genocide, slavery, and trans-ethnic spirits in Nguni and Ndau healing traditions

This chapter argues that scholarship on inter-ethnic violence in South Africa is dominated by the constructivist perspective which attributes present-day conflict to a holdover of colonial and apartheid violence. As a result, this scholarship often reads contemporary violence through an atavistic lens thereby "freezing" Africans into perpetual conflict rooted in a traumatic past. In contention, this chapter aims to demonstrate that Africans have indigenous institutions for dealing with histories of violent trauma. In the former KwaNdebele, such indigenous approaches can be found in Nguni and Ndau healing traditions which seek to reconcile a history of violent contact between South Africa's Nguni groups and the Ndau people of central Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe. Using ethnographic material and indigenous folklore, I argue that these institutions are nested within a long-standing tradition that conceptualises a consummate cosmological order as predicated on a balance between autochthony and difference, or that the dialectic between the two divides – embodied by a spirit medium – is what undergirds social cohesion.

Chapter 6 – "uZimu liNdebele": Ethnic pride and national belonging among the Southern Ndebele

This chapter interrogates the question of belonging for the Southern Ndebele who have come to see themselves as a persecuted group often conflated with their namesakes in Zimbabwe and therefore castigated as "foreign" to the South African nation-state. This persecution motif permeates daily discourses of discontent and is deeply rooted in histories of dispossession and dispersal in the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, where the Ndebele were dispossessed of their land and condemned to an itinerant existence on white-owned farms and homelands designated for other ethnic groups. This period of hardship was however followed by a short period of reprieve in the 1970s when the Ndebele were apportioned their own homeland and a quasi-independent government which built

and maintained roads and other public infrastructure. This has, therefore, given rise to a kind of insular politics that is nostalgically backward-looking. The dawn of democracy, from this perspective, has seen the Ndebele being ostensibly overlooked by the government in ways that closely mirror how they were treated by successive colonial administrations for whom they were fated to assimilate into other, more dominant groups, and disappear. Not surprisingly, these views have seen a resurgence of ethno-nationalism, one which seeks to ensure that the Ndebele stake their claim to the country's resources (in ways that closely mirror struggles that petitioned, in the Balkanisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s, for a Ndebele homeland and a Ndebele radio station). However, this new ethno-nationalism has neoliberal undercurrents, seen in its zero-sum view of the economy, or notions of the ethnoscape as a site of Darwinian struggles for the country's finite resources. From this perspective, identity itself has become a fungible commodity or a token that determines where one can live, work, or derive a livelihood.

Chapter 7 – In-between ethnic and national identity: The Tsonga-Shangaan and the ambivalence of liminal belonging in South Africa

This chapter interrogates the question of national belonging for the Tsonga-Shangaan who, like the Southern Ndebele, are also conflated with their counterparts in Mozambique and castigated as foreign to the South African nation-state. It argues that this stigmatised status can, in part, be attributed to the fact that the Tsonga-Shangaan, who often bear nominally "Zulu" names while they are in fact not Zulu, confound both ethnic and national categories of belonging rendering them, to an extent, betwixt and between a citizen and foreigner status, a position which is epitomised by their double-barrel ethnonym.

Chapter 8 – AmaShangane, amaKula, and abantu bakaMugabe: Shifting ethnonyms and the discursive construction of difference in former KwaNdebele

This chapter focuses on the term "Shangaan" and interrogates how it became one of the most current slurs for immigrants of African descent in South Africa. The extent to which this term has become pejorated is reflected in the fact that some members of the Tsonga-Shangaan community in the country

tend to eschew it in favour of the less stigmatised “Tsonga” as a preferred ethnonym. Drawing on ethnographic research and historical sources, the chapter demonstrates that the terms Tsonga and Shangaan have become the object of a semantic shift. It argues that while Shangaan began as a marker of “ethnic” pride for the Gaza Nguni, today it has come to connote a status of itineracy as well as an “illegal” sojourn for African immigrants in South Africa. Ironically, the term Tsonga – which has more pejorative etymological roots – has since become a neutral descriptor for a South African ethnic group. The chapter concludes that the term “Shangaan” has come to define a set of socio-economic relations between black South Africans and African immigrants, and sometimes among black South Africans themselves.

Chapter 2 – Researching self and others: On methods, ethics, and methodology

I am not an objective bystander, fragments of my own life are present in this work. (Kihato 2013, xvi)

Introduction

Research in social anthropology has traditionally relied on ethnography and participant observation. However, the post-modern turn in the discipline saw many anthropologists make use of autoethnography – the incorporation of data obtained from the researcher's own lived experience and/or derived from their socio-cultural context – in the research process and output.[20] As I noted at the beginning of the introduction chapter, my interest in the study of Tsonga-Shangaan ethnicisation is motivated by my positionality as a person of a Tsonga-Shangaan heritage. As a result, I have undertaken this research to satisfy my intellectual curiosity as well as make sense of ambivalent feelings of belonging to the South African nation-state where, even though my claim to a civic citizenship has been constitutionally guaranteed, it has nevertheless been rendered suspect. I have therefore drawn on this ambivalent sense of liminal belonging to inform my interrogation of the relationship between a person's ascribed identity and their sense of belonging to the nation-state.[21] This chapter is therefore an attempt to give an account of how this undertaking was carried out.

[20] The post-modern turn in social anthropology occurred during the 1970s and 1980s, marking a shift from an empirical to a reflexive ethnography. The urtexts of this turn are considered to be James Clifford and George Marcus' (1986) edited volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and George Marcus and Michael Fischer's (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (see Scholte 1987; Mascia-Lees et al. 1989). Many, although not all, anthropologists embraced reflexivity mostly in the early 1980s to the early 2000s.

[21] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) have identified two theoretical blind-spots which they have termed the "*two naturalisms*" in scholarly discourse. The first, prevalent in ethnology, is the predilection to conflate ethnic groups (or "tribes") with particular territories, while the second is the tendency, prevalent in nationalist discourse, to take as axiomatic the association between citizens and "their" nation-states, thus "present[ing] associations of people and place as solid, commonsensical, and agreed-upon, when they are in fact contested, uncertain, and in flux" (pp. 11–12). Accordingly, I am cautious not to "naturalise" Tsonga-Shangaan claims to national belonging, a stance that often leads to an essentialist outlook in scholarship. Nosipho Mngomezulu (2014) also problematises this predilection for "naturalisation" in scholarly discourse. She argues

Musings from the field: research amidst a global pandemic

The ability for continual mutation while retaining the illusion of immutability was the strength of oral traditions in pre-colonial societies. A strength which allowed for acts of ethnic elision among members wishing to pass into a putatively superior cultural group or a strength which allowed for the incorporation of outright strangers in a lineage network while casting this act in terms that were overtly genealogical. Against this background, the ethnographer – because of the privilege of his written account – runs the risk of closing off future possibilities for those who agree to appear in his text, including his future self.

Throughout my research, I grappled with these concerns. Even when I was writing about myself, I worried about how my future self might read what I had written and, with both palms on his face, curse me as a naive navel-gazer. I also worried about how I was closing off said possibilities for those of my siblings and relatives who might have wished to affect a non-stigmatised identity. However, I worried more about those strangers who had given me consent to write about aspects of

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that the boundaries of the nation-state have been taken as a "given" in a state and/or nation-centric discourse occluding, in the process, other forms of social interaction which fall beyond the boundaries of the nation-state and to state-ascribed forms of identification (pp. 64–65). Nevertheless, Mngomezulu (2014) argues that newly formed countries such as Mauritius are relatively easier to deconstruct as "a sociohistorical and political construct[s]" (p. 66). Norman Etherington (1995) also makes this point, writing that: "An essentialist premise underlying the master narrative is that the nation is a fact of nature on its own soil. This has always been easier to establish in Europe, where the mists of time conveniently obscure historical vision, than in settler colonies whose migratory origins are fulsomely documented" (Etherington 1995, 39). Nowhere is this fact clearer than in the creation of nation-states such as Lesotho, Botswana, and eSwatini which partly owe their inception to nineteenth-century British colonial policy (see Omer-Cooper 1995, 289–90, 294) but which have now come to be seen as the last remaining vestiges and/or pockets of homogenous homelands which have not yet been sullied by migrations and miscegenation. Nevertheless, in *Afropolitanism*, Achille Mbembe (2017) reminds us that, "Insofar as African states are total inventions, and recent ones at that, strictly speaking there is nothing in their essential nature that can force us to worship them— which is not to say that we are indifferent to their fate" (Mbembe 2017, 106). In the rest of the thesis, I foreground the fact that pre-colonial African identities were rooted in itineracy and often fetishized difference over autochthony, an ethos to which we should aspire to return.

their lives in which they shared details that I felt could in future cause them harm. Here I exercised my "author-rity" and edited out what I deemed necessary.

The work of gathering data for this research project began, in earnest, in June 2020, amid the Covid-19 global pandemic. However, because of sporadic government-mandated lockdowns, I often took breaks in-between fieldwork and focused on other aspects of research. However, whenever strict "social distancing" regulations were lifted I resumed face-to-face interactions with participants while still observing Covid-19 safety protocols to protect myself and my participants. I normally arranged interviews via social networking sites (mainly Facebook Messenger, a free mobile messaging application) where I briefly introduced myself as a doctoral student from the University of the Witwatersrand. Such messages either got a response in which case an eventual meeting was mostly guaranteed while in a small number of cases they were ignored (or "blue ticked" in social media parlance). In those instances where prospective research participants showed interest after my introductory message, I followed this with a request for their mobile contact number and asked them if they would be willing to meet for a thorough discussion about the study (its aims and objectives) and for a possible interview at a place and time of their choosing.

My selection of research participants was mostly random; however, it was sometimes sparked by prospective participants' online activities. This is because it is possible to enter a keyword on a social media application search bar and see what people have posted in relation to that topic. For example, the keyword "amaNdebele" would turn up several results indicating what people had posted or commented on regarding that keyword. As a result of this, I was able to identify persons who – based on their posts on a given topic – I could surmise would be interested in a discussion about ethnicity. In other instances, I chose to contact people whose social media "handles" or usernames included descriptors that identified them as a specific ethnicity (for example, "So-and-so" the Tsonga and "So-and-so" the Pedi), while others used faux royal epithets that similarly betrayed their ethnic heritage (for example, Ndebele King, Pedi Queen, Tsonga Princess, and so forth). The use of these

social media handles indicated, for me, an above average interest in the subject of ethnic belonging and pride.

When a date and venue was agreed upon, on the morning of the appointed day, usually hours before the agreed-upon time, I would either call or send an SMS to remind the prospective participant of our upcoming meeting. I did this to ascertain if they were still available to meet as well as to give them an opportunity to opt-out and/or request a postponement if they were no longer able to commit. This eliminated the chances of travelling to a location only for the participant to cancel the meeting or postpone it to a later date. However, when I got confirmation that the prospective participant was still available for a meeting, I set about preparing all the research paraphernalia to ensure a smooth and successful interview. This included information sheets, consent forms, interview questionnaires, face masks, hand sanitiser, and a tape recorder. Meetings and interviews were often carried out in public venues such as pubs and, in a few cases, boutique restaurants, which are quiet and sparsely trafficked during weekdays. I would arrive at the venue at least half an hour earlier, pick a secluded spot and set up for the interview. After I was settled, I would then send an SMS to the prospective participant and describe to them where I was seated and give them a description of what I was wearing so that they would easily recognise me upon arrival. Once they had arrived and we had exchanged the usual pleasantries, I offered them the information sheet and sat quietly while they read through it. When they were done, I summarised its contents and asked them if they had any questions. When I was satisfied that they were caught up on the scope of the study, including the fact that they were not in any way obligated to participate, I would then formally request an interview. In all these interactions, there were no occasions where a request for an interview was declined. Therefore, all meetings smoothly transitioned into an interview which mostly lasted for no more than two hours.

However, participant observation did not require such careful planning since it was opportunity-driven and took place sporadically as and when an opportunity presented itself within and outside the research area. This entailed listening to, observing, and participating in conversation around

– or related to – the research topic. Such conversation often took place whenever people were gathered for daily conversation such as in buses and/or minibus taxis, in taxi ranks outside shopping malls, inside beer halls or taverns, and/or on the lawns outside while seated under a shade. In a few cases I "observed" such conversations on social networking sites such as Facebook and WhatsApp (through posts and exchanges in the comment sections). In the case of physical interactions, I normally scribbled something on my phone in situ and set it down properly on my laptop when I got home. However, for social media posts and comment sections, I normally relied on "screenshots" which I stored on my phone and later transferred to my laptop and saved in a folder prepared for that purpose.

However, since this research was also a self-study, I sometimes scribbled reflections and recollections from my personal life and occasionally consulted with, and sometimes formally interviewed, members of my own family. And since lineal connections do not obviate ethical research conduct, I adhered to the established protocols for engaging with research participants, a process which entailed a discussion of the research project's aims and objectives and a formal request for consent (this was done in the case of two interviews I conducted and recorded with two family members). Nevertheless, there were many instances where I sought insights on questions without going through the rigour of setting up an appointment for a formal interview. However, these consultations were done with my interlocutors' full knowledge of my intentions. I expand on the nitty-gritties of fieldwork and its related theoretical and ethical considerations in the section, "Methods and ethics". In the following section, I discuss the theoretical and historical underpinnings of autoanthropology.

Autoanthropology and the ethnography of the self

The classical objective of anthropology has been the study of non-Western and "primitive" peoples of the colonised world, whereas its counterpart sociology had as its objective the study of the West's subaltern classes (Rapport and Overing 2000, 9–10). This shows how the discipline has been mired in the history of colonial conquest and the subjugation of colonised peoples. The study of those on the bottom of society by those occupying its upper rungs is a commonplace to the history of both

disciplines (a condition which largely persists to this day). As a methodological tool, autoethnography – the rationale and theoretical justifications for how autoanthropologists collect and interpret data – seems to be an extreme expression of the discipline's post-modern turn to reflexivity, beckoning the fraternity to turn the focus more on the anthropologist who has thus far been present only on the arrival scene accounts and absent for the rest of the text (I return to this point below).[22]

This turn has been more evident in the postcolonial period where more and more social scientists have tended to turn inward in their scholarly endeavours in light of the knowledge that written texts, rather than being the product of detached or dispassionate scholarship, are the product of embodied authorship (Van der Geest et al. 2012, 5). Nigel Rapport and Joanna Overing (2000) observe that the emergence of autoanthropology as a subdiscipline has meant that anthropologists have begun to study their own selves, their own social milieus or social settings, and the problematics that obtain therein, a shift which they maintain has meant that anthropologists have come to occupy the double role of both "investigator and citizen" (pp. 18, 20–21).

This shift has had both practical and ideological implications. First, this has meant that anthropologists now have better access to the field, both geographically and culturally. This is because one is no longer obligated to travel far in order to study a "remote" and/or "exotic" culture for them to be taken seriously as an anthropologist. While being well-versed in the linguistic repertories and cultural mores of a given society has made it much more easier for those anthropologists who study in

[22] Rapport and Overing (2000, 10) explain that there have been some benefits to this tainted past since, "the irony is that because of its historical expertise in the study of otherness, its specific voice can be a strong one raised against the dark side of colonialist excess. It has strengths unparalleled by other traditional fields of study, except perhaps history, in that it understands the importance of the particular, and thus the local, over against the universalist and the global. Anthropologists contextualise specific lifeways by keeping intact the systems of values and practice to which each is tied. Careful anthropologists do not usually go around making global, universalist sweeping statements".

home-adjacent sites to establish rapport with those among whom they study.[23] Second, this has meant that the anthropologist's knowledge of his or her own complex personhood will alert them to the complexity of others which they inadvertently deny when "freezing" them into incomplete and over-generalised categories (Rapport and Overing 2000, 21, 27; also see Cohen 1992b, 349–50; Gordon 1997, 4; Strathern 1987, 17; Van der Geest et al. 2012, 11).[24] Anthony Cohen (1992a) elucidates this point:

> By and large, we do not regard ourselves as generalisable. Yet, the categorical techniques of our discipline, indeed the conventional definition of our task as the discovery of 'culture', implies our generalisation of others. We have reserved the Self as the province of mysticism, of artistic expression or psychology. (Cohen 1992a, 223)

Marilyn Strathern (1987) defines autoanthropology as "anthropology carried out in the social context which produced it" (p. 17). However, she maintains that it is not the mere fact of being a native of a culture one is studying that defines what one does as autoanthropology, but rather the "cultural continuity between the products of his/her labours and what people in the society being studied produce by way of accounts of themselves" (ibid.). Strathern (1987, 17–18) thus delivers a critique of autoanthropology in that it should not entail the mere parroting of information in the form it was given but should entail the use of concepts or tools of analysis which come from the very culture being studied. However, Strathern (1987) admits that this presents with some serious difficulties:

> It is clear that simply being a 'member"' of the overarching culture or society in question does not mean that the anthropologist will adopt appropriate local cultural genres. On the contrary he/she may well produce something quite unrecognizable. Commonsense descriptions are set aside. Indigenous reflection is incorporated as part of the data to be explained, and cannot itself be taken as the framing of it, so that

[23] There are nevertheless some drawbacks to these shifts, Rapport and Overing (2000, 22) explain that: "On the other hand, anthropology at home has its own difficulties and dangers. It may not always be possible to gain that distantiation which has been the hallmark of anthropological method—so-called 'culture shock', by which the conventions of local life are seen as strange and thereby calling for translation, if not 'explanation', by the anthropological observer. The anthropologist at home must sometimes work harder not to take things for granted and to make himself view things as a stranger might."

[24] The emergence of autoanthropology as a subdiscipline therefore holds the promise that anthropologists are beginning take seriously the individual who has so far been neglected in our focus on the social, an overfocus which has tended to erase the former (Rapport and Overing 2000, 27–28).

> there is always a discontinuity between indigenous understandings and the analytical concepts which frame the ethnography itself. These derive from a specific theoretical focus which may make intelligible the anthropologist's behaviour (as an 'academic') but not necessarily what he/she writes. Attempts to make such accounts more accessible rest either on educating the audience anthropologically, or on abandoning the traditional ethnographic genre in favour of a popular one – a history or report. The manner in which anthropologists set aside indigenous framings would seem to make their activities in Essex, then, not so dissimilar from their activities (say) in Melanesia. (Strathern 1987, 18)

Above Strathern (1987) argues that we need to discern whether the anthropologist's account is exogenous in its intention or if it is a simple case of his or her explanation replacing that of their interlocutors. The latter therefore makes for "displaced authorship" or that the anthropologist's "version" of an explanation or meaning has taken precedence over those of his or her interlocutors (Strathern 1987, 24). Strathern (1987) therefore delineates *writing* from *authorship* which helps us disentangle this conundrum. If a writer is merely a person who is using the text as a mode of explanation without much intrusion on his or her part, while an author uses the text to express their very relationship with what they write about, then the anthropologist acts as a writer if he or she merely juxtaposes participants' accounts of their social milieu alongside scholarly or analytical explanations (Strathern 1987, 24–25). The emergence of autoanthropology as a subdiscipline therefore holds the promise that anthropologists are beginning to take seriously the individual who has so far been neglected in our focus on the social, an overfocus which has tended to erase the former (Rapport and Overing 2000, 27–28). Against this background, the goal for autoanthropologists should be to take on the mantle of authorship, transcend the mere juxtaposition of indigenous and exogenous accounts, and work towards transcending this dichotomy by centring the indigenous in the research process, and not solely as the object of analysis but as a tool of that analysis (Strathern 1987, 18).

Judith Okely (1992) explains that there has been some pushback on the incorporation of autobiography in ethnography, with some labelling the act as "narcissistic" and/or "mere navel gazing", a criticism which Okely (1992) attributes to a conflation of "self-awareness" with "self-adoration". While the latter indeed entails the very act of self-satisfaction which prevents reflection, the former however entails serious and/or vigorous self-scrutiny (Okely 1992, 1–5; also see Van der

Geest et al. 2012, 6).[25] The repudiation of autobiography in anthropological research – and its dismissal as a vain attempt at self-inflation – has produced a situation where the anthropologist is always prominent in the arrival scene account of the monograph but absent throughout the rest of the text. This repudiation serves to produce a façade of scientific "objectivity" as well as to dispel concerns that autobiography is "no more than the affirmation of individual power or confessional self-absorption" (Okely 1992, 5).[26] Okely (1992) also laments the separation of ethnography, thought to be the mere collection of data from the field, and theory, the transformation of said data into explanatory models or conceptual frameworks. She argues that this dichotomy presumes a separation between the individual and the intellectual labour in which he or she is engaged (Okely 1992, 3, 9), thereby creating the false impression that those who collect ethnographic data have no bearing on its final analysis:

> The pressure to split off the self and the autobiography of fieldwork from its total practice owes a great deal to the positivist history of social anthropology which emphasised the neutral, impersonal and scientific nature of the enterprise. This involved a peculiar combination of intensive fieldwork by means of participant observation with the ideal of the objective observer. (Okely 1992, 9)

Similarly, Nosipho Mngomezulu (2018) critiques the notion of an "objective observer" as "the myth of a mind separated from the body" (p. 186). This dissociation of sensibility is much more apparent among the early ethnographers. Even though fieldwork in anthropology gained traction in the early

[25] Also see Tuck and Yang (2014, 230) who argue that autoanthropology also serves to overproduce "pain narratives" in ethnography

[26] However, it would seem that when the use of autobiography in anthropology is not seen as "self-adoration" or "self-promotion", it is oppositely considered a loss of power and/or a loss of control. This has led to the "splitting" that has seen many anthropologists publish their work in two separate forms, a monograph and either a diary or fictionalised account (Okely 1992, 7, 9; also see Fratkin 2012, xii–xiii). However, Okely (1992) argues that autobiographies are a form of subversion from those on the margins of society, rather than a celebration of a "lone hero", nor are they an indicator of one's loss of power (p. 7). She thus comments that, "those on the margins may first learn through an alternative personal experience their lack of fit with the dominant system. Their individual experience belies the public description at the centre. Out of their experience have arisen alternative forms on the margins. Autobiographies from the marginalised and the powerless—those of a subordinate race, religion, sex and class—have not inevitably been a celebration of uniqueness, let alone public achievement, but a record of questions and of subversion" (Okely 1992, 7).

1920s with its subjective and objective descriptions, it took a very long time for anthropologists to fully acknowledge and embrace the uses of emotions for research. This is because traditional empiricists considered emotion as a fertile site for introducing biases into the research process. This is demonstrated by the fact that Bronislaw Malinowski's now famous *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, written in the early 1900s, in which he described his emotional experiences on the field, was only published in 1967, decades after he had written it (Davies 2010, 6). Even when emotions were seemingly being acknowledged, their implications for the researcher and his research output were denied. James Davies (2010) elucidates this point:

> If participation was accepted, its personal effects for the researcher (and ultimately the work) were not. This particular predilection for emotion to be borne but never broached remained widespread throughout the first half of the twentieth century, for during this period anthropology was fully aware that the "personal equation" tested its scientific place in the academy. (Davies 2010, 5–6)

As a result of these fears, the founders of modern anthropology were reluctant to acknowledge and embrace the uses of emotion for research. Understandably, these early anthropologists were concerned about the status and place of their new discipline as a "science" in the academy (Davies 2010, 6). Davies (2010) explains that "it was not until the 1950s that the experiences and emotions that participant observation evoked were reported at all. And yet even when such reports did emerge, as with Malinowski's diary, they were still safely shorn from mainstream anthropology and relegated to personalised fieldwork accounts" (p. 6). Nevertheless, emotion in anthropological research methods began to gain acceptance in the late 1970s (Davies 2010, 9), where fieldwork began to be seen as an "intersubjective practice", or the axiom that the knowledge produced from ethnographic research was a product of an interchange between two subjects: the researcher and the research participant (Davies 2010, 9; also see De Pina-Cabral 2011). However, this shift mostly focused on the task of challenging the positivist narrative of an "objective" science while relegating the actual role or uses of emotion for research to a subsidiary exercise (Davies 2010, 11). Nevertheless, in his infamous paper entitled "Glimpses of the Unmentionable in the History of British Social Anthropology", Edmund Leach (1984) argued that there are in fact continuities between the personal and the scholarly output of an

anthropologist, that what one writes about in their scholarly journals and monographs is a "structural/metaphoric transformation" of what one says in their private or day to day life (p. 3). He commented that:

> I am saying that every anthropological observer, no matter how well he/she has been trained, will see something that no other such observer can recognize, namely a kind of harmonic projection of the observer's own personality. And when these observations are "written up" in monograph or any other form, the observer's personality will again distort any purported "objectivity." (Leach 1984, 22)

Similarly, in *Laibon: An Anthropologist's Journey with Samburu Diviners in Kenya*, Elliot Fratkin (2012) elucidates this point when writing about one's personal attachment to their research participants and the ostensible loss of objectivity. He writes that:

> This was, and remains, a concern in anthropology. In those days before "postmodern, self-reflexive" anthropology, ethnographers were supposed to keep themselves outside of the story they were telling. But in truth, it was impossible to remain totally objective when doing fieldwork. You had real relationships with real people, and, as in a family, your own life and the lives of your subjects were intertwined. (Fratkin 2012, 65)

As discussed above, the absence of the author in the text has mostly been an attempt to create distance between the author and what they write about and thus maintain an atmosphere of objectivity and authority. However, the insertion of the author in the text seeks not to generate authority nor self-promotion but rather presents a form of scepticism and subversion. Okely (1992) elucidates this point:

> […] the I is the voice of individual scepticism from the margins; in many instances not only the I of *difference*, but one of subversive *diffidence* in the face of scientism. The individual 'I' is not making claim to generalisations within a dominant discourse... The 'I' says 'but in my experience…'. This, in the final analysis, cannot be falsified from the outside. It is knowingly but defiantly open to a critique of being non-representative. This specificity challenges also the orthodox canon of autobiography which demands that the supreme example be a 'representative' and 'eminent person' [...]. (Okely 1992, 12, emphases in original)

Sjaak van der Geest and his colleagues (2012) explain that another common worry around a more inward-looking or reflexive ethnography is the complete "disappearance" of the participant or informant, an act which many fear will see anthropology become a literary exercise, resulting in an overproduction of anthropologists who are preoccupied with self-exploration (p. 6). Nevertheless, that the personal cannot be separated from one's scholarly pursuits is evident in the fact that many anthropologists are largely motivated by a personal problem or interest when choosing their research

topics (Cohen 1992a, 220). Many an anthropologist has decided to delve deeper into a given topic when they realise that hardly anything had been written about it when they were interested in finding out more. On the other hand, if there had been some work done on that particular topic, they did not agree with how the problem was being tackled, or that there were no voices from within the group about whom the research was done (Van der Geest et al. 2012, 7–8). As I noted at the beginning of the introduction chapter, my interest in the study of Tsonga-Shangaan ethnicisation in South Africa is motivated by a personal problematic growing up as a member of this stigmatised group in a predominantly Southern Ndebele community.

Doing research in former KwaNdebele

KwaNdebele was an apartheid-era homeland of the Southern Ndebele established in 1977, with its capital located in the village of Siyabuswa,[27] some 120 kilometres northeast of Pretoria, in the then Eastern Transvaal (today's Mpumalanga province). The homeland was established as part of the National Party's plan to establish ethnically "homogeneous" homelands for each of South Africa's black population groups where they could ostensibly pursue sovereign self-determination, an act that historian Ntsoakae Phatlane (2002) argues was a ploy to mask what was in effect the intensification of racial discrimination as, "a system of internal decolonization" (pp. 401–02). The Southern Ndebele were among the last of South Africa's ethnic groups to be apportioned their own homeland and were up to this point mostly dispersed on white-owned farms and/or resident in the homelands of Lebowa and Bophuthatswana, respectively earmarked for the Pedi and Tswana ethnic groups. However, the late 1960s saw Ndebele royals petition the state for a homeland of their own. This move led to the normalisation of relations and the consequent collaboration between the Ndzundza, Manala, and Kekana sections who were until then still divided by squabbles over the paramountcy of the group (a situation which still obtains to this day between the Ndzundza and Manala sections). However, beyond the efforts of Ndebele royals to petition the state for a homeland, the mechanisation of agriculture and

[27] This was at least until 1986 when the capital was relocated to KwaMhlanga.

the abolition of tenant farming in the 1960s saw many people – especially the Ndebele who were indentured since the late nineteenth-century – displaced from white-owned farms, leaving them economically vulnerable and without a home (Nielsen 1996, 8). In fact, over 50 percent of KwaNdebele's population is said to have been made up of former tenants who were displaced from farms in Delmas, Witbank and Middelburg (Makanjee 1987, 62). The decision to grant the Ndebele their own homeland, from this vantage point, begins to look more like a means of shedding responsibility for a people who had become superfluous. Accordingly, KwaNdebele was slated to achieve its "independence" from South Africa between August 1986 and May 1987, a move that was rejected by grassroots movements while favoured by the homeland's political elite, giving rise to the violence that engulfed the homeland until 1988 when independence was finally thwarted (Phatlane 2002, 415). Writing amid the violence, Joanne Yawitch (1986) commented that:

> The factors that have combined to reverse the drive to independence are rooted in the SA Government's separate development policy — a strategy designed to enable 'white' South Africa to shed its responsibility for the political rights and economic well-being of as many black South Africans as possible. (Yawitch 1986, 24)

While Derrick Nielsen (1996), who was writing with the benefit of hindsight, reached similar conclusions:

> Despite the government's rhetoric [...], KwaNdebele was not created as a vehicle for zealously 'bringing together' an 'ethnic nation'. Rather, the bantustan was a means for the government to bring together – and control – those that its other policies had displaced, removed or made surplus to the economy. (Nielsen 1996, 25)

It stands to reason that the entire homelands system can be explained in similar terms. Furthermore, the rejection of independence by KwaNdebele's population gives one example when apartheid statecraft failed, disproving what can best be characterised, in the post-apartheid period, as an attempt to cast it as insurmountable.

The dawn of democracy saw the homelands system formally abolished, while the various homelands were absorbed into South Africa's nine provinces. Today, territories that formed part of KwaNdebele have mostly been demarcated as part of the Mpumalanga province's Nkangala region which contains six municipalities. This being a very large district I have mostly limited my focus on

the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality area which encompasses 57 villages and a population numbering around 431, 248 residents according to the 2022 Census.[28] It is quite difficult to ascertain the number of residents for each specific ethnic group, and worse, to produce such a number would still mean acquiescing to the primordialist claim that ethnic identity is a natural fact. As will be shown throughout the thesis, race and ethnicity are in many cases administrative rather than objective categories. However, according to the 2011 Census the figures for the municipality are given in the table below (see Figure 2).

Language	**Percentage of speakers**
IsiNdebele	58.4
Sepedi	12.6
IsiZulu	12.5
Sesotho	4.8
Siswati	2.9
Xitsonga	2.6
Setswana	1.9
English	1.2
IsiXhosa	1.0
Afrikaans	0.4
Tshivenda	0.4
Other	0.9

Figure 2: Population by language in Thembisile Hani Municipality, Mpumalanga province

It is also important to note that these figures denote the number of speakers per language and not necessarily one's ethnic belonging. The 2011 Census only accounts for racial categories such as "Black African", "Coloured", "Indian" and/or "Asian", "White", and "Other". Census takers tend to ask which language one speaks on a daily basis rather than what one's ethnic identity is. This therefore means that the figures obtained cannot be taken as an approximation of the number of ethnic groups in a given

[28] Census 2022 Provinces at a Glance, Report No. 03-01-43 by Stats SA 2023 https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/Provinces_at_a_Glance.pdf Accessed on 18 May 2024.

area. This is because people might identify as a specific ethnicity even when they do not speak that given group's language. In fact, it is commonplace to find that in many households only the oldest members of the family speak their native language while the younger members have been enculturated into whichever group dominates in the area concerned.

While the study mainly focused on the Tsonga-Shangaan and, perhaps to a lesser degree, the Southern Ndebele, significant attention was also paid on virtually all ethnic groups resident in the area, especially regarding their attitudes towards the target population and towards other ethnic groups other than their own. Admittedly, the Tsonga-Shangaan constitute one of the numerical minority groups in the area. However, it made more sense to study the phenomenon of ethnic stigmatisation in an area less populated by members of the target population. More importantly, the presence of other numerical minorities in the area such as the Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa (see Figure 2) served to assess and thereafter refute the possibility that processes of ethnic stigmatisation were purely a consequence of a numbers game.

As regards social cohesion, in particular inter-ethnic relations, I did not observe first-hand any outright instances of ethnic violence and there are no recorded cases known to me to date. However, this is not to say that ethnic prejudice does not exist in the research area. The same goes for xenophobic violence: there have not been any reported cases of attacks in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality area. I am, however, aware of one isolated incident in 2018 where a South Asian shopkeeper in Vezubuhle (near KwaMhlanga) is said to have stabbed a shoplifter to death with a screwdriver. Hearing this, the community is said to have gathered and gone in search of the culprit who fled leaving his shop to be pillaged by the angry mob. Even though the incident was not sparked by xenophobic hatred it soon degenerated as some residents who were part of the mob were later seen expressing xenophobic sentiments. Fortunately, the violence did not spill over to other foreign-owned shops in the area. Additionally, during the 2019 widespread xenophobic violence, a certain queue marshal in a taxi rank

in Phola (also near KwaMhlanga) is said to have been seen going from one mini-bus taxi to another asking passengers what language they spoke, presumably as an act of intimidation to foreign nationals.

Even though there have not been any real xenophobic attacks or looting of shops, non-national shop owners tend to close their businesses whenever there are reports of attacks elsewhere in the country. However, real confirmed cases of xenophobic attacks have been recorded in places outside of the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality area such as eMalahleni (formerly Witbank), Evander, Voortrekker, Delmas, Kungcatsha, and Azania. That there have not been many recorded cases of xenophobic attacks within the research area, I believe, is a strength as it helps establish outright that any data presented herein do not represent the extreme of South African society, but everyday experiences and perspectives that might be commonplace in much of the country. After all, xenophobic violence is only an extreme expression of a usually subtle phenomenon.

Methods and ethics

I formally began collecting data for this study in the latter part of 2020 after I was given ethics clearance by the non-medical Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the University of the Witwatersrand on 19 June, 2020 (see Appendix A) as well as after my research proposal for this study was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand's Graduate Studies Committee on 3 December 2020 (see Appendix B). The data gathering process lasted for no more than 37 months four weeks, after which the remainder of the study period was solely dedicated to research analyses and writing up the thesis. The study complied with the ethics guidelines of the Singapore Statement on Research

Integrity,[29] and the University of the Witwatersrand's non-medical HREC guidelines.[30] More importantly, however, I was very cognisant of the 2019 Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the various measures taken to curb it: such as the various stages of government lockdowns which began in March 2021 and ended in April 2022. I also took special care to apply the various government Covid-19 guidelines such wearing a face mask in public spaces, sanitizing my hands before handling and/or handing out research paraphernalia, and practicing social distancing. These measures made it difficult and risky to conduct participant-observation and face-to-face interviews (I return to this point below). I therefore mostly opted to conduct participant and face-to-face interviews in those brief moments when mandatory lockdowns were lifted and/or put in temporary abeyance. Nevertheless, since this study contains an autoethnographic component, it was possible, during mandatory lockdowns, to interview some members of my own family with whom I had been spending time during the lockdowns. Nevertheless, even in such intimate situations I still needed to take heed of established principles for ethical research.

[29] Which espouses the principles of honesty, accountability, professional conduct, professional courtesy and fairness, and good stewardship. And binds researchers to nine responsibilities, namely: 1. Integrity; 2. Adherence to regulations; 3. Research Methods (employing appropriate research methods); 4. Research Records (securing records in ways that allow for verification and replication of the research); 5. Research Findings (sharing data and findings); 6. Authorship; 7. Publication Acknowledgement (acknowledging those who have contributed to the research; 8. Peer Review; 9. Conflict of Interest (disclosing conflict of interest); 10. Public Communication (being responsible whenever communicating in public, limiting yourself to your area of specialisation when making professional comments); 11. Reporting Irresponsible Research Practices; 13. Research Environment, and; 14. Societal Considerations (weighing the risks and benefits of research). See 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity 2010, Singapore Statement on Research Integrity, viewed on 3 February 2020 https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/e-kousei/data/singapore_statement_EN.pdf.

[30] University of the Witwatersrand 2019, Ethics Committees, viewed on 3 February 2020 < https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/. Tullis (2014, 246, 256–57) also provides guidelines tailored for autoethnography: 1. Do no harm to self and others; 2. Consult your university ethics committee; 3. Get informed consent; 4. Practice process consent and explore the ethics of consequence; 5. Do a member check; 6. Do not present publicly or publish anything you would not show the persons mentioned in the text, and; 7. Do not underestimate the afterlife of a published narrative.

Judith Lapadat (2017) defines autoethnography as "an approach to qualitative inquiry in which a researcher recounts a story of his or her own personal experience, coupled with an ethnographic analysis of the cultural context and implications of that experience" (p. 589). Lapadat (2017) explains that autoethnography seeks to represent in text, and critically analyse, personal lived experiences in ways that elucidate the broader cultural context from which they sprout (p. 590). More importantly, Lapadat (2017) maintains that the personalised narratives that autoethnographers generate make their texts more interesting and accessible to a wider audience than is traditionally the case (Lapadat 2017, 593). These are some of the reasons that make autoethnography immensely rewarding but nevertheless ethically challenging (Tullis 2014, 252). Despite the latter fact, autoethnographers tend to receive relatively less oversight from ethics committees because they tend to evade such bodies, and when they do subject themselves to these bodies, ethics committees themselves sometimes tend to not conceive of autoethnography as research. However, as Jillian Tullis (2014) cautions, this does not absolve autoethnographers of their ethical responsibilities (p. 258). This is mainly because even if one does research solely on themselves, they still cannot avoid implicating others in their work (Ellis 2007, 2009, cited in Tullis 2014, 247–48). This latter fact presents some dilemmas for both researchers and ethics committees regarding how consent for those implicated in such work ought to be obtained (Tullis 2014, 247). For instance, Tullis (2014) explains that ethics committees might reject research that relies on data obtained from personal relationships through "emotional recall" since such work could be classed as "previously collected data" (p. 247). However, there is a solution to this predicament, although not ideal, where a researcher acquires what is termed "retrospective consent" (Tullis 2014, 248–49).

Though the question of consent is, as we have seen, a fraught and complex one, it is still a very crucial and necessary part of conducting autoethnography which presents some opportunities for researchers and their research participants. The process of negotiating for consent is the first opportunity that autoethnographers receive to discuss the potential ramifications and/or benefits of

participating in the study with their research participants. This process is two-pronged and is termed the "ethics of consequence" which entails informing participants of both the negative and positive consequences of participating in the study. Furthermore, beyond obtaining signatures on consent forms, autoethnographers must engage in what has been termed "process consent" wherein they continually check participants' willingness to continue participating throughout the course of the study (Etherington 2007 and Ellis 2007, both cited in Tullis 2014, 249; also see Lapadat 2017, 591). And lastly, autoethnographers have to commit to the principle of "non-maleficence" or the edict to do no harm (Etherington 2007 and Ellis 2007, both cited in Tullis 2014, 249). The latter fact might sometimes prove elusive no matter how committed autoethnographers might be to the principle of "non-maleficence". Nevertheless, the researcher needs to take every available opportunity to make the attempt. Tullis (2014) elucidates this point:

> It is important to note that the absence of harm is not necessarily a requirement—emotional responses, which are not by definition harmful, are difficult to predict or prevent in some settings—but researchers should make every effort to minimize harm and maximize the benefits for participants. It is here where researchers should enact the ethical principle of justice, which involves ensuring the distribution of risks and benefits equally among all participants. (Tullis 2014, 249)

My methods for obtaining consent proceeded from these guidelines. I usually approached prospective research participants either through personal and/or through electronic means (i.e., social media texts, phone calls, SMS, and occasionally via email). I would normally introduce myself as either a doctoral student and/or researcher from the University of the Witwatersrand and thereafter appraise the prospective research participant about my research topic. If this basic introduction proved successful, I would then formally request a meeting at the participant's earliest convenience as well as give them the option of choosing a venue, although I tended to advise them that such a venue would need to be a private and quiet space as a Covid-19 precautionary measure, as well as for the ease of recording our conversation. Subject to a successful negotiation of a date, time, and place for a scheduled interview, I would meet the participant and present them with an Information Sheet in either English, Xitsonga, and/or isiNdebele (see Appendix C). I always gave participants time to read through the information-

sheet after which I summarised its message (the aims and objectives of the study as well as the potential risks and benefits of participating in the study). Following this, I would ask if the participant had any questions they wished to ask. After giving clarity – and if the participant still showed interest in proceeding – I would then present them with a Consent Form in either English, Xitsonga, and/or isiNdebele (see Appendix D). Again, I would give participants time to read through the form, after which I would go over the form with them and ask if they had any questions before I facilitated the signing process. Only after these steps had been concluded would the interview process begin. It goes without saying that such strenuous processes serve to prevent and/or limit any potential harm to research participants.

However, in autoethnography, research ethics also serves to prevent and/or limit any potential harm toward researchers per se (Tullis, 2014, 251). This is because the use of personal narratives might have a lasting effect beyond the research period and affect researchers in unforeseen ways. Therefore, this means that autoethnographers should also be concerned about the costs of such methods on themselves (Tullis 2014, 246; also see Lapadat 2017, 594). Tullis (2014) elucidates this point through personal reflections:

> As a graduate student I frequently questioned, with the guidance of my professors, if I had the skills and credibility to write effective autoethnography. I also considered what barriers autoethnography might pose to employment and tenure. I contemplated how making certain private details about my life public would alter the way others viewed me and those who might appear in my stories. I was aware that certain disclosures, especially about stigmatizing topics, could perpetuate stigma and prejudice towards me even if my goal was to combat these attitudes. (Tullis 2014, 252; also see Lapadat 2017, 594)

More important to consider is the fact that texts have a long shelf life, and once they have been written it is very difficult to tell what the consequences for the researcher, and those who appear in his or her text, will be (Lapadat 2017, 593). Lapadat (2017) elucidates this point:

> It is ironic that the turn to autoethnography was precipitated in part by the crises of representation and legitimation—the recognition that interpretations cannot capture lived experience and that all texts are partial and temporary inscriptions or performances—yet once an autoethnographic story has been written, the written version has the effect of reifying that particular story. An autoethnographer's point of view and understanding will change over time, but the text persists, frozen in time, and tends to be read as an authoritative account. The consequences of this persistence and the text's privileged representation of the story can be hard to anticipate at the outset. (Lapadat 2017, 594)

Despite the possible costs to both researcher and participant, autoethnographic accounts are immensely beneficial. They can be therapeutic for the researcher who gets to make sense of his or her own experiences, and the participant who learns that his or her seemingly isolating trauma is not so peculiar after all (Lapadat 2017, 592–94). This settles longstanding feelings of guilt researchers often experience on the field, or the conviction that the researcher-participant relationship is a unilateral or exploitative one with the researcher taking all the credit for the ultimate research output. Research participants might indeed evaluate their relationship with a researcher and suspect that they are being exploited. This is because researchers might be perceived to be appropriating knowledge which belongs to the people, using it for their own personal gain (for example, obtaining a university degree, or securing gainful employment). Marilyn Strathern (1987), however, offers us a radically different view on research exploitation which is easily solved by autoethnography. Strathern (1987) argues that at issue is not the "extraction" of information, or even the "conversion" of such information into materials mentioned above, but rather the eventual exclusion of those from whom information was obtained in the "finished" research output (p. 20). Furthermore, she comments that:

> Academics may be seen to create an exclusive domain within which their accounts have value. Theoretical models circulate endlessly between practitioners with different analytical intentions, but the origins of these models are attributed to academic discourse itself. Their origins in other lives, other cultures, become overshadowed. Ultimately the use anthropologists make of their data is for ends also of their own making. In this sense anthropology domesticates an exogenous world, making new uses for materials originating under quite different circumstances, and thereby encompassing the different uses which people have for the way they live their lives. Such encompassment is experienced as exploitation when people perceive that others have the power to turn data into materials whose value cannot be shared or yielded back to them in return. Anthropologists are thus seen to convert lived experience into items (units, constructs, concepts) whose usefulness, as elements for their own models, they alone control. (Strathern 1987, 20)

Autoethnography responds to this call for accessible scholarship that represents the voices of those on the margins, including in the analytical dimension of research. With that said, primary data collection for this study was done through the use of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant-observation entailed the recording of chance encounters or observations inside and outside the study area which I deemed important for the furtherance of the research aims and goals

of the study. Such events were recorded by myself in a field diary for later analysis and inform many of the conclusions reached in this study.

There were two kinds of interviews for this study: the first kind was designed to map inter-ethnic relations within the research area (see Appendix E). This was done in a way that avoided posing any leading questions that would have driven research participants towards discussing the research topic (i.e., the question of Tsonga-Shangaan stigmatisation). Instead, this part of the interview process focused on the question of ethnicity and national belonging as a general subject in order to establish which groups got discriminated against and on what grounds (without presupposing that the Tsonga-Shangaan bear the brunt of this stigmatisation and/or presenting this presupposition to the research participant). This approach allowed me to validate some already established observations in the literature on ethnic tensions and/or prejudices in the country, more specifically the observation that the Venda and the Pedi, along with the Tsonga-Shangaan, tend to be particularly stigmatised as "foreign" to the South African nation-state. Furthermore, this approach allowed me to come to the realization that the Southern Ndebele also consider themselves to be a marginalized group in South Africa, and have begun to take steps, however minute, to fight for their national belonging (Chapter 6 focuses on efforts by the Southern Ndebele to secure a place for themselves in the country).

The second kind of interviews were those that focused on the life histories of Tsonga-Shangaan and Southern Ndebele interviewees, and recorded mostly participants' subjective lived experiences as members of what they held to be a stigmatised ethnic group (see Appendix F).[31] The average length of both kinds of interviews was just over an hour, with the shortest lasting for 19 minutes, while the

[31] There are various ethical procedures that are potentially beneficial for this research project such as "transcript validation" where interview transcripts are returned to interviewees for comment (in cases where interviewees are illiterate it might be prudent to send them a CD copy of the recording). Additionally, it might prove beneficial to do "member checks" where "finished" research materials are retuned to study participants to get their perspective on the researcher's interpretations (this also works to ensure that researchers do not publish materials they would otherwise not like their participants to see) (see Lapadat 2017, 591; Tullis 2014, 253).

longest interview lasted for two and a half hours. As I indicated above, I was careful to not contravene government Covid-19 guidelines and therefore mostly collected primary data when there was incontrovertible public health consensus that it was safe to continue social interactions. In these cases, I still took every precaution necessary and followed the non-medical HREC Covid-19 guidelines to ensure that I did not endanger myself and my research participants (see Appendix G). As a result, I always wore a face mask and carried, in my backpack, hand sanitiser and an assortment of disposable masks to hand out to participants. Furthermore, I also made sure to observe strict social distancing protocols.

Although I was able to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic and gather data through mostly face-to-face interviews, the limitations posed by lockdown restrictions as well as personal precautionary measures on participant observation are obvious in parts of this thesis. This is not to say that interviews are not an adequate tool for social science research, however, there are some indications that interviews are quite limited in what they can reveal about a given social phenomenon. To gain new insights, social scientists (particularly social anthropologists) often have to establish a rapport with their research participants. Such rapport cannot be realistically achieved through once-off and/or through a limited series of spaced-out sit-downs, but can only be achieved through intimate cohabitation with, and/or repeated exposure to, participants in their lived spaces. It is through such close contact that the researcher-participant relationship becomes less palpable, allowing participants to treat the researcher as a friend whose questions elicit genuine and less formulaic responses, thus limiting the often-rehearsed responses to questions that participants imagine a researcher would want to hear. In *Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Everyday Life in an In-Between City*, Caroline Wanjiku Kihato (2013) elucidates this point by reflecting on her own primary data collection journey:

> Sibongile worked at a restaurant in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. She was a member of a group a colleague and I convened, of 11 migrant women who met every fortnight to discuss pictures they had taken of their everyday lives in Johannesburg. At the first group workshop I was struck by the repetition of the narrative of despair amongst the women. When I compared it with subsequent workshops, where women shared more of their experiences of triumph, and how they had overcome difficult situations, I

> wondered what had changed over the few months we had been meeting, and why there seemed to be a more even distribution of discussions of success and hopelessness. In a conversation with Sibongile at her workplace a few months later, I asked her whether things had improved over the few months we had been meeting, because there seemed to be a shift in her testimonies. She was quiet for a moment and then she said to me: When we first met, we did not know what the project was or what we could get out of it. I thought that maybe you could help with getting us jobs or papers. So I was saying my situation was bad in case you guys offered us something . . . It's not that it is not bad; what I said was true, you know it's true. After a while we just took you as friends, just people who we meet and laugh and share together with . . . and you know I also wanted to show people I am not stupid, and I can make my own life even with difficulties. (Kihato 2013, 121)

What this means is that while once-off encounters might not necessarily produce incorrect information, they are nevertheless more likely to produce a single narrative, in the case described above the outcome would have been a singular focus on pain narratives (see Tuck and Yang 2014; Mkhwanazi 2016). One more methodological insight that Kihato (2013) foregrounds is the use of images sourced from research participants themselves. Kihato (2013) maintains that such an undertaking allows research participants to, "*show* agency in their words and images not only by selecting what to reveal and what to conceal, but also by determining *how* and when they choose to do so" (Kihato 2013, 118, emphases in original).

Protecting and ensuring the anonymity of research participants is crucial for ethical research conduct. There are several strategies I employed throughout the research process to ensure the anonymity of my research participants such as de-identifying data by removing any identifying information that could reveal the true identity of the participant. This included removing demographic information such as age, sex, race, and place of residence. Other strategies included the creation of "composite characters" by collapsing several participants' narrative into a single participant's narrative (see Tullis 2014, 250), or doing the opposite by "splitting" a single character into two and assigning a different pseudonym to each character. In some rare cases, I fictionalised the narrative to obscure time and space (see Tullis 2014, 250).

Secondary means of data collection included scholarly work, government commissions and NGO research reports, popular books, media reports, and, in a small number of cases, archival material. Furthermore, I also relied on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (now called X) for

"ethnographic" data collection wherein I mostly monitored already existing debates around ethnicity and national belonging. In many other cases I used said social networking sites to scout for research participants, a useful and perhaps only available resource in the context of limited and/or restricted movement during a global pandemic.[32] Sonia Mbowa (2020) argues that, "Race, racism and hate speech play out in interesting and sometimes disturbing ways on digital spaces", a fact which makes social networking sites an invaluable resource for researching these human vices (p. 57). Furthermore, Mbowa (2020) explains that the use of publicly available data sourced from sites where there are no expectations of privacy from users and where said data holds both scientific and social value, present sufficient grounds for foregoing consented use, an act which she maintains does not obviate the obligation to follow ethics guidelines (p. 58).[33] This can be done by redacting the names of social media users in cases where screenshot images of a racially inflammatory comments thread are provided. This can also be achieved by avoided using screenshots that show the profile pictures of

[32] Digital sources of data can be described as primary sources that approximate the efficacy of fieldwork. In fact, Mngomezulu (2014) explains that even though fieldwork in anthropology has traditionally been seen as a form of rite of passage (p. 105), recently anthropologists have moved to embrace alternative methods of gathering data alongside traditional methods. Such modern methods include the use of digital media such as blogs and websites and social networking sites such X, Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others (pp. 116–17). Nevertheless, the use of these new sources of data presents with new ethics challenges (p. 118).

[33] Such guidelines usually entail that: a) one should familiarise oneself with the privacy and user terms and conditions of the platform and abide by them; b) that one should ask permission from the creator and/or administrator of the platform (e.g., a Facebook closed group) on whether it is acceptable to use the platform for data mining; c) that one must apply the principles of informed consent by making participants aware of one's presence and what one's intentions are (i.e., the research aims and objectives), and finally; d) one must inform participants about what is required of them, and impress upon them that their participation is voluntary and that they may choose to not participate and/or withdraw their participation at any given stage in the research process without incurring any penalties. See University of the Witwatersrand, Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application (Non-Medical) https://www.wits.ac.za/media/witsuniversity/research/documents/Guidelines%20for%20applicants.pdf Accessed on 26 May 2020.

social media users to protect their identity.[34] Protecting the identities of research participants is motivated by protecting their safety, reputations, and other unforeseen consequences that might come from the publication and circulation of ostensibly authoritative academic research.

There are however other, less obvious, sites for potential harm to research participants, especially when researching sensitive topics which might result from emotional harm that might be unwittingly inflicted by researchers on their research participants. Out of the 32 interviews that I conducted with research participants, at least two interviewees had narrowly escaped xenophobic attacks, and thankfully evaded what would have likely been death through immolation. I also encountered a few individuals who recollected, during life history interviews, traumatic stories of their early childhood experiences. However, more upsettingly, I interviewed a participant who related that they had been conceived through an act of sexual violence. Nevertheless, all interviews went "well", at least to the extent that I never got the impression that research participants were, through these interviews, subjected to secondary trauma, nor did a single participant opt to end the interview. As indicated above, some of what came out of these interviews was upsetting, if not outright disturbing, reconfirming that one can never be fully prepared for what might come out of the interview process. Nevertheless, I always had access to the contact details of the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), a national NGO which provides free mental health services, to which I could refer participants if it became necessary to do so. Furthermore, I also had the support of my research supervisors whom I could have roped in had it become necessary to do so.

[34] Mbowa (2020) provides further strategies such as using data obtained from public groups and/or pages rather than from individual timelines and/or profiles, obscuring and/or changing the names of the groups or pages where information was sourced, and changing the profile names of users when reproducing their posts (p. 58).

Reflections

This chapter has discussed the dissociation of sensibility among the early ethnographers who, in the early twentieth century, were primarily concerned with maintaining a veneer of objectivity in their scholarly endeavours, to the post-modern turn in the late twentieth-century when many anthropologists began to embrace a more reflexive approach to research. This turn has given rise to a sub-discipline called "autoanthropology" which incorporates autobiographical data and data obtained from the researcher's own socio-cultural context in the research process. For me, this entailed referencing my lived experience, drawing from the lived experiences of family members, and studying within the place of my upbringing and the surrounding areas. While this proved advantageous, it is not without its limits. For one, studying within a familiar social milieu might mean that one loses some of the advantages that accrue to a "stranger" for whom nothing in the research site is taken for granted. This has always been the strength of ethnography and participant observation as traditional research methods in anthropology. Furthermore, it is important to note that autoanthropology does not necessarily denote a native-informant perspective. Accordingly, this chapter takes seriously Marilyn Strathern's (1987) injunction that it is not studying within one's own socio-cultural context and/or in home-adjacent sites that makes what one does autoanthropology, but rather the incorporation of concepts and frameworks derived from within that context as tools of analysis rather than as mere objects of analysis. As a result, throughout this thesis, I adopt a theoretical framework that is grounded in indigenous folklore, cosmology, and aetiology to inform my explication of othering practices in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 3 – Challenging the invention thesis: The post-constructivist turn in ethnicity studies

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a literature review of the existing scholarship on ethnicity. I define and discuss some of the theoretical approaches that have been used to explain the concept, namely: "primordialism", "constructivism", and what some are beginning to call "post-constructivism". Furthermore, this chapter explores some of the major theoretical shifts in the definition of ethnicity that occurred in the 1970s, such as the transition from using the term "tribe" to using the term "ethnic group". More than a mere change in terminology, this shift had epistemic and ideological implications. This is because while the former term connotes an authentic expression of culture, the latter term has predominantly come to be accepted as connoting the artificial construction of group identity. While constructivist scholars of ethnicity in Africa have led this important paradigm shift, they have since come under criticism from scholars who argue that they have overestimated the role of colonial administrators and their African functionaries in the construction of ethnicity, while severely undermining the role of ordinary Africans in the construction process. These scholars have therefore argued that the version of ethnicity that emerged from the colonial encounter was – instead of a mere colonial invention – a product of a "dialogic process" between coloniser and colonised. I conclude the chapter by arguing that the post-constructivist perspective helps us challenge what has become a dominant paradigm in scholarship on ethnic conflict in post-apartheid South Africa, which often attributes it to the machinations of colonial and apartheid administrators.

Defining ethnicity

Scholars of ethnicity have often commented on its elusiveness, deeming it a construct bereft of any definitional precision and therefore plagued by constant conceptual shifts (Dorman 1980; Worby 1983; Eriksen 1993; Szeftel 1994; Le Vine 1997; Levine 1999; Hale 2004; Gabbert 2006; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Nevertheless, Thomas Eriksen (1993) writes that most scholars fundamentally agree that "ethnicity has something to do with the *classification of people* and *group relationships*" (Eriksen,

1993, 4, emphases in original). Some scholars have attributed this dearth in definitional precision and conceptual clarity to the "elastic" nature of ethnic identity itself (e.g., Le Vine 1997, 53), while others have gone so far as to question its ontological foundations, attributing it to scholarly construction (e.g., Worby 1983, 8, 48; Eriksen 1993, 17; cf. Levine 1999, 177). This section reviews some of these conceptual shifts, more pertinently the shift in terminology from the use of "tribe" and its associated representations in the classical ethnographies of the late nineteenth-century, to the use of "ethnic group" in relatively more contemporary ethnographies of the late twentieth-century, and the impact this has had on anthropology and other social science disciplines interested in the study of ethnicity.

Ethnicity is thought to be an all-encompassing term that incorporates what was before consigned to "culture" and "tribe". In fact, what were often thought of as tribes have now come to be thought of as ethnic groups (Cohen 1978, 379), while what used to be called "tribalism" has now come to be called "ethnic clashes" (Atieno-Odhiambo 2002, 230). However, this shift was not merely a "euphemistic substitute" as noted by Saul Dubow (quoted in Szeftel 1994, 188), or as noted by Victor Le Vine (1997) who argues that the term "ethnic group" prevailed merely because it was the "politically correct term", or that the debate on these terms was "without intellectual issue" (p. 48). On the contrary, Eriksen (1993) writes that, "this change in terminology implies more than a mere replacement of one word with another" (p. 10). For instance, Eric Worby (1983) has argued that while tribes were thought to be "naturally given" ethnic groups have now come to be considered as "culturally given" (Worby 1983, 9). This shift is further elucidated by Ronald Cohen (1978) who explains that tribes were believed to be isolated and self-contained monads, whereas ethnic groups were defined by interaction and exchange in a variety of contexts (p. 384). Here we might also take a cue from John Galaty (1982) who writes that, "one ethnicity implies at least one other, just as 'shared' blood implies some 'different' blood as well" (Galaty 1982, 2; also see Szeftel 1994, 190). Eriksen (1993) writes similarly that the term "ethnicity" connotes "aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive" (p. 4), and that

"group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group" (p. 10).

The etymology of the term tribe itself is quite telling and reveals much about the ideological baggage of the early anthropologists interested in the study of "tribes". The word derives from the Latin term *tribus* which connotes the encroaching barbarians on the borders of the Roman empire (Cohen 1978, 379–84). Cohen (1978) explains that the term reveals much about colonial territorial expansionism and the desire to divide the world into "civilised" and "uncivilised", categories carried and popularised by anthropologists (Cohen 1978, 348; also see Berman 1998, 320). Interestingly, however, the term "ethnic" – from the Greek *ethnos* which was in turn derived from its adjectival *ethnikos* – has similar pejorative etymological roots, in the first instance being used, in the third century BC, by ancient Greek scholars to delineate between the Hellenic civilisation and the "foreign" and/or "barbarous" peoples beyond, and in the second instance being used, in fourteenth-century medieval Europe, to describe "heathens" or those who fell beyond the spiritual bounds of Christianity and/or Judaism, the pagans and the gentiles (Worby 1983, 5–6; Eriksen 1993, 4; Le Vine 1997, 46; Gabbert 2006, 86). In the aftermath of the Second World War, the term "ethnics" came to be used, in the US, as a more "polite" term to denote white people of non-British descent such as Jews, Italians, and the Irish, and other minorities considered inferior to citizens of mostly British descent (Eriksen 1993, 4).

Crawford Young (1986) gives a more cogent explanation for the emergence of the modern delineation between "ethnicity" and "tribe". He explains that a clear corpus of ethnicity literature only emerged in the 1950s in the field of urban sociology since it studied urban centres which were increasingly being viewed as spaces of "culture contact" and competition for resources between a variety of different groups.[35] It is at this juncture, argues Young (1986), that a distinction was made

[35] The American sociologist David Riesman is credited as having been the first to use the term in 1953 (Eriksen 1993, 4). We might include to this list members of the "Manchester School of Anthropology" such as Clyde Mitchell and

between "ethnicity" in the urban context and the "tribe" in the rural setting, and that while the former was defined as "artificial" the latter was considered an "authentic" expression of cultural difference (Young 1986, 444; also see Galaty 1982, 1). It can be argued that the split between tribe as an authentic expression of culture, and ethnic group as an artificial construction of a group identity for instrumental ends, came to define the split between anthropology and sociology as two distinct disciplines with different objects of study.

However, it can also be argued that such a split had, at worst, ontological ramifications as it presented Western and non-Western peoples as fundamentally distinct while, at best, it created a distinction between so-called "modern" societies and "primitive" and/or "traditional" societies (Eriksen 1993, 10). Wolfgang Gabbert (2006) elaborates on this point, explaining that while in the twentieth century the term "ethnic group" was used to refer to populations in developed and/or industrialised Western societies such as those in North America and Western Europe, the term "tribe" was used for the indigenous populations of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Australia whose forms of social organisation were thought to be "relics of earlier stages of [human] development" (p. 87). Eriksen (1993) argues that this split is no longer tenable since:

> […] the concepts and models used in the study of ethnicity can often be applied to modern as well as non-modern contexts, to Western as well as non-Western societies. In this sense, the concept of ethnicity can be said to bridge two important gaps in social anthropology: it entails a focus on dynamics rather than statics, and it relativises the boundaries between 'Us' and 'Them', between moderns and tribals […]. (Eriksen 1993, 11)

Accordingly, the term tribe has now come to be rejected by Africanist scholars who eschew it insofar as it connotes uncivilised, primitive, isolated and/or bounded units that have, for the most part, remained unchanged (Cohen 1978, 384), and have been marred in constant "tribal warfare" (Young 1986, 442, 444). The term "tribalism", however remains current in academic discourse and is used to connote a "political ethnicity", or a kind of "divisive" and "fissiparous" form of cultural identification

Arnold Epstein, who studied ethnicity in the mining towns of the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1950s (see Levine 1999, 166–67).

(Young 2004, 6). In another sense, however, "tribalism" is defined as an empirical phenomenon experienced by the common people while "ethnicity" is defined as conceptual construct coming out of the vaunted halls of academia (Atieno-Odhiambo 2002, 230).

At this stage it might be prudent to pause our discussion of the various conceptual shifts that came with the adoption of the term "ethnicity" in the 1970s and sketch out how some scholars have defined the concept, and/or how they have articulated what ethnicity does. In his introduction to the seminal edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Fredrik Barth (1969) offered a critique of what some scholars have called the "tribal mosaic" view of ethnicity which permeated much of the earlier ethnographic accounts, presenting a picture of pristine and isolated cultural units oblivious to the existence of other peoples and therefore "unblemished" by contact. Furthermore, Barth (1969) critiqued the notion that the geographic spread of ethnic groups, each occupying their particular ecological niches was what accounted for much of the cultural diversity that exists between groups, arguing instead that "categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby *discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories*" (Barth 1969, 10, emphasis added). This definition contradicts much of the definitions in the literature which tend to privilege the *cultural and symbolic content* that is thought to distinguish a group from all other groups, rather than the *maintenance and/or reinforcement of a group boundary*, as the Barthian perspective proposes. This is however not to say that Barth (1969) did not acknowledge the symbolic and ideological aspects of ethnic identity. In fact, he wrote that:

> The cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies would seem analytically to be of two orders: (i) overt signals or signs – the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life, and (ii) basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged. Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity. (Barth 1969, 14)

Nevertheless, Barth (1969) played down the significance of these "diacritical features" and "value orientations" and instead defined ethnicity in terms of *discrete categories* and *persistent boundaries*, dismissing as merely morphological the cultural differences that exist between groups (pp. 11–2), and arguing instead that, "the critical focus of investigation from this point of view becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (p. 15). Barth's (1969) insights on the nature and form of ethnicity have become the subject of discussion and critique over the decades, cementing him as arguably one of the most influential scholars of ethnicity. Nevertheless, the problematic aspect of his formulation which opens itself to critique is his insistence on *discrete* and *persistent* group boundaries. Such a formulation has found critique from scholars such David Webster (1991) who showed that individuals supposedly belonging to the same ethnic group can hold multiple and overlapping ethnic identities. Webster (1991) suggested that it is more appropriate to talk of a repertoire of identities rather than a single rigid identity that a person maintains throughout their lifespan (p. 249).[36] Other scholars such as Le Vine (1997), while not necessarily and/or explicitly critiquing Barth (1969), also argued that social identities are "usually multiple and layered" (p. 54). While Gabbert (2006) similarly critiques Barth (1969) insofar as "his definition implies that each human being has only one 'primary' group identity" (p. 88). Some scholars altogether eschew the term "identity" and have instead proposed the use of the term "identification" to underscore the fact that ethnicity or nationhood entails a process that unfolds throughout a person's life (see Hale 2004, 479–80; Walder 2011, 33-34; Mngomezulu 2014, 58–59). As noted above, much of the definitions of ethnicity in the extant literature on the subject tend to stress its cultural and symbolic content. For instance, Cohen (1978) defined ethnicity as a set of "socio-cultural diacritics" such as history, religion, language, nationality, and phenotypic markers that delineate a shared identity for members and non-members (Cohen 1978, 386–87; also see Galaty 1982, 17; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 38).

[36] However, this is not to say that there are no instances where the cultural content completely changes while the social boundary remains the same (see Gabbert 2006, 89 for an example).

However, Cohen (1978, 387) argued that such diacritics can be contracted or expanded depending on the situation in order to include or exclude members:

> To get round the reification problem, I would define ethnicity as a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. The process of assigning persons to groups is both subjective and objective, carried out by self and others, and depends on what diacritics are used to define membership. The nesting quality is similar to that of a social distance scale in which the greater the number of diacritical markers, the closer one gets to a particular person and/or his kin group. It differs from a social distance scale because ethnicity is an historically derived lumping of sets of diacritics at varying distances outward from the person, so that each of these lumpings acts as a potential boundary or nameable grouping that can be identified with or referred to in ethnic terms, given the proper conditions. It is similar to a social distance scale, however, in that the number of diacritics decreases inversely with the scale of inclusiveness. Diacritics that take in the largest numbers of people are used at the most inclusive levels of scale, while those that distinguish at lower scale levels become more important when more localized or smaller scaled distinctions are being made. The division into an exclusive grouping is always done in relation to significant others whose exclusion at any particular level of scale creates the we/they dichotomy. (Cohen 1978, 387)

It is against this background that Cohen (1978) critiqued Barth's (1969) formulation insofar as it postulated stable and continuing boundaries, defined by their widest diacritics. Cohen (1978) based this critique on the fact that people within groups are always aware of the sub-differences that exist amongst them and therefore can, in the future, call on those differences during internecine conflicts (pp. 387–88). Against this background, it can be argued that in the Balkanisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s, a Tsonga-Shangaan ethnic consciousness was conceptualised through its widest diacritics. This conceptualisation incorporated a larger number of people, some of whom had distinctly identified as "Tsonga" while others had distinctly identified as "Shangaan", to warrant the formation, in the 1960s, of the Gazankulu "homeland",[37] touted as the "ancestral" homeland of a unified Tsonga-Shangaan "nation".

Many scholars have argued that although ethnic groups form out of socio-cultural diacritics, over time these diacritics take on the veneer of biological significance. For instance, Elizabeth MacGonagle

[37] I use scare quotes for "homeland/s" to put emphasis on the fact that these were illegitimate apartheid-era inventions which attempted to fuse people to lands and/or territories that were not necessarily their ancestral heartlands. Although subsequent mentions of the term do not appear in-between scare quotes throughout the thesis, it should be noted that the sense in which the term is used remains the same.

(2007) writes that, "even though select histories are constantly used to produce identities, ethnic identities tend to take on a powerful salience and appear to be natural, essential, and even primordial" (p. 18). Essentialist notions of ethnicity have a long history that pervades even the academy. I explore these considerations in detail in the next section by looking at particular expressions of primordialist conceptions of ethnicity in twentieth-century South African universities.

Primordialism

> The primordialist image of ethnic groups may be likened to various stones constituting a "wall" that is society. As between such stones, there are clearcut and enduring boundaries between groups. Each group has its particular constitutive features (cultures, traditions, histories, physical traits, language repertoires, religion, etc.) that also do not change and that tend to be quite consistently distributed within the group. Extended kinship relations are usually said to be the critical element that holds each group together and imbues it with its emotive power. (Hale 2004, 460)

When anthropology was making major ideological shifts and embracing broader definitions of ethnicity in the 1970s, in South Africa a group of anthropologists were heralding old definitions that conceived of ethnic groups as bounded and self-contained units premised on biology[38] and Calvinist

[38] As discussed in the previous section, primordial definitions of ethnic identity tend to dominate when groups define themselves against or in relation to other groups, however such rigid conceptions are sometimes known by group members themselves to be untenable. Evidence shows that this is a fact that was well understood even by apartheid legislators despite their ostensible commitments to "ethnos theory" and "separate development". Writing about the politics towards the establishment of a Ndebele homeland in the 1960s and early 1970s, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2003) shows that in its decision to create a homeland for the Southern Ndebele people to the exclusion of their northern brethren, and despite their obvious cultural affinities with the Southern Ndebele, the apartheid government was more concerned about administrative control than cultural homogeneity. Lekgoathi (2003) writes that, "an unstated, albeit clearly discernible concern of government was the establishment of a larger, contiguous area that could be easily administered, rather than consolidation of the Ndebele "national unit". It appears, therefore, that the government's idea of creating ethnically homogenous homelands – if ever there had been such policy in the first place – gave way to political expediency" (pp. 56–57). This fact is even more obvious in the politics surrounding the official establishment of the Lebowa Territorial Authority in 1969 (where the Northern Ndebele were encouraged to remain) as apartheid government officials were seen promoting the concept and strength of a culturally heterogenous homeland in order to evade potentially antagonising the different ethnic groups within the homeland. For instance, Lekgoathi (2003) writes that, "from the beginning of the homeland system, central government was aware of the difficulties ahead, especially in Lebowa where no one group could make uncontested historical claims of political hegemony over all others, and where the elevation of one group could potentially politicise other ethnicities"

theological suppositions about the "discrete" peopling of the world as divinely preordained (Sharp 1981, 30).[39] These were a group of Afrikaner scholars (*volkekundiges*) who established a subdiscipline of anthropology called *volkekunde*,[40] a discipline that seemed to harken back – in its theory and practice – to the mantras of mid-nineteenth century race "science". For instance, N.S. Jansen van Rensburg and C.S. van der Waal (1999) write that, "*Volkekunde* in the 70s and 80s seemed to be an anachronism, reminding observers of the colonial and conservative elements in anthropological work of the period up to the 1960s" (p. 46). Consequently, the first half of twentieth-century South Africa saw a bifurcation of analytical output among anthropologists in English-medium universities and *volkekundiges* in Afrikaans-medium universities, what Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal (1999) have called the "anthropological apartheid in South Africa" (p. 47). This divide culminated, at least in theoretical and methodological orientation,[41] in a divergence that would cast, by the 1940s,

(Lekgoathi 2003, 64; also see Rakgogo and Mandende 2022 who argue that Khelobedu was erroneously classified as a dialect of Sepedi, rather than a language in its own right, by the apartheid government for administrative convenience). Similarly, Keith Breckenridge (2014, 232) shows that at the height of National Party rule there was acknowledgement amongst parliamentarians that they could not definitively categorise people in terms of race (that in fact race was more an administrative fact rather than a biologically determined category). Breckenridge (2014) writes that, "the leaders of the National Party were anxious not to make the test of whiteness a matter of descent because they were well aware, as H. J. 'Bronkie' Bronkhorst reminded them in parliament, that few 'amongst us can beat upon his breast and proclaim he is of pure white descent'" (p. 232).

[39] These ideas took root much earlier in the 1930s and 1940s (see Sharp 1981, 32).

[40] John Sharp (1981) explains that most theses submitted in Afrikaans universities in the late 1970s took as their theoretical framework *volkekunde*'s ethnos theory (p. 20). Furthermore, it is not so much that the *volkekundeges* were not privy to the ideological shifts that were taking place in anthropology in regards the study of ethnicity as Sharp (1981) shows with at least one *volkekunde* scholar, writing that, "Booyens' thesis is innovative in that he studied an area outside South Africa […] and in the breadth of his references on ethnicity (Barth, A. Cohen, Despres, Y. Bromley and others). What is strange to outsiders is that, having listed these references, he refuses to face up the challenge they imply to his position. Having demonstrated the breadth of his knowledge he retreats (and perhaps has to retreat) back into the closed primordialist code shared by his mentors and colleagues" (Sharp 1981, 22).

[41] *Volkekundeges* seemed to have privileged the use of interviews – rather than participant-observation – as their choice fieldwork method. Informants seem to have been selected from among those considered to hold

anthropology and *volkekunde* as cognate fields rather than intra-disciplinary strands (Sharp 1981, 17). This divergence intensified in the 1980s, mirroring the political tumult that came with increased confrontation between liberation fighters and the apartheid state, a confrontation that also characterised those scholars who identified with the status quo and those who opposed it (Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 45; cf. Webster 2018).

Such bifurcation could be reduced to how much purchase both disciplines put on ethnicity as an explanatory model for South African society. Whereas anthropology considered ethnicity a crucial – but not the sole – factor in sketching out a comprehensive model of society, *volkekunde* seems to have considered it the most important – if not the sole basis – around which a comprehensive analysis of South African society could be undertaken (Sharp 1981, 19). This schism which was compounded by other factors such as language barriers, ideological and moral outlooks about the then state and projected future of the country, leading more and more to reduced contact and exchange between South African anthropologists and the *volkekundiges* (Sharp 1981, 16; Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 48). In fact, until the late 1990s, South African anthropologists were separated into exclusive academic associations and their respective journals with little to no formal contact between them (Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 46–48).[42]

specialised knowledge about their communities. These select informants tended to be men while the ethnographers themselves were usually also men since it was feared that women ethnographers would not be safe during fieldwork. The style of interviewing was in some cases explicitly referred to as "interrogation" while a dispassionate disposition towards informants was encouraged in order to maintain some distance between the researcher and the researched (Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 49–50; Van der Waal 2015, 223).

[42] In the mid-1990s *volkekunde* underwent some changes beginning with a "rebrand" from "*volkekunde*" to "cultural anthropology", while more substantive or ideological changes took place in the late 1990s and the early 2000s (Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 47–48). Much of these changes took place at the Rand Afrikaans University, today the University of Johannesburg, where some inklings of a break with *volkekunde* were beginning to show by the early 1980s (see Van der Waal 2015). The amalgamation of the Association for Anthropology in Southern Africa (AASA) and the South African Society of Cultural Anthropologists

As a discipline, *volkekunde* was premised on a synchronic theory of ethnicity – partly inspired by German romantic nationalism – called "ethnos theory". Its central tenets held that human beings were – through Divine Will – discretely partitioned into irrevocably different nations (or *volke*), and that each nation (or *volk*) was endowed with its own unique culture which, although capable of undergoing some changes, nevertheless remained authentic to its bearers (Sharp 1981, 19). Furthermore, a *volk* was believed to be comprised of individuals who were naturally inclined to marry endogenously so that, over time, it trended towards a membership that was solely premised on descent or blood ties (Kuper 2005, 291).[43]

Although the proponents of ethnos theory heavily drew from German romantic nationalism, including its permeation of German academia at the height of Nazi rule, *volkekundiges* also drew from other sources, including from American, Soviet, and Dutch thinkers. For instance, influential *volkekundiges* such as Werner Eiselen and Nico Diederichs drew from the Dutch statesman and Calvinist theologian, Abraham Kuyper.[44] Eiselen and Diederichs seemed to have heavily borrowed – but also heavily distorted if not outright inverted – some of Kuyper's ideas, in particular his formulation of "sovereignty in one own's sphere" by which he meant those "natural" and "organic"

(SASCA) into Anthropology Southern Africa (ASnA) in 2001 symbolised the end of this schism, albeit a few disparate stragglers lingered in the *volkekunde* camp in the late 2000s (Van der Waal 2015, 230).

[43] This idea (or rather the allure of maintaining a façade of genealogical descent) is/was not limited to *volkekundeges* but appears to be a universal phenomenon. For example, John Galaty (1982, 3) writing about the Maasai people and how they saw themselves explained that, "for Maasai, the notion of 'Maasai' is a pre-eminently natural category since it represents an aspect of reality as concrete as geographical features, as biologically distinct as cattle, and as unique in practice as species of wild animals". Galaty (1982, 17) further explains that the "the glossing of these diverse features in terms of a generalized natural construct represents a pre-eminently ideological process that serves the function of explaining reflexively a group's identity to itself."

[44] Eiselen is credited with having founded *volkekunde* at Stellenbosch University, however the University of Pretoria is credited with having had the most influential *volkekunde* department under Piet Coertze, whose 1959 *Inleiding tot die algemene volkekunde* or *Introduction to General Anthropology* was the primary reading material in undergraduate courses, and who had himself been a student of Eiselen at Stellenbosch (van der Waal 2015, 220–22).

domains of social life that ought to remain free from the dictates of the state, and instead had their own autonomy accountable only to the divine authority of God (Evans 1997, 225–26). Furthermore, these *volkekundiges* were also persuaded by Kuyper's critique of Charles Darwin's formulation of species differentiation through a natural and unguided process and therefore insisted that the hierarchical ordering of the different species and the various human races was a process that was very much guided and pre-ordained by God (Evans 1997, 226). It is easy to discern how these distortions might have been irresistible to these *volkekundiges* who soon adapted Kuyper's "sovereign spheres" and reduced them into the "natural spheres" or the different *volke* whose individual autonomy – although promised and ensured by God – was mediated by the state (Evans 1997, 226).

Again, it is easy to discern how such ideas were well-suited to provide a veneer of scientific validity for the bureaucratic logic that undergirded National Party rule. Many scholars have convincingly argued that *volkekunde* served to provide scientific justification for the apartheid regime since there seems have been an overlap between *volkekunde* as an academic enterprise and Afrikaner nationalism. In fact, many *volkekundiges* were ardent Afrikaner nationalists and saw their academic work as *volksdiens*, that is, "service to the Afrikaner people" (Jansen van Rensburg and Van der Waal 1999, 46; Van der Waal 2015, 221). Against this background, some scholars have argued that under National Party rule *primordialism* fused with *instrumentalism* (I discuss the latter in detail in the next section). For instance, Robert Gordon (1988) argues that *volkekundiges* were in part motivated by the urge to resolve the "poor white problem" (p. 549), he writes that, "Afrikaner anthropology has played a significant role in the legitimation and reproduction of the apartheid social order on two levels: as an instrument of control and as a means of rationalizing it" (p. 536). Gordon (1988) further explains that "all *volkekunde* professors were ardent Nationalists and members of the Afrikaner Broederbond, a secret society whose members played a significant role in formulating the apartheid government's 'Native Policy'" (p. 537).

This merging of what in the discipline were thought to be distinct approaches (primordialism and instrumentalism) to ethnic identity is called "neoprimordialism", and has survived beyond the apartheid state in the movements of the early 1990s such as Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and some conservative Afrikaner right-wing groups which mobilise their members through primordial claims to ethnic belonging for political ends (Comaroff and Stern 1994, 38; MacGonagle 2007, 26; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 39–40). For instance, John Comaroff and Paul Stern (1994) comment that:

> From this perspective, collective identities are not "things" in or for themselves, but an imminent capacity that takes on manifest form in response to eternal forces. This view presumes a prior cultural sensibility, a well of latent sentiments, a shared heritage; a primordial infrastructure, as it were, from which appropriate signs and symbols, political practices and ethnic emotions, may be extracted when the situation demands it. (Comaroff and Stern 1994, 39)

The next section explores instrumentalism in all its different manifestations and provides some examples of its uses on the African continent. Furthermore, it reviews what some of the critiques of instrumentalist approaches to understanding the saliency of ethnic consciousness on the continent have been, while also providing a brief review of relatively new attempts to discuss and define ethnicity.

Instrumentalism and constructivism

While "instrumentalism" holds, in general, that ethnicity is a means to an end rather than an end in itself, which is to say that people have at times made use of their cultural identity to serve either their ideological and/or material ends, "constructivism" holds that ethnicity has been constructed and imposed on the common people from above, for instance how colonial powers used chiefs for control over colonised peoples, what Mahmood Mamdani (2001) has termed "decentralised despotism". According to John Comaroff and Paul Stern (1994), there are two strands of instrumentalism, one *cultural* and another *political*. With cultural instrumentalism ethnic identity entails the use of shared symbols that enable a group to make sense of the world.[45] Whereas political instrumentalism

[45] Other scholars have not necessarily made this distinction and have primarily defined instrumentalism in terms of how ethnicity is used to orient groups towards specific material ends vis-à-vis other groups (see discussions in Young 1986, 449; Spear 2003, 17).

constitutes the ways in which power elites forge an ideology, values, signs and/or symbols and impose them on a mostly diverse population in order to create a single rigid identity (p. 40). Based on this definition, it would seem that the former strand constitutes instrumentalism proper, while political instrumentalism can be delineated as constructivism.

Constructivist scholars of ethnicity argue, contrary to earlier anthropological renderings, that pre-colonial African ethnic groups were mostly fluid and in a continual state of negotiation and flux. They argue that it was only with the arrival of colonial administrators that more rigidly defined identities were constructed. For example, Bruce Berman (1998) comments that:

> […] pre-colonial political and socio-cultural boundaries were marked by fuzziness and flexibility; and Africans existed within a reality of multiple, overlapping and alternative collective identinties. There is also evidence that the notion of the individual person with the fixed, unique and bounded identity of Western modernity simply did not exist until introduced under colonial rule. (Berman 1998, 310)

Similarly, Crawford Young (2004) argues that the pre-colonial African state – unlike its contemporary form which has come to be defined by a contradiction between national and ethnic identity – had none of the obsessions around cultural identity that have come to define modern African states. He comments that:

> The pre-colonial identity map in Africa was very different from the ethnic cartography of today. Most large states in pre-colonial Africa were neither ethnic in self-definition nor homogeneous in population. In the many regions of the continent where small-scale political organization prevailed, a given linguistic zone had multiple polities. Most identities were localized, even if there might be some awareness of sharing a widely diffused linguistic consciousness, as with Arabic. (Young 2004, 13)

In fact, in *Afropolitanism*, Achille Mbembe (2017) writes that there is a "pre-colonial African modernity" that has yet to be fully accounted for in the historiography of the African continent. Against this background, we can surmise that the constructivist approach is at odds with essentialist or primordialist definitions of ethnicity discussed in the previous section,[46] since it maintains that

[46] Of course notwithstanding neoprimordialism which some authors have dismissed as a fanciful synthesis.

ethnicity is not a static or ahistorical phenomenon, and that it has to be studied in its specific historical contexts. Berman (1998) further elucidates this point:

> No African society was or is culturally homogeneous and univocal. Ethnicity is constructed in societies containing multiple and conflicting versions of culture and custom, as well as divergent interests and conflicts of gender, generation, clan, faction and, under the impact of colonialism, developing classes. (Berman 1998, 311)

In the main, proponents of the constructivist view of ethnicity argue that colonial powers – in particular the British and the Belgians – politicised ethnicity to bolster their hold over the African territories under their domain. For instance, Crawford Young (1986) writes that:

> 'Tribe', of course, was central to the sociology of colonial hegemony. 'Native administration' was erected upon a division of the African population into units of presumed relative homogeneity, and their rule through intermediaries. The controlling image was of a natural situation where society was composed of discrete, territorially bounded units, whose inherent clarity was muddied by migrations and 'endemic tribal warfare'. (Young 1986, 442)

Young (1986) further argues that the colonial state therefore created, out of a muddled ethnoscape, more rigid and politicised ethnic units which best served the project of colonial expansion. He writes that:

> The reality did not match the grid of colonial classification placed upon it. Ethnic consciousness, while certainly present, was very different from its contemporary forms, and indeed difficult to retroactively reconstruct. It certainly lacked, in most instances, political articulation, and was largely unrelated to the process of State formation and dissolution: ethnic charters were usually irrelevant to State building, and the crucial post-colonial mobilizing issues of ethnic 'domination' and resource distribution were not present. To a large degree, the colonial system encountered a set of blank tablets, on which to inscribe its own tribal metaphors. (Young 1986, 442–3)

The crafting of said identities, explains Young (2004), was orchestrated by colonial administrators and missionaries who placed a "tribal map" on the various African territories, a task which was designed to aid the project of "native administration". This endeavour was further supplemented by missionary ethnographers and, later, professional anthropologists whose task it was to do the necessary research in order to fill the "classificatory containers" with the relevant cultural content that ostensibly defined the ethos of the colonised peoples, in the process reducing complex forms of social organisation and identification into more clearly delineated and easily manageable units, sometimes projecting data that was gathered in one small area into a wider territory (Young 2004, 13–14; also see Young 1986, 443).

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's (1983) edited volume entitled *The Invention of Tradition* – in particular Ranger's (1983) offering in that volume entitled "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa" – is considered the urtext of the constructivist perspective (see Spear 2003, 5). Other similarly seminal texts in this school of thought include Leroy Vail's (1989) edited volume *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* and Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.[47] These works present a thesis that has been variegated as the "invention of tradition", the "making of customary law" and the "creation of tribalism" (Spear 2003).[48] To give an example, Patrick Harries' (1989) contribution to *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* through his "Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism" makes a constructivist case for the emergence a Tsonga-Shangaan ethnic consciousness in the twentieth-century, a consciousness which he argues was *cultivated* by Swiss missionaries, colonial administrators, neo-traditional chiefs, and mission educated natives. Harries (1989) explains that in the

[47] Note that most of the constructivists, recognising the limitations of this theoretical framework, went on to modify their theses (see Young 1986, 449-50; Young 2004, 14; Spear 2003, 5). In fact, Young (1986 and 1994) ultimately advocated for a synthesis of primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist perspectives on ethnicity.

[48] In the first instance, traditional structures of authority are said to have been invented by colonial administrators and missionaries working in conjunction with certain tribal elders to entrench colonial domination, by either appointing illegitimate candidates into positions of chieftainship, and/or by eroding the legitimacy of traditional structures of authority which, in their function as intermediary structures of colonial domination, lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the people. In the second instance, customary law is said to have been made by colonial administrators, missionaries, and their African collaborators are said to have produced, by stringing together local customs, Christian morality, colonial law and administrative regulations, and codified versions of customary law wielded by authoritarian chiefs. In the third instance, it is said that colonial administrators and missionaries transformed previously fluid social units defined by broader forms of identification and congealed them into territorially defined political units fitted with standardised written languages, whose "unchanging" customs and traditions were etched into the ethnic monograph, and in so doing created tribalism (Spear 2003, 3). Spear (2003) writes that, "What these concepts share is a common emphasis on the social construction of tradition, law and ethnicity by colonial authorities to preserve tradition and social order while subordinating African societies to colonial rule" (pp. 3–4).

early twentieth-century, native commissioners in South Africa were worried about the "detribalisation" of the various groups that were instrumental in maintaining an environment of divided interests and aspirations among blacks. It was believed that "detribalisation" would have brought about "a wider and more unified political consciousness" (p. 98). For instance, Harries (1989) quotes parts of a report produced by the Native Recruiting Corporation of the Chamber of Mines in 1920 which states that:

> […] the different tribes will become more and more in sympathy with each other, with a growing disregard of loyalty to their respective tribal chiefs and a fusion of common interests under the guidance of the educated classes of natives irrespective of tribe or place of origin will result. (Harries 1989, 99)

Harries (1989) further explains that new laws were passed in the 1920s to help preserve and increase the powers of the chiefs, sometimes going as far as creating chiefly authority where previously none existed. Other than dividing the populace along ethnic lines, chiefs provided an indirect means of control over the population (Harries 1989, 98). For instance, writing about colonial Zimbabwe, Eric Worby (1994) comments that:

> Tribes were first and foremost a way of marking relations of obligation to the colonial state under circumstances where control over people could best be exercised through control over chiefs rather than over territory. (Worby 1994, 378)

The chiefs themselves were to an extent agreeable to this imposition as they stood to benefit by receiving lucrative salaries from the colonial state (Harries 1989, 108). Nevertheless, they had in truth been reduced to gloried policemen and tax collectors and were thus rendered the object of their peoples' scorn (see Middleton 1960, 268; Middleton 1963, 88; Ranger 1967, 339, 360; Ranger 1968, 442; Worby 1983, 41–42; Lan 1985, 136–38, 146, 198; Lekgoathi 2009a, 69; Kelly 2018, xxx).

The "post-constructivist" turn

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the bourgeoning of literature that critiqued the constructivist perspective on ethnicity, one of the most seminal of these texts were Carolyn Hamilton's (1998) *Terrific Majesty* subtitled *The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention*. Focusing on discourses around the "colonial invention" of images of King Shaka, Hamilton (1998) critiques both Mamdani's (1996) *Citizen and Subject* (pp. 3–4) and Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) *The*

Invention of Tradition (pp. 25–26), arguing that these constructivists had ignored, "the complex historical entanglement of indigenous and colonial concepts" (pp. 3–4) that informed what emerged out of the colonial encounter. Hamilton (1998) highlights the fact that colonial "inventions" were limited by, and/or had to contend with, African understandings of their own history and traditions so that what emerged was the product of that "interchange". She writes that:

> […] this study shows that what the early travellers, missionaries, and colonial administrators found in the area that is today KwaZulu-Natal was not a clearly articulated and bounded culture, nor a singular identity, and was bolstered by no unargued Zulu history. The cultural ideas, historical notions, and identities that prevailed in the area were complex and powerfully articulated constructs with contested meanings and heterogeneous origins. The same is true of the ideas, notions, and identities imported into the area. And from their moments of first contact these highly varied bodies of material locked onto one another in a myriad of different ways effecting processes of continuous change, interaction, and imbrication. These processes of interchange marked not only the texts of the time, both oral and written, the many and varied forms of material culture, but even the performances and practices of power itself. (Hamilton 1998, 6)

Hamilton (1998) argues that the "invention of tradition" thesis seems to have overly focused on how tradition was put to use by colonial administrators for political ends, without looking at the processes through which specific customs and traditions were selected. Furthermore, she explains that although the invention thesis acknowledges that the traditions and customs promoted by colonial administrators were, in fact, adaptations of older forms, it tends to focus on the novel aspects of these adaptations while occluding the ways in which said adaptations were partial continuations of their historical antecedents. More importantly, argues Hamilton (1998), the thesis seems to ignore the processes that informed why and how specific traditions and customs were selected for adaptation (p. 26). These are all factors that Hamilton (1998) argues would have revealed the extent to which indigenous actors were part and parcel of the processes that informed much of the innovations that came out of the colonial encounter. She writes that:

> The notion of "invention" can all too easily lose sight of the history of the tradition, of the way in which the tradition's (or elements of the tradition's) own past shapes its present. It further places full control over content and form in the hands of the "inventors"—usually political elites—and ignores the way that their versions of history are shaped by contesting and conflicting versions of the past. It loses sight of the struggles between existing, often opposed, bodies of knowledge, and the ways in which such contests are related to the social conditions that prevail in the worlds inhabited by their promoters. It denies the possibilities of "subjugated knowledges," and the effects these subversive texts have on the versions of

> the past promoted by those with political power. It sets up a crude opposition between "myth" and "reality. (Hamilton 1988, 26–27)

In the main, Hamilton (1998) argues that "the identity and the desires of the colonisers were not simply projected or inscribed on Africa, nor was Africa drawn from the imagination", that instead what emerged out of the colonial encounter was part of a "dialogic process" between coloniser and the colonised (p. 28). Similarly, Thomas Spear (2003) argues that the invention thesis, in its variegated guises, occludes how African traditions were not static before they were the object of colonial "manipulations", but had always been a site of contestation and constant re-negotiation and re-interpretation. This suggests that the advent of colonisation did not put an end to these processes but simply introduced a new player who also had to contend in the same field in order to promote a version of "tradition" best suited for the project of colonial expansion. Spear (2003) writes that:

> […] the emphasis on colonial invention (defined as devising, contriving or fabricating) has led historians to neglect the historical development and complexity of the interpretive processes involved. Such constructions were rarely without local historical precedents, and they had to be perceived as legitimate to be effective. Local discourse played a vital role as people continually reinterpreted and reconstructed tradition in the context of broader socio-economic changes. And colonial policies often stimulated rather than stilled conflict in the ongoing politics of neo-traditionalism. Far from being created by alien rulers, then, tradition was reinterpreted, reformed and reconstructed by subjects and rulers alike. (Spear 2003, 4)

Spear (2003) further argues that the invention thesis tends to present colonialism as a "unilateral political phenomenon" (p. 4) and by so doing represent Africans as historical bystanders who are very gullible and/or deprived of any agency. He writes that:

> In the process of analysis, once provocative concepts have often been reduced to ahistorical cliches. Colonial power is taken for granted, while economic forces are neglected. Colonial duplicity overwhelms African gullibility. And African politics, often expressed in intense disputes over tradition, is neglected. (Spear 2003, 4)

Furthermore, Spear (2003) argues that the more dominant aspect of the invention thesis has been the notion of "indirect rule" through traditional authorities where either new "traditional" structures were altogether created and/or where pliable candidates, thought to be loyal to the colonial project, were promoted over their recalcitrant fellow contenders. Spear (2003) argues instead that structures of traditional authority had to be considered legitimate before they could become effective tools of

colonial domination. Consequently, colonial authorities had to consider, and became subject to, "local discourses of power that they neither fully understood nor controlled" (Spear, 2003, 9). He writes that:

> Insofar as colonial authorities, ill-financed and thin on the ground, depended on traditional authorities, law and custom to maintain their rule, tradition became the source of continuing struggles over power, meaning and access to resources. Far from becoming an instrument of authoritarian rule, then, tradition was contested by Africans and Europeans alike in attempts to establish their power and access to resources. (Spear 2003, 9–10)

In cases where colonial administrators did in fact create "traditional" structures of authority, Spear (2003) argues that these "pseudo-traditional authorities" still had to be considered legitimate by those over whom they presumed to rule, and for this reason had to take into account, and be subject to, local discourses of power and neo-tradition (p. 12). Against this background, Spear (2003) writes that:

> Indirect rule thus offered a contradiction in terms. If colonial administrators were to capitalize on the illusion of traditional authority, their rule was limited by the need of those authorities to maintain their legitimacy. Nor could traditional authority simply be invented if it was to resonate with people's values and be effective. Rather it had to emerge from the discourse of tradition, and once colonial administrators acknowledged the sovereignty of traditional discourse, they too became subject to it, as both Feierman and Fields show. (Spear 2003, 12–13)

Furthermore, Spear (2003) criticises the invention thesis on its overemphasis on the role of colonial administrators and mission educated African elites in promoting specific forms ethnic identification, while downplaying the role played by ordinary people in shaping the content that ethnic identities assumed, for instance, their role in generating myths of origin, folklore, and affective ideas of "home", among others (p. 23). However, Spear (2003) argues that mission-educated African elites did not merely absorb and regurgitate colonial notions whole, but instead often reflected on them and in many cases made their own innovations on them. In fact, he argues that colonial notions more likely to become acceptable among ordinary Africans were those that appeared – for all intents and purposes – like the "authentic" expressions of the colonised rather than those that appeared to be the "pure" and/or "unmediated" ideas of colonial authorities (Spear 2003, 23–24). Against this background, Spear (2023) maintains that ethnicity in Africa has a longer history and cannot be reduced to a mere "colonial invention". He writes that:

> While colonial rule often had the effect of transforming preexisting concepts, colonial authorities rarely created them from scratch, and they frequently found themselves as subject to African ethnic processes as in control of them. Ethnicity has, thus, been continually reinterpreted and reconstructed over time in such a way as to appear timeless and legitimate, and it has been deployed by contending parties in complex processes of selectivity and representation that lay at the core of peoples' collective historical consciousness and struggles for power, meaning and access to resources. It is, then, simultaneously, constructed, primordial and instrumental, and therein lies its essential problematic. (Spear 2003, 24)[49]

More importantly, Spear (2003) argues that "colonial policy, then, derived less from a coherent ruling strategy or the consent of the governed than from ongoing negotiations and compromises with Africans and among themselves" (p. 26). Notions of "negotiations" and "compromises" work to highlight the question African agency in the reconceptualisation of tradition, custom and/or ethnicity.[50] In fact, Spear (2003) further writes that, "even genetically engineered plants derive genes from their predecessors and need fertile soil in which to succeed", by which he means that newer versions of tradition, custom and/or ethnicity emerge out of a preexisting toolkit (p. 26).

[49] Spear's (2003) charge that ethnicity is "constructed, primordial and instrumental" (p. 24) deserves further explication in view of the preceding section in which primordialism was discussed from the perspective of its particular manifestations in South African scholarly discourse in the 1970s among some Afrikaner ethnologists. Here Spear (2003) invokes primordialism to explain the affective dimension of ethnicity (p. 26). Young (1986) reviewed similar notions among some scholars of ethnicity who, although espousing instrumentalist notions, also noted the sentimentality of ethnic consciousness, or its ability to generate a powerful emotional sense of belonging (pp. 449–50). As a result, Young (1986) also wrote that, "the necessity to weave together the instrumentalist and primordialist dimensions of ethnicity is self-evident. Instrumentalism alone fails to capture the intensity, the passion, the availability of ethnicity for political mobilization" (p. 450). Therefore Spear (2003) argues that on their own these theoretical frameworks fail to give an adequate explication of ethnicity, for example, he writes that, "just as instrumentalists failed to account for the content of ethnicity, so primordialists were unable to account for when and why ethnicity was invoked and became so charged" (Spear 2003, 17; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 39–40).

[50] Young (2004) also factors in African agency in his constructivist perspective, writing that: "Agency in this active process of social construction of ethnicity was not limited to the alien labors of European administrators, missionaries, or anthropologists. Africans were active participants as well. The colonial chiefs soon acquired a vested interest in the containers created by "native administration", and the identity labels attached to them. In the emergent urban centers, migrants of common cultural affinity formed organizations for mutual support in overcoming the multiple challenges of town life: jobs, housing, coping with misfortune. These ethnic and hometown associations became as well sites for performance of cultural identity, and articulation of collective consciousness. With the introduction of electoral competition in the terminal colonial period, ethnic associations became building blocks for political parties; in the process, ethnicity acquired new political meanings" (Young 2004, 14).

The work of Hamilton (1998) and Spear (2003) marks what Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2020) has called a "post-constructivist" turn in ethnicity studies, defined by its insistence on African agency in the construction process, and/or how ordinary Africans – not just mission-educated elites – also shaped the cultural content of ethnicity.[51] We may add to this body of work Isak Niehaus (2002) who situates his contribution within a corpus of ethnicity literature that, "emphasize[s] the multi-dimensionality of ethnic constructs, recognize the diverse processes of ethnicisation, and celebrate the capacity of ordinary people to adopt terms of their own definition as the basis for collective assertion" (p. 558). Other post-constructivists include scholars such as Enocent Msindo (2005) who writes that, "By concentrating their attention on elite interactions in the construction of ethnicity, scholars of constructivism ignore the role of African commoners in the social construction of ethnicity in the colonial era" (p. 79). In his contribution, Msindo (2005) shows how, among the Kalanga of what was still Rhodesia, struggles of resistance against the imposition of more widely spoken and standardised languages such as isiNdebele and Setswana were championed by ordinary people. In the 1920s and 1930s, the promotion of TjiKalanga became of such overriding importance to the extent that a chief's legitimacy to rule over the Kalanga came to be defined by the extent of their commitment to resist government policy in this regard (p. 85).

Lekgoathi (2009a) has also made numerous contributions to this turn in scholarship. For instance, he argues that African informants and researchers helped shape what became the "Dr. N. J. van Warmelo Manuscript Collection" archive – currently curated by the University of Pretoria's Department of Library Services – a task that Van Warmelo, as a government ethnologist, was bestowed in order that he may produce a clearly defined Ndebele "tribe". To the extent that Van Warmelo did arrive at a taxonomic delineation of the Ndebele into the "Southern Transvaal Ndebele" and the "Northern Transvaal Ndebele", Lekgoathi (2009a) argues that he (Van Warmelo) was not merely

[51] Lekgoathi, Sekibakiba. Personal communication: "*Reader's Report on a Ph.D. Proposal*", 1 December 2020.

"inventing" the Ndebele but that his views on pre-colonial and colonial Ndebele societies were fundamentally shaped by accounts provided by his African interlocutors, themselves taking a cue from the prevailing oral traditions of their respective communities (p. 62). Interestingly, Lekgoathi (2009a) argues that some of Van Warmelo's interlocutors also had their own agendas in their telling of particular accounts, that the documentation – in a government archive – of their narratives helped legitimise them relative to competing, but undocumented, versions (pp. 69–70). More importantly, Lekgoathi (2009a) argues that although Van Warmelo might have been particularly discriminating in his selection and usage of what was available to him, his archive – with all its complexity – remains available to researchers who might not have the constraints nor the desire of arriving at a predetermined picture of precolonial and colonial Ndebele communities (pp. 79–80).

In another contribution, Lekgoathi (2009b) foregrounds African agency even in the context of apartheid radio broadcasting (established to entrench parochial forms "national" identification among South Africa's various ethnic groups) wherein African announcers had to navigate and evade the ever watchful eye of white station "controllers" who – somewhat proficient in the native languages of their respective stations – were there to ensure that announcers did not deviate from nor contradict state policy (p. 586). Lekgoathi (2009b) explains that some announcers were able – through "the thicket of language" – to slip through subversive items of communication that countered, for example, state propaganda (p. 577). He argues, therefore, that "we need to acknowledge that ethnic separatism in the homelands was not simply created by Afrikaner architects of apartheid but was also influenced by African intermediaries, such as radio announcers, whose messages had some resonance with African listeners" (Lekgoathi 2009b, 578).

Furthermore, Lekgoathi (2009b) argues that African audiences were also not merely "passive recipients" of state propaganda but were in fact discerning and tended to gravitate towards particular broadcast programmes (p. 576). Even though the state went through great pains to select announcers believed to be loyal to the government's separatist agenda, many would-be subversives fell through

the cracks, often slipping in seditious pieces of information that inverted state ideology, sometimes outright urging listeners to be wary of what they heard, while others made it clear – through distancing – that they were merely the transmitters and not the authors of whatever state propaganda they were mediating (Lekgoathi, 2009b, 580–81, 588–89).

Reflections

While constructivist scholars played a key role in challenging primordialist conceptions of group identity, one which saw it as an essential marker of ethnic difference, there are nevertheless grounds to challenge the paradigm which they have bequeathed us. For instance, it is true that the invention thesis is important in pointing out how ethnicity is a product of diachronic socio-cultural processes and not an authentic and/or immutable expression of group identity. However, the constructivist perspective has tended to overstate the influence of power elites while downplaying the agency of ordinary people in the construction of ethnic attachment. This has, therefore, led to a situation in which colonial administrators and, to a lesser extent, their African functionaries have been credited with the "invention of tradition" on the continent, while ordinary Africans are often viewed as behaving in mechanical ways, acting out the designs of said elites. This thesis has come to permeate discourse on contemporary ethnic conflicts where violence is often explicated through the machinations of power elites and/or as a holdover of their social engineering endeavours. This outlook necessarily reduces ethnicity into an atavism or what remains from our divided past.

Chapter 4 – The Tsonga-Shangaan as a marginalised ethnic group in South Africa

Introduction

While the previous chapter explored the various theoretical approaches in the study of ethnicity, this chapter explores how the Tsonga-Shangaan as an ethnic group have been studied in South Africa's history and how the question of their marginalisation has been approached and explicated. It argues that the Tsonga-Shangaan have largely been studied from the vantage point of constructivist scholars wherein their ethnicisation has been attributed to the machinations of colonial and apartheid administrators, missionaries, and a coterie of mission-educated Africans. Furthermore, this chapter shows that the marginalised status of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa has similarly been attributed to the politicisation of ethnicity in the colonial and apartheid periods, a condition ostensibly engineered to maintain an atmosphere of divided interests and aspirations among the different ethnic groups to prevent the emergence of a broad-based workers' consciousness. It is argued that these attempts at social engineering have produced the enduring logics of ethnic intolerance which are purportedly expressed through "complexes of inferiority and superiority" among stigmatised and stigmatising groups. I argue that this hypothesis, and its variants, "freezes" contemporary ethnic antagonisms to their colonial and/or apartheid antecedents. I propose that there might be value in examining the prevailing stereotypes that are ascribed to the Tsonga-Shangaan, that such an undertaking might reveal insights about those who peddle them and add to our understanding of the raison d'être undergirding stigmatising and othering practices in post-apartheid South Africa.

The invention of a Tsonga-Shangaan identity

The history of the Gaza Nguni state, although famed, is mostly overshadowed by the Zulu kingdom which, in part, brought it into being. The story begins in the conflicts of the early nineteenth century between the Ndwandwe and Zulu states, culminating with the defeat of the Ndwandwe in 1820, causing waves of emigrations north of Natal. The King of the Ndwandwe, Zwide kaLanga, settled in Nkomazane or Komati where he tried to rebuild his kingdom raiding the Sotho, Pedi, Dlamini, and

other states which presented opportunities for plunder, while Soshangane kaZikode, Zwide's cousin, went further north and settled closer to Delagoa Bay and established the famed Gaza Nguni empire. Soshangane was Zikode kaLanga's son which also made him Zwide's son according to Nguni custom; this fact explains why he would have been given command over a significant portion of the Ndwandwe army (Buthelezi 2004, 90–91).

These incursions into the northern territories would be credited to the "Zulu", both in popular and scholarly telling. For instance, it is not uncommon to come across academic accounts that maintain that Soshangane was a renegade Zulu general sent to conquer and bring the northern ("Thonga") tribes to heel, while popular accounts tend to offer this narrative almost exclusively. [52] In truth, the Ndwandwe and the Zulu were sworn enemies and were engaged in a bitter struggle for control over south-east Africa. Nevertheless, a contingent of Zulu immigrants did join the Gaza Nguni in the aftermath of King Cetshwayo's defeat in the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War (Rennie 1984, 185).

This erasure of Ndwandwe history seems to have taken hold very early on given that by the late 1820s colonial records had already begun to identify King Shaka and the Zulus as the main instigators of the turmoil that would come to be referred to as "*uMfecane*" in the historiography of the region (Buthelezi 2012, 40; Hamilton 1995). Furthermore, colonial explorers from Natal mostly tended to refer to the Gaza Nguni as "Zulus" and, occasionally, as "northern Zulus" and "Umngonis", to distinguish them from the actual Zulu (see Doyle 1891; Elton 1872; Erskine 1875; Erskine and Mann 1878; Mann 1878; Massie 1905). However, this misreading of history has not always worked in favour

[52] I believe this might be partially attributed to A. T. Bryant's (1964) *A History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Tribes*, wherein he writes that, "The great army which Shaka despatched to the north, as well as the wild and disorderly rabble of fugitives led by Soshangane, Nxaba and others, all swept through the length and breadth of their country, while large numbers of Kaffir refugees forcibly settled in their midst" (p. 104). If read hastily, this passage might be easily misunderstood to suggest that Soshangane was at the helm of those dispatched by Shaka.

of those it often erased and therefore absolved of pre/colonial atrocities. For instance, Anitra Nettleton (1988) writes about how Tsonga-Shangaan figurative sculptures, showing men wearing head rings and women adorned with peaked hairdos, have been credited to the Zulu by some scholars and museum curators, thereby implicitly crediting the Zulu, "with a greater degree of culture than those who actually did make the sculpture[s]" (p. 51). Elizabeth MacGonagle (2008) explains that this misreading of history can be credited to the military prowess and victories of the Zulu state which have captured the popular imagination. She wites that:

> Ndau elders in the twentieth century […] transferred the powerful image of the fierce Zulu warrior—reputed to be prone to violent and ruthless action —to a similar oppressor, the Gaza Nguni. According to one Ndau elder, the Ndau say that "Shangani, Zulu, and Ndebele are one and the same thing." (MacGonagle 2008, 40; also see Buthelezi 2004, 31, 41)

Nevertheless, Gaza Nguni incursions into the northern territories triggered mass emigrations among the local populations into the area that would be known as the Transvaal. Emigrations of this magnitude would not occur until between 1858 and 1862 when the Gaza-Nguni were thrown into a succession civil war between two of King Soshangane's sons: Mawewe and Mzila. These emigrations were further compounded by a series of ecological disasters that plagued the kingdom roughly around the same period (Harries 1989, 83; Niehaus 2002, 560). A final wave of emigrations into the Transvaal occurred in the aftermath of the defeat of the Gaza Nguni by the Portuguese in 1895 in what is known as the Luso-Gaza War. The finality of this defeat was epitomised by the capture and imprisonment of King Ngungunyane kaMzila (Niehaus 2002, 560).[53]

In the late nineteenth-century, these immigrants populated the northern and eastern Transvaal and did not necessarily form a coherent group ruled over by one paramount chief. Instead, they were often settled under Venda and Sotho chiefs (Harries 1989, 84–85). Against this background, Harries (1989)

[53] These refuges were led by Mpisane, Ngungunyane's brother, who acted as regent until his nephew Thulamahashi took the reins of power. However, in 1922 Thulamahashi abdicated and recognised his older brother Buyisonto – who had escaped from the Portuguese in Angola where he was being imprisoned along with his father – as the rightful heir (Niehaus 2002, 560).

argues that one can hardly speak of a Tsonga-Shangaan ethnic consciousness in the late 1800s, arguing that the emergence of such a consciousness can be mostly credited to Swiss missionaries. He writes that:

> Even to use the term 'Tsonga-speaking' with reference to the nineteenth century is misleading as it invokes an erroneous linguistic unity. No single language linked the early East Coast refugees who were settled throughout the northern and eastern Transvaal. Instead, they spoke a rich variety of language forms that reflected their diverse geographical origins. The codification and categorization of Tsonga as a language was only undertaken at the end of the nineteenth century by missionaries who, trained to categorize and classify national groups and characteristics according to language, reified this linguistic category into an ethnic group – into a 'tribe'. (Harries 1989, 85)

According to Harries (1989) a Tsonga-Shangaan ethnic consciousness only emerged in the twentieth century and was a product of Swiss missionaries, a missionary-educated local petty bourgeoisie, and neo-traditional chiefs buttressed by the apartheid government's homeland policy and was largely a response to modernity and the changes in forms of economic organisation that the latter process wrought. Against this background, Harries (1989) argues that, "the roots of Tsonga ethnicity are not to be found in the primordial values associated with the precapitalist political systems and forms of production that early anthropologists categorized and classified by 'tribe'" (p. 82). Instead, a Tsonga-Shangaan ethnic consciousness emerges as a response to rapid economic changes that see people adopt cultural symbols thought to harken back to a shared historical existence as a means to bolster their class or regional interests (Harries 1989, 82).

Conversely, Isak Niehaus (2002) challenges Harries' (1989) constructivist perspective and argues instead that the Tsonga-Shangaan were able to forge broader forms of ethnic identification that were at odds with colonial administrators and their African functionaries (p. 558). Niehaus (2002) demonstrates these broader forms of identifications among the Shangaan and the Basotho between the 1860s and the 1930s, a period which was marked by political alliances between leaders of both groups and that seem to have even withstood the Balkanisation period which, even though marked by increasing tensions between homeland bureaucrats and neo-traditional chiefs, still witnessed, among ordinary people, inter-ethnic marriages, and saw Shangaans attend Basotho initiation schools, and

Basotho consult Tsonga-Shangaan healers and diviners (Niehaus 2002, 559; also see Nettleton 1988, 49). Notwithstanding Niehaus' (2002) criticism of constructivist explications of Tsonga-Shangaan ethnicisation, the next section demonstrates that efforts to elucidate the question of Tsonga-Shangaan marginalisation in South Africa have been constructivist in their outlook.

Apartheid holdover or stigmatised identity?

The Tsonga-Shangaan tend to be the most stigmatised of South Africa's ethnic groups, in fact the term "Shangane" has become synonymous with "foreigner" in South Africa's ethnophaulic lexicon. There are at least four hypotheses that attempt to account for this stigmatised status. The first hypothesis – which is perhaps the most dominant – attributes the stigmatisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan to an affect of the country's colonial and apartheid past. For instance, Colin Chasi and Ntsako Lowane (2016) consider South Africa to be still haunted by its violent apartheid past which – taken together with the ethnic partitioning of the country in the 1950s and 1960s – has produced ethnic antagonisms in the post-apartheid period which have seen the Tsonga-Shangaan particularly stigmatised. They write that:

> The psychological effects of apartheid's structural violence continue to be felt today, even as the country battles to rid itself of the remnants of apartheid planning and practices [...]. For many, the work of getting out of structurally violent class and race positions involves overcoming the legacies and logics of apartheid. (Chasi and Lowane 2016, 51)

Ximbani Mabaso (2018) similarly traces the genesis of this stigmatisation to apartheid social engineering. In particular, he blames the apartheid government for its "erroneous" interpellation of the "Tsonga" as "Shangaan" thereby ostensibly instigating the negative associations between the term and all those it subsumed. It is through this state interpellation that Mabaso (2018) argues that the Tsonga came to be inculcated with an inferiority complex while other ethnic groups were oppositely inculcated with a superiority complex towards their Tsonga brethren. In the post-apartheid period, argues Mabaso (2018), these complexes of inferiority and superiority find expression in xenophobic violence wherein marginalised ethnic groups also become the object of attacks (Mabaso 2018, 317–18; also see Madlome 2022, 9). Some kernels of this hypothesis can be found in the second, third, and fourth

hypotheses which have all been adeptly furnished by Patrick Harries (1989), although they have been echoed by other scholars.

The second hypothesis largely credits this discrimination to the notion that the Tsonga-Shangaan were, unlike other ethnic groups, not a product of a proud warrior tradition, nor did they have a paramount chief, factors that would have ostensibly worked to cast them as "weak" and "inferior" from the standpoint of other groups in the Transvaal. Furthermore, being without a paramount chief, the Tsonga-Shangaan would have been largely overlooked by the apartheid government when allocating land to South Africa's black population groups, thus damning them to an itinerant existence among other ethnic groups wherein they would have been stigmatised. For instance, Harries (1989) writes that:

> Tsonga-speakers were not the product of a military tradition and had no paramount chief to represent their interests, factors which made them inferior to the more politically centralized ethnic groups in the eyes of many whites and blacks. Consequently, Tsonga-speakers were divided by the Native Affairs Department into administrative districts dominated by Venda or Northern Sotho chiefs, while within the black urban areas they were marginalized as a minority group. (Harries 1989, 101; also see Leibhammer 2007b, 30)

The third hypothesis traces the genesis of Tsonga-Shangaan stigmatisation to the politicised nature of ethnicity in the mining sector in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is because mining compounds were ethnically arranged, while ethnic antagonisms were encouraged by mining bosses who sought to prevent the emergence of a workers' consciousness that would have seen miners agitate for better wages and other amenities.[54] Accordingly, Harries (1989) quotes a 1913 Chamber of Mines report which stated that, "inter-tribal jealousies have always rendered it possible, in the last resort, to protect Europeans by utilizing one tribe against another" (p. 102). Meanwhile a 1947 Chamber of Mines pamphlet reported similarly that "competition between the tribes is encouraged" (ibid.). It is for this reason, argues Harries (1989), that a Tsonga-Shangaan consciousness developed

[54] Despite their obvious impediment towards a more united front, Lekgoathi (2014, 438) argues that such ethnic based affiliations had some positive benefits for migrants who suddenly found themselves in a hostile environment having to guard against harassment by mine authorities and other migrants.

in the mines as early as the 1850s to deal with the hostile environment engineered by mining bosses (Harries 1989, 102; also see Leibhammer 2007b, 29).

The fourth hypothesis also links the stigmatisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan to the mine migrant labour system in the late nineteenth-century and draws on notions of caste-like categorisation of labourers so that those who did the most demeaning jobs often found themselves at the bottom of a hierarchically-ordered labour system. Against this background, the Tsonga-Shangaan – who mostly immigrated into Transvaal from either war-torn and/or famine-stricken southern Mozambique – are said to have been more desperate for employment, a condition that would have pressed them into more dangerous and low-paying jobs. For instance, Harries (1989) writes that:

> On the mines, 'Shangaans', because of the distance and the impoverished nature of the area from which they came, were prepared to do dangerous and heavy manual labour. (Harries 1989, 102; also see Harries 1981, 40; MacGonagle 2007, 108)

The second and fourth hypotheses can also be found in James Clyde Mitchell's (1956) seminal essay entitled *The Kalela Dance*, in which he writes about inter-ethnic relations on the Central African Copperbelt. Mitchell (1956), albeit not writing about the Tsonga-Shangaan, reported that some groups enjoyed more prestige or reputation relative to others mainly because of their military and/or conquest histories prior to European colonisation (especially in the eyes of their erstwhile subjects), while other groups acquired a diminished status mainly because of the work they undertook within the colonial industrial order. He wrote that:

> […] the military prowess of the Ngoni, Ndebele and Bemba, for example, has no doubt contributed to the general high ranking of these people throughout all the scales. The fact that the Luchazi, Luvale, and Chokwe accept occupations that bring them into contact with human excreta no doubt plays an important part in placing these tribes at the bottom of the scale. (Mitchell 1956, 27–28; also see Siegel 1989, 356–57, 361–62)

The first hypothesis or the notion that the stigmatisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan is a holdover of colonial and/or apartheid structural violence or apartheid state interpellation seems to ignore the fact that the Tsonga-Shangaan – and a few other ethnic minorities – tend to be particularly singled out for stigmatisation. This is to say that the hypothesis leaves us guessing about why the Tsonga-Shangaan

and/or any other ethnic minority should specifically be the focus of this residual enmity. More importantly, this hypothesis implicitly suggests that ethnic conflict is absent in pre-colonial African societies and therefore is an aberration only introduced by colonial settlers whenceforth it propagates itself and is thus reflected in present-day ethnic antagonisms. Furthermore, this view ignores pre-colonial and early colonial histories of internecine violence and undermines the ingenuity of Africans to manage histories of violence (see Chapter 5). For instance, the early days of colonisation saw different groups of Africans aligning themselves with colonists against their African enemies, and vice versa. However, these mutual histories of violence did not necessarily preclude the forging of future alliances among Africans against European settlers. The risings of 1896 and 1897 against the British in Southern Rhodesia are a case in point, giving a clear example of erstwhile enemies – the Shona and the Ndebele – cooperating to foment a rebellion against a common European enemy (see Ranger 1967). Mitchell (1956) elucidates this point in the case of Northern Rhodesia:

> The evidence that we have from Northern Rhodesia is that in certain situations Africans ignore either class differences or tribal differences (or both), and in other situations these differences become significant. I have presented evidence to show that in their opposition to the Europeans, Africans ignore both their 'class' and tribal differences. (Mitchell 1956, 45)

The second hypothesis or the notion that the Tsonga-Shangaan might have been made vulnerable to stigmatisation because they supposedly did not have a proud military tradition prior to colonisation, and/or the notion that they did not have a paramount chieftaincy in the aftermath of colonisation, ignores the fact that such achievements did not always naturally translate into praise. For instance, Mitchell (1956) explains that the Lozi did not enjoy the same status as their Nguni counterparts despite their military exploits (p. 27). Nevertheless, even if this were true, both the Tsonga and the Shangaan – if one insists on this arbitrary distinction – have proud military traditions which precede both the Swazi and Zulu, dating back to the mid-sixteenth century and lasting until the high point of colonisation in the latter part of the nineteenth century (Webster 1986, 614–15).

Of course, Harries (1989) was writing about a paramount chieftaincy in the context of the aftermath of colonisation, a period wherein many chieftaincies – not just those of the Tsonga-Shangaan – had

been either fragmented and/or restructured. Nevertheless, the notion that the Tsonga-Shangaan would have been rendered vulnerable to stigmatisation because they did not have a paramount chief seems especially plausible in light of scholarly assertions that "Tonga" described a "chiefless" or "subject" people (Beach 1980, 158), or a people resident outside the sphere of successive Karanga-Shona states between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (Rennie 1984, 116–18), while later describing a people resident outside the sphere of Gaza and other Nguni polities in the better part of the nineteenth-century (Harries 1989, 85). There also exists ethnographic and historical material which indicate that the institution of kingship was of overriding importance in much of the African continent, where being "chiefless" meant eking out an existence in the disordered regions beyond civilised human society (see Hamilton 1998, 209–14). For instance, David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins (2017), in their exploration of African kingships, write that, "the kingship is a civilizing mission" or that in much of the continent, "it is not civilized to be without a king" (p. 6). While Jill Kelly (2018) comments that, "When individuals or polities pledged their allegiance to a chief or a more powerful chiefdom, they expected protection and order in return. To exist without a chief was to inhabit a world of *ubuzimuzimu*, chaos, and danger" (p. 23). Nevertheless, the Tsonga and the Shangaan both have histories of centralised monarchy. In fact, the Ndwandwe kingdom – of which the Gaza Nguni are an offshoot – is considered to have been among the first polities in south-east Africa to have both a centralised monarchy and a regular army. For example, Phillip Bonner (1982) writes that:

> The notion of total war given expression in the campaigns of the Ndwandwe presupposes a greater degree of permanent military organisation, which the Swazi themselves were subsequently to borrow. The ideological apparatus of kingship was also more fully developed as can be inferred from the Swazi again borrowing from the same source. If this is correct – and it is difficult to say more with the few fragments of information available – then the Ndwandwe may qualify as the most developed northern Nguni state. (Bonner 1982, 23; also see Kelly 2018, 14)

Bonner's (1982) assertion that the Ndwandwe kingdom might have been the most developed northern Nguni state is validated by the fact that virtually all Nguni groups outside of South Africa today are Ndwandwe offshoots. However, to be more specific, Rennie (1984) also commented that the Gaza Nguni brought, among the Karanga-Shona of the south-eastern states, a conception of kingship that

was “highly developed” (pp. 183–84). No doubt those who insist on delineating the Tsonga from the Shangaan will be tempted to attribute these histories to the Gaza Nguni, while holding on to the myth of decentralised Tsonga-speaking clans either ignorant of warfare (see for example Maluleke 2005, 51; Maluleke 2017, 54–55; Mabaso 2018, 319) or introduced to it by their Gaza Nguni overlords, as purported by Henri Junod (1913) in his *Psychic Life*:

> At that time [1820 onwards] a new period begins, owing to the profound disturbance caused by the invasion of the Ngoni army under Manukosi. The costume of men changes. The clans are amalgamated under the Zulu conqueror. The military spirit increases. War, accompanied with blood-shed and all the Zulu apparatus, replaces the skirmishes of former times. (Junod 1913, 538)

However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we can point to the Tembe kingdom as an example of a centralised monarchy among the Tsonga.[55] This is especially true of the Tembe under the capable leadership of King Mabudu kaMangobe (circa 1740–1798), under whose reign the kingdom seems to have reached the height of its power. The Tembe kingdom has, in fact, been credited with having pioneered the mobilisation of young men into the regimental system or *amabutho*, a system later adopted and put to use by some Nguni groups popular among them the Swazi and the Zulu. Interestingly, the Ndwandwe, who are credited with having been the most developed northern Nguni state (as noted above), seem to have been on the guard against Tembe suzerainty in the eighteenth century. For instance, Kelly (2018) writes that, “during the first half of the eighteenth century, the people of Ndwandwe moved from south of Delagoa Bay to the region between the Phongolo and Black Mfolozi rivers … possibly to avoid control by an expanding Tembe kingdom

[55] In fact, in his earlier *The Social Life*, Junod (192) acknowledged and highlighted the extent to which the institution of kingship was an integral part of Tsonga society, quoting some of his informants, he wrote:

“The chief is the Earth, as we have seen. He is the cock by which the country is sustained. (Tobane). Mankhelu adds: ‘He is the bull; without him the cows cannot bring forth. He is the husband; the country without him is like a woman without husband. He is the man of the village. Should a dog bark, if there is no man, nobody will dare to go out of the hut and ascertain the danger that threatens, nobody will have the courage to chase away the hyena. A clan without chief has lost its reason (hungukile). It is dead. Because who will call the army together? There is no army anymore! The chief is our great warrior (nhena), he is our forest where we hide ourselves and from whom we ask for laws. The tinduna cannot proclaim laws’” (Junod 1912, 356).

under Mangobe" (p. 14). Moreover, David Webster (1991) writes that the Thonga under King Mabudu were, "probably the pre-eminent political force in the subcontinent, as neither the Swazi nor the Zulu states had yet been constituted" (p. 247). The Tembe kingdom seems to have come into dominance over parts of south-east Africa due to its positioning in the coastal regions which gave it control over important trade routes, effectively making it a middleman trading state between European merchants and the African communities in the interior (Webster 1986, 618). For instance, Webster (1986) writes that:

> The Thonga were so powerful during the early period that the Portuguese only maintained their trading station at Lourenco Marques at the pleasure of the Thonga, who were content to have them, in order to trade. The Thonga built themselves a deserved reputation as traders and middlemen, controlling the flow of cloth, beads, brass, guns and other European artefacts into the interior, and ivory, skins and cattle in the opposite direction. (Webster 1986, 613–14).

The development of the regimental system among the Thonga which Webster (1986) maintains was used for "hunting, raiding and defence" (p. 626), was probably catalysed by the need to defend these important trade routes. The Swazi and the Zulu only eclipsed the Tembe in the period between 1790–1870, the highlight of this being the rise of the Zulu state under King Shaka between 1816–1828 (Webster 1986, 613). Nevertheless, in the 1820s the Portuguese in Lourenço Marques were still paying tribute to the Tembe kingdom (Webster 1991, 247). For instance, Webster (1991) writes that:

> By 1598 shipwrecked sailors' reports speak of *ancosses* (chiefs) in the region, revealing a higher level of political organisation than before. From then to the late nineteenth century was a time of Thonga dominance. This was followed by an eighty-year period of first Swazi and then Zulu influence in the area, and another lengthy spell of Thonga dominance, from about 1875 to 1950. After that, because the area was administered as part of Zululand, Nguni influence rose again. (Webster 1991, 249)

The Tembe Thonga are not an isolated example since the Hlengwe – albeit less centralised in their political organisation – were similarly a force to be reckoned with. In fact, Rennie (1984) credits them with having catalysed the decline and eventual fall of one the Karanga-Shona states, as well as having pioneered much of the military innovations that later came to be portrayed as peculiarly Nguni (Rennie 1984, 168).

Challenging a historicist reading of ethnic conflict

I am, to an extent, partial to the third hypothesis which traces the stigmatisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan to the politicised nature of ethnicity in the mine migrant labour system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This hypothesis is made more plausible by the fact that the Tsonga-Shangaan formed the bulk of the workforce in the goldmines of the Witwatersrand basin. In fact, John Rennie (1984) wrote that Shangaans acquired a reputation as good underground mineworkers (p. 188), a fact which might explain why the Witwatersrand Labour Association (Wenela) recruited largely among their ranks (see Connor 2003, 95). It can be argued, therefore, that this would have made Shangaans a domineering force in the context of ethnically defined "homeboy" associations, rendering them vulnerable to stigmatisation. (I expand on this argument in Chapter 8). However, my foremost contention is the characterisation of contemporary ethnic conflict as a holdover of colonial and/or apartheid histories, or the framing of these antagonisms as atavistic. In *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Leroy Vail (1989) identified an earlier variant of this hypothesis. He wrote that:

> The most prominent explanation—if only because of its widespread use—is the one that, despite the great frequency with which one encounters it in media coverage of Africa, is plainly the least satisfactory. In effect, this interpretation is a restatement of the old assumption that Africans are by nature 'tribal' people and that 'tribalism' is little more than an irrelevant anachronism, an atavistic residue deriving from the distant past of rural Africa. It should have evaporated with the passage of time, but, inexplicably, something went wrong, and it continues to refuse to obey the laws of social and political change. It thus remains able to motivate Africans to frequent actions of conflict and violence. Ethnic consciousness is, in this view, a form of collective irrationality. (Vail 1989, 2–3; also see James 1990, 34)

Hylton White (2012) identifies a more current variant of this hypothesis in his quest to explain former President Jacob Zuma's 2009 rise to power which was, in the media, largely attributed to a residual Zulu ethnic consciousness or a regression to earlier forms of ethnic expression. White (2012) argues that this hypothesis serves to divert us from the real issues that inform contemporary expressions of ethnicity. He writes that:

> In postcolonial studies, it is an orthodoxy that forms of identification such as ethnicity are legacies inherited from the colonial order of things. From this perspective, the task of thinking is first to locate the forms of colonial life in which such identifications originate, then to trace the complicated relays of rule and response that carry them forward into the postcolonial era. Without for a second disputing that

> ethnicity was intrinsic to the logics of colonial rule, I venture that resorting to this older truth alone serves all too often to divert us from the dynamics grounding ethnic attachment now. (White 2012, 398)

Furthermore, White (2012) explains that although what informed Zuma's popularity was, at least in some parts of KwaZulu Natal, indeed a Zulu ethnic consciousness this had essentially "departed from older lines of ethnic attachment" (p. 399). More importantly, White (2012) alerts us to the importance of examining the contents of specific forms of identification such as "Zuluness" which he argues mean quite different things to their colonial and/or apartheid antecedents (p. 411). In fact, talk of a need to "return to tradition" or the "return to the old ways" which I have also encountered in my research, speak largely to everyday issues rather than to outdated or frozen-in-time colonial constructs.[56] White (2012) elucidates this point:

> […] a radio station from Durban featured talk about the revival of African culture. Aimed as much at urban audiences as rural ones, such calls to return to African ways have become a prominent feature of the national media landscape since the end of apartheid. Whatever debates they spark, in Zululand they come across as nothing like Inkatha's older discourse about traditional authority. Instead of being about chiefs or about submission to customary law, they focus on the most up-to-date components of the structure of feeling: self-discovery, self-forgiveness, self-respect, the power of positive thinking. On the spectrum of South African public culture in 2009 this was much closer to the Oprah show and its local variations than it was to anything Buthelezi had ever said. (White 2012, 419–20)

Based on the reasons laid out above, I hope that I have made a convincing case for why the attribution of what appears to be a stigmatised Tsonga-Shangaan identity to the supposedly enduring logics of colonial and/or apartheid violence is untenable. Nevertheless, and as I have already indicated above, I am in partial agreement with the fourth hypothesis, or the notion that the term "Shangaan" gained currency and acquired its negative associations in the context of the mine migrant labour system in the late nineteenth century. However, this in no way should be taken to suggest that the contemporary use of the term today has anything to do with this historical context. Indeed, to argue to this effect would be to take, at best, a historicist position and, at worst, a primordialist view of the South African

[56] Nolwazi Mkhwanazi (2014) also alerts us to this phenomenon in her research in the townships of Nyanga East and Khayelitsha where it was widely believed that the avoidance of sex talk between children and adults was an "African way of doing things" or reflective of "African culture" whereas in truth this was a modern tradition adopted from Christianity (p. 113).

ethnoscape. It is on these grounds that I propose that the marginal status of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa should be studied as a corollary of emergent processes of stigmatised ethnicisation rather than as a holdover of our colonial and/or apartheid past. I argue that there is value in examining the prevailing stereotypes ascribed to the Tsonga-Shangaan, that this undertaking can reveal insights about those who peddle them and add to our understanding of the raison d'être underpinning processes of othering.

Writing about the Lamba of Zambia, Brian Siegel (1989) has already charted the course in this regard. For instance, he comments that the contents of stereotypes hold and/or can reveal certain truths about group relations (Siegel 1989, 350–51). This is to say that contrary to conventional wisdom, stereotypes might not merely be "inherently irrational and fallacious bits of self-serving gossip about a given social group" but can instead reveal truths about those who are stereotyped and those who do the stereotyping (Siegel 1989, 365).[57] More importantly, Siegel (1989, 365) maintains that we should devote our efforts to the processes underlying the selection of particular stereotypes, investigate their significance to those who peddle them, and interrogate whether they have any basis in fact.

Here the Lamba are a case in point since they were stereotyped as "lazy" and "backward" by Europeans and Africans alike, stereotypes that Siegel (1989) argues reflected the ways in which this stigmatised group responded, or rather resisted, their incorporation into the colonial industrial order (Siegel 1989, 351). While many Africans were engaged in the "struggle for prestige" attained through emulating and attaining, for example, European styles of dress, the Lamba were content living in their villages, paying their taxes and buying manufactured goods with the money they made from their bush and garden produce (Siegel 1989, 357). For instance, in the 1970s, Lamba elders talked about the town as a corrupt place inhabited by people of questionable moral character. As a result, they bragged about

[57] Compare and contrast with Jenkins (1994) who insists that stereotypes tell us about the intentions and/or policies of stereotypers rather than about those who are stereotyped (p. 207). I am more inclined to agree with Siegel (1989) that stereotypes can reveal something about both actors.

having evaded town work, while those who did work in town boasted about having resisted its vices and trappings (Siegel 1989, 357). However, Siegel (1989) argues that by not having successfully adapted to the challenges of colonial industrial life, the Lamba must have appeared as a "weak and backward people" (p. 360). Elisha Atieno-Odhiambo (2002) writes similarly about colonial East Africa where the British delineated the "industrious" Kikuyu from the "indolent" Lou who were reluctant – if not outright resistant – to submit to European labour. For instance, Atieno-Odhiambo (2002) comments that:

> […] the Luo constituted a "tribe" with an autonomous way of life. […] This was a poor, but free, peasantry. "The [District Commissioner] does not close my gate for me," every male Luo homeowner (*won dala*) could proudly assert. (Atieno-Odhiambo 2002, 233)

Peter Geschiere (2009) also writes about the Bakweri of Central Africa who were similarly stereotyped as "indolent" and "apathetic" because of their reluctance to work on German plantations (pp. 57–58). Against this context, Siegel's (1989) insights about how Lamba stereotypes were not merely "uninformed, projective fictions" but revealed certain truths about group relations, in a given historical context, become all the more persuasive (p. 364). Drawing from the literature on gossip and rumour, we might also add that the stigma attached to either the Lamba, Lou and/or Bakweri also served to coerce or discipline them into accepting their envisaged positioning in the colonial industrial order (Zwane 2018).[58] The following section discusses the literature on stigma and explores how stigma functions as a mechanism of acculturation in group relationships.

[58] It should be noted that stereotypes are more a means to an end and do not always reflect real and objective traits of their victims. Siegel (1989) himself qualified his findings, arguing that, "I do not suggest that all stereotypes at all times and in all places are rational factually informed bits of social gossip. Stereotypes, as self-perpetuating, ascriptive mental constructs, are probably used by all peoples everywhere to order and interpret the complexities of social life. As such, they can be either true or false. Here, however, I have demonstrated that there are sound historical reasons why the Lamba acquired their stigmatised reputation" (pp. 365–66).

Stigma and social mobility

The term stigma derives from the Greek genitive *stigmatos* meaning, "to mark with a sharp or pointed object". In antiquity, this was a means of branding a person to indicate that they were either a criminal, slave and/or a traitor so as to mark them off as "ritually polluted" thereby signalling to the rest of society that they were to be ostracised. Today, however, the term is used to connote the shame or disgrace ascribed to a person or persons rather than its literal bodily evidence (Goffman 1963, 11). In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Erving Goffman (1969) delineates stigma into three types, namely: (a) those that have to do with bodily defects; (b) those that allude to a weakness or defect of character, and; (c) those that affect entire groups such as a race, nation, religion, and/or ethnicity (Goffman 1963, 13). Needless to say, the latter type is the object of my focus.

Lerita Coleman (2006) defines stigma as "a response to the dilemma of difference" (p. 141), explaining that "stigma stems from differences" and that "by focusing on differences we actively create stigmas because any attribute or difference is potentially stigmatizable" (p. 143). However, Goffman (2006) puts more emphasis on "normative expectations" or "righteously presented demands" whose transgressions might result in "undesired differentness" (p. 131). Goffman (1963) argues that it is for this reason that one can only feel stigmatised in "mixed contacts" where the presence of others (potential judges) forces the one (the person with a stigma) to put on an act or to be "self-conscious and calculating about the impression he is making" (pp. 22–24).[59] Similarly, Coleman (2006) adds that "it is only when we make comparisons that we can feel different" and/or that "stigmatization or feeling stigmatized is a consequence of social comparison" (p. 142). This suggests that we are stigmatised when we fall short of performing our expected roles, which would make stigma the discrepancy between our authentic identity and the identity of a putatively dominant culture (Goffman 2006, 132). This social expectation aspect makes stigma akin to gossip, at least in its function to discipline

[59] This formulation seems to fit seamlessly with our already adopted theoretical approach that processes of ethnicisation are inherently dialectical (see Jenkins 1994, 204).

individuals into performing their socially expected roles. In fact, Goffman (1963) explains that when stigma is not visible or perceptible it can spread through gossip (pp. 64–66).

More importantly, Goffman (1963) argues that stigma does not refer to particular attributes, but to "a language of relationships" since attributes can be discrediting in one context and accepted as constituting normal behaviour in a different context (p. 12). This also implies that stigma is a value-laden process and often reflects the preferences of the dominant group who decide which attributes are discreditable and which are not (Coleman 2006, 142). These dominant-subordinate(d) relations also imply that stigma can affect one's life chances and can also serve to explain and justify one's lowly socio-economic positioning. Goffman (1963) elucidates this point:

> By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often un-thinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. […] We tend to impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one […]. (Goffman 1963, 14)

Coleman (2006) echoes these sentiments:

> Stigma often results in a special kind of downward mobility. Part of the power of stigmatization lies in the realization that people who are stigmatized or acquire a stigma lose their place in the social hierarchy. Consequently, most people want to ensure that they are counted in the nonstigmatized "majority." This, of course, leads to more stigmatization. (Coleman 2006, 142)

The relevance of these insights for processes of ethnicisation is illustrated by Ronald Cohen (1978) who comments that the most debated aspect of ethnicity is its effect on power differences between groups where membership in either a "dominant" or "minority" group can help or hinder one's access to resources, especially if said resources are scarce (pp. 391–92). Eric Worby (1984) provides a comprehensive formulation for how such processes of stratification might unfold. He explains that relations of property and power between groups mostly demand that people be put into social categories, and that the allocation of persons into said categories be complemented by a process of identity ascription, what we might call *discourses of difference*. From this vantage point, ethnicity becomes a corollary of stratification and discursive practices (Worby 1984, 24–25).

The view that when there is equality between groups then ethnicity becomes less pronounced, while increased disparities between said groups result in its saliency, is a well-entrenched one in the literature and has been demonstrated in both historical and ethnographic writings (see Cohen, 1978, 392). Against this background, acculturation becomes the only practical option for a minority group with diminished access to resources.[60] For instance, writing about stigmatised ethnic groups in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, Elizabeth MacGonagle (2008) comments that:

> Disadvantaged Ndau-speakers who actively challenged their social definitions as the "other" as well as groups who came from the fringes of society, were able to alter their identities to "fit" into an acceptable community within a centralized state. (McGonagle 2008, 45)

Acculturation is therefore achieved when members are successfully incorporated into the dominant culture, and one way this can be achieved – at least in the initial stages – is through the act of "passing" where one "covers up" their identity and conforms to the behavioural norms and customs of a putatively dominant culture. I discuss this phenomenon in detail in the following section.

Passing for "normalcy"

> The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. (Arendt 1994, 115)

> Because of the great rewards in being considered normal, almost all persons who are in a position to pass will do so on some occasion by intent. (Goffman 1963, 94)

Just as Ronald Cohen (1978) defines ethnic identity as a set of "socio-cultural diacritics", Harold Eidheim (1969) also maintains that ethnic identity is defined by a set of "symbols and signs" that are thought to mark off or define separations between groups. The performance of these signs and symbols

[60] Although this model holds true in many respects, Cohen (1978) explains that ethnicity is not merely a corollary of social stratification, that there are in fact instances where ethnic antagonisms can arise despite the absence of real disparities, he writes that: "As we have seen, some interethnic relations are not based on inequities between the groups. Furthermore, ethnicity may be of such positive value to members that lack of stratification and possible incorporation with loss of separate identity can produce counter movements to revive and reverse the cultural distinctiveness being lost" (Cohen 1978, 394–95). Buthelezi (2017 and 2012) also gives us at least two examples of ethnic revival movements among the Ndwandwe and the Buthelezi which are not necessarily undergirded by material differences between ethnic groups.

therefore places an individual into one or another category (p. 48). Consequently, this can be manipulated so that one can, in specific places, perform the appropriate set of signs and symbols that afford them, albeit temporarily, acceptance into specific categories. This phenomenon is what Goffman (1963) has termed "passing" in his seminal *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*.

As a result of the racial stratification of South Africa during the apartheid period, many people attempted, and sometimes succeeded, in passing for a racial category other than the one ascribed to them by the state. For instance, blacks attempted and sometimes succeeded in passing for Coloured, a racial category which proffered relatively better treatment from the government. While Coloureds, in turn, attempted and sometimes succeeded in passing for white, a racial category interpellated by the state as constituting the pinnacle of this racial hierarchy. Zimitri Erasmus (2008) elucidates this point:

> Lived reality defied apartheid's 'pure types', though in the same breath people sometimes resorted to using and manipulating the system of racial classification to pass for 'white' or 'coloured' in order to access the rights and opportunities associated with these legal categories. In general, classification and reclassification had profound and painful consequences for people's everyday lives. Among these were the splitting of families and the renouncing of kin of a darker skin because of fear of exposure. (Erasmus 2008, 172)

In his memoir *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*, Chris van Wyk (2004) explores this phenomenon and its expression through the practice of changing one's patronym to its nearest cognate in the dominant culture, a practice which has a long history among Africans. He writes that:

> The Langrich family is one of many African families that have made their way into a Coloured community, to escape the indignities of the pass laws and stay where job prospects are better, albeit slightly better. A Morewa of Alexandra township moves into Riverlea and becomes Mr Moore. The Ndlovus become the Oliphants – they change their name but still remain the animal with the long trunk. The Setlares become Grootbooms thus retaining their family tree. The McBaines used to be Magubane and the Masekelas are going around as Maskells. The list goes on and on. (Van Wyk 2004, 174–75)

Goffman (1963) elucidates how the process of passing unfolds and explains that stigmatised individuals often go through two "moral careers" or phases of socialisation. The first phase is when they learn the point of view or perspective of those deemed normal and internalise this view of what it means to bear a particular kind of stigma. The second phase is when they learn that they possess a particular stigma and appraise themselves of the consequences of this fact (p. 44). In the last of these

two phases, the individual learns to cope with the stigma, and eventual learns to pass into normalcy (Goffman 1963, 100).

Goffman (1969) further explains that passing can also be a spectrum: beginning with the occasional and unintended acts of passing, to the deliberate and complete passing that he has called "disappearing" (p. 100). However, Goffman (1969) has also argued that the effort put into passing is somewhat unending, that those who pass cannot afford to take for granted what to others are unimportant behavioural routines. This is because new events can always spring up and render one's past cloaking devices obsolete (Goffman 1969, 109). In that vein, passers can end up suffering from what Goffman (1963) has termed "in-deeper-ism", or the phenomenon wherein one gets caught up in an endless spiral of having to further embellish details of his or her lie, to keep from being discovered (p. 104). As a result, Goffman (1963) argues that a person who passes leads a double life. The first is when he or she fears that their tainted past (or the source of stigma in their past) can be uncovered or unearthed, a fact which can only happen when one is in the "disappearance" phase of passing.[61] The second is when the source of the stigma forms part of one's present life, in which case the individual must guard against the potential of his or her being caught in the very act (pp. 96–99). Goffman's (1963) conceptions of double living is temporal, in that the passer lives in fear of the prosect of their past "catching up" with them. There is, however, also a spatial conception of double living, one in which the passer adopts two different identities: one reserved for the group they are passing into and another which they reserve for those who share their stigma.

Harald Eidheim (1969) elucidates this point in his exploration of the stigmatised Sámi people (an ethnic group in Norway who are interpellated as "Lapps"). Eidheim (1969) explains that there are two "spheres of interaction" which the Sámi inhabit: one private, where an individual can stay true to their

[61] Goffman (1963, 99) explains that a person who is passing can always, at any phase, revert to their former identity.

"authentic" identity and another, which is public, where they have to perform and conform to a set criteria of the group they aim to be accepted in, an aspiration that Eidheim (1969) argues is motivated by a desire for social acceptance as well as for upward mobility (p. 45). Eidheim (1969) describes the private sphere thus:

> The Lappish closed sphere coincides with kin and neighborhood relations between Lapps but it also includes relations between non-kin and non-neighbors within the wider district who are known to be Lappish. Lappish language is the code of interaction. Failure to use Lappish in such interaction is sanctioned negatively, except in the case of the youngsters who have little or no command of the language. (Eidheim 1969, 54)

For the Sámi there is an acceptance that they can only be authentic to their identity in the private sphere – that is, in their private homes or in the spaces they have organised where they can share experiences and strategies on how to manage encounters in the public sphere. This is because whenever they enter the public sphere they have to conform to the signs and symbols of the dominant group or risk incurring penalties. Eidheim (1969) elucidates this point:

> One may easily be misled to believe this, but we must realize that an inherent quality of the public sphere is that it gives no scope for Lapps to show behavior which springs from their Lappish identity without great social costs. Such behavior is reserved for closed stages, where the social dangers and defeats that people have been subject to in public encounters are redundantly reviewed and to some extent mended, or at least made temporarily less severe, through the sharing of adversities with other Lapps. (Eidheim 1969, 52)

Eidheim's (1969) conceptualisation of the spatial dynamics of stigma helps us flesh out some of our earlier postulations in the preceding sections about the link between gossip and stigma, especially insofar as these have implications for group identity. For instance, Max Gluckman (1963, 311) argues, among other things, that gossip among members of the same group is a means of ensuring that that group's values are maintained; this, he argues, stems from a drive to keep the group distinct relative to other groups, in other words to preserve its identity. While Richard Jenkins (1994) writes that, "Gossip may serve to mark the boundaries between one ethnic community and another and is one of the most effective ways of policing inter-ethnic sex and friendship relationships" (p. 212).

Eidheim's (1969) conceptualisation of the different "spheres of interaction" therefore serves to further elucidate these aforementioned observations. For instance, when people gossip information is

exchanged within closed circles (or in the private sphere) to strengthen group bonds and enforce conformity. In fact, an invitation to share in gossip is a declaration of trust and confirms one's place in a group, while refusing this invitation is tantamount to a rejection of group membership. For example, Eidheim (1969, 50) writes about the dilemma faced by the Sámi when they encounter other Sámi in the public sphere: if they interact with their brethren this might out them as covert Sámis, while their refusal to join in on these public conversations will in turn harm their standing in the Sámi community.

Similarly, the stigmatised status of the Tsonga-Shangaan has meant that some of their ranks have had to pass when in certain spaces in the country, a phenomenon which has a long history dating back to South Africa's colonial past. For instance, the *Valdezia Bulletin* wrote, in 1934, that part of the reason for its establishment was to engender a sense of pride among the community and thereby prevent frequent acts of passing into other ethnic groups. To this effect, the newspaper's editors commented that, "Too often we hear of people, Shangaans included who, when amongst nations or tribes other than theirs, are afraid of calling themselves after their own tribe. Some even go to the length of changing their names for fear they will be laughed at" (*Valdezia Bulletin*, August 1934 quoted in Harries 1989, 101). Nearly thirty years later, Benson James Masebenza would similarly write *Xihloni* (or "Hedgehog"), a poem in which he laments the tendency of some Tsonga-Shangaan to hide their ethnic heritage when among other groups, accusing them of speaking "foreign" languages, adopting "foreign" surnames, and therefore castigating them as "self-deniers" (Mabaso 2018, 321). Writing more recently, Ximbani Mabaso (2018) insists that some Tsonga-Shangaan continue to "hide" their ethnic heritage, a fact which he argues results in their continual undercounting in national censuses. He writes that:

> The effect of a large number of Vatsonga hiding their identity results in wrong statistics because they are consequently always undercounted. A large number of Vatsonga registered as Coloured and declared their mother tongue as Afrikaans. Some were forcefully branded the nationality of the homeland they found themselves in, with some surname modifications such as Matshebula/ Mathebula/ Mabasa/ Mabaso/ Mavasa/ Mavhasa claiming different ethnic camps […]. The Vatsonga as an ethnic group

> therefore survived assimilation by the Vhavenda, Basotho and AmaZulu, for instance. (Mabaso 2018, 322)

Here Mabaso (2018) seems to assume that the adoption of either a Zulu, Venda, or Sotho cognate for a surname is a one-way process, that only the Tsonga-Shangaan have been amenable to such "outside" influences. However, shifts in patronymic nomenclature entail a process that can go in either direction and tends to define shifting patterns in relations of domination between groups. For instance, a generation of *amaVulandlela* that "shifted" its patronym to its closest Nguni cognate in the period of Gaza Nguni dominance might have been succeeded by a generation that "shifted back" to a putatively Tsonga cognate of their patronym, a move that would have reflected the declining influence of Nguni cultural forms. Similarly, as shown by Webster (1991), among some Tembe Thonga in northern KwaZulu-Natal, the adoption of the putatively Zulu "Mthembu" in the place of the putatively Thonga "Tembe" indicated the rise of Zulu dominance in the Balkanisation era of the 1950s and 1960s where the area was administered as part of Zululand (Webster 1991, 249, 251–52; also see Rennie 1984, 186 for examples of similar shifts).[62] Isak Niehaus (2002) elucidates this point when writing about the Tsonga-Shangaan-dominated Bushbuckridge area of Green Valley, where it was mostly Sotho and Venda clients that were assimilated by their Tsonga-Shangaan patrons. He writes that:

> […] a Shangaan identity was achieved rather than ascribed by birth. At the most basic level, becoming Shangaan involved changing the language one prefers to speak and one's surname. Such changes were easiest in the case of surnames that were not specific to any particular ethnic group. Surnames such as Mnisi, Manzini and Nyathi were recognized as either Swazi or Shangaan; Ndlovu, Tshabalala and Selinda as either Zulu, Swazi, or Shangaan; and Mokena as either North Sotho or South Sotho, Swazi or Shangaan. But surnames were not an immutable barrier to transforming one's identity. Surnames could be changed, legitimately. A Sotho man could adopt the Shangaan equivalent of his clan name. for example, the clan of the Northern Sotho surname Shai is 'elephant' – Tlou in Northen Sotho and Ndlovu in Tsonga. Likewise, the clan of Mohlala is 'buffalo' – Monareng in Northen Sotho and Mhlolo in Tsonga. Children generally adopted the surnames of their father. But they could use their mother's surname if she was not married or if they were raised by her kin. Orphans, too, used the surnames of their carers. (Niehaus 2002, 574)

[62] Admittedly this is a stretch, however we can further speculate that the shift from Tembe to Mthembu might in fact be a reclamation of a "lost" heritage since A. T. Bryant (1964) argues that "Tembe" was originally "Mtembe" having been abridged into Tembe by Europeans. Bryant (1964) compares this "corruption" of the patronym to the corruption of Mabhudu to Maputa by the Portuguese (pp. 104–05).

Furthermore, Isak Niehaus (2002) explains that:

> Some Basotho also preferred to present themselves as Shangaans. This was done to disguise the fact that they or their relatives had been accused of being witches or thieves, because they had been raised by their mother's family, or had discovered that their biological fathers were really Shangaans. Other Basotho who lived among Shangaans in Tsakane preferred to speak Tsonga for the sake of convenience. (Niehaus 2002, 575)

These ethnographic examples serve to reaffirm Goffman's (1963, 12) assertion that stigma relates to a language of relationships rather than the essence of particular attributes. This is purely because a set of attributes that are discredited in one context can be accepted as constituting normal behaviour in a different context.

Reflections

This chapter has discussed a series of hypotheses on the stigmatised status of the Tsonga-Shangaan in post-apartheid South Africa. It argues that the most dominant of these hypotheses subsumes the phenomenon within a discourse about xenophobia and attributes it to a holdover of colonial and apartheid histories. Consequently, this hypothesis "freezes" contemporary ethnic antagonisms to their colonial and apartheid antecedents. However, this standpoint is confounded by literature that demonstrates that Africans have always been able – throughout European colonialism – to transcend parochial forms of ethnic attachment imposed on them by segregationist administrations. Rather than focusing on what is thought to be a holdover of a colonially divided past, this chapter argues that the sources of Tsonga-Shangaan marginalisation in South Africa should be sought in emergent practices of stigmatised ethnicisation. Accordingly, it posits that a focus on ethnic stereotypes can move us beyond what is essentially a historicist reading of contemporary conflict.

Chapter 5 – Atoning for the sins of our forebears: (Pre)colonial genocide, slavery, and trans-ethnic spirits in Nguni and Ndau healing traditions

My mother ran a tuckshop in our yard, there were two buildings: one was our residence and there was another building for the shop. My mother ran the shop while my father worked in a BMW factory in Rosslyn, Pretoria. When my father passed on in 1992, my mother continued on her own running the shop which was soon hit with successive break-ins. One time the thieves broke the window, cut the security bars and entered, mostly taking non-perishables. Another time they came in through the roof, cutting the iron sheets to get in. I remember one day in the early hours of the morning we stood behind her, clutching at her skirt as she stood at our kitchen door shining a torch on the burglars who scattered like cockroaches. My mother finally closed down the shop in 1997. It was only later in my life that I learned that she closed down not only because the theft bankrupted the shop, but also because she saw that the thieves got more brazen with each break in, and she feared that it was only a matter of time before they turned their attention on our house after they finished looting the shop. My mother tells me that the robberies started just before our father passed, when he was bedridden, and increased in intensity after his passing. The criminals (who were known to my mother and us) sought to exploit an opportunity of victimising a husbandless widow with her small children.

It is in this context that I remember my grandmother N'waMboni, a healer who regularly visited us in the late nineties from eMagudu, a village located in eMalayinini in Mpumalanga. She would come and do some "house binding" in our home and also "bind" us as well, making incisions on different parts of our bodies, smearing medicines on the open wounds. Her visits were reassuring because we were by now virtually destitute as my mother was solely reliant on a paltry pension pay-out of R800 per month to feed and clothe us.

My mother has often told me of how my granny, who spoke only Xitsonga, had Ndau and Nguni spirits, and would speak either Ndau or Ngoni during her trances, depending on which spirit was possessing her. It is interesting, and I am purely basing this on conjecture, that the healing gift or curse in my family could be linked to the happenings in the so-called Mfecane wars of the early nineteenth century, the genocides that took place in those days. That the curse of amaNdawu is a way of atoning for those crimes. In a way, this chapter is a way of atoning as much as it is a way of making sense of where I come from. In a Freudian sense or in the way of Kufemba, it is a way of confronting and bringing to light the demons of the past, for witchcraft thrives in the dark. Once the muthi has been dug up it loses its potency.

Introduction

In many African cosmologies, bodies are said to be vessels for the spirit which is eternal: the body dies but the spirit lives on. Through "possession", spirits are able to wear and change bodies much like we, the living, wear and change clothes. This premise presents with several ontological possibilities: (a) that more than one spirit can inhabit or cohabit a body; (b) that spirits of old persons can inhabit young bodies, or that the living can entice spirits to inhabit the bodies of infants (who have not yet formed a personality or spirit) in order to re-member or to corporeally bring the dead back to life; (c) that healers can invite into their own bodies spirits of other persons (witches) or of animals (witch familiars); d) that healers can invite into their own bodies spirits of the dead so that they may speak more directly to the living, and most importantly for my purposes here; (e) that two or more ethnically "different" spirits can inhabit or cohabit one body,[63] causing a person to exist as both culturally familiar and culturally distant, thus blurring the lines and putting into question, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) explain, "the unity of the 'us' and the otherness of the 'other,' and question the radical separation between the two that makes the opposition possible in the first place" (p. 14).

In KwaNdebele those who are "called" to become healers are often possessed by both Nguni and Ndau spirits. In the first instance, a healer is possessed by *idlozi lasekhaya* or a familiar ancestral spirit drawn from within one's own lineage and thus connected by "shared blood". While in the second instance, a healer is possessed by *idlozi lokukhamba* or a wandering or placeless ancestral spirit connected by "bloodshed". This is a phenomenon which, mainly among traditional healers, is traced but not limited, to a series of nineteenth-century conflicts in south-east Africa called *uMfecane* (the

[63] There does not seem to be a limit to how many spirits can inhabit a body, for example, Junod (1913) explains that a neophyte can name as much as ten possessing spirits (p. 445). More interestingly, in the Shona tradition, there are even instances where a "powerful spirit" can possess several mediums at the same time (see Chigumadzi 2018, Chapter 5).

Crushing),[64] where mostly Nguni groups following defeats from the rising Zulu state in present day KwaZulu Natal emigrated northwards and are said to have, in turn, massacred and enslaved disparate groups of mostly East Coast peoples (prominent among them the Ndau).

This bloody history has thus found expression in how, among the Nguni, those initiating to become healers must also initiate for Ndau spirits, who are the displaced and murdered victims of *uMfecane,* who wander about possessing the progeny of their erstwhile persecutors. In turn, neophytes of a Nguni heritage begin their apprenticeship by wandering about unconscious, until they are delivered to an adept who is often of a Ndau heritage, or a medium of a Ndau spirit. The motif of wandering in the wilderness is not unique to KwaNdebele but has been recorded in many classical and contemporary ethnographies on traditional healing, where it constitutes the diviner's quintessential journey to his or her vocation. Here I argue that this motif serves to highlight the dual character of the healer as a person who mediates between the domestic sphere and the wild space beyond settled human society. In KwaNdebele, this dual character or Nguni-Ndau dyad is expressed, as we have established, through the co-habitation – in one human body – of a broad variety of persons, both human and non-human. More importantly, however, I argue that this ontological regime encapsulates *the dialectic of*

[64] Julian Cobbing (1988) contests the use of the term "*uMfecane*", he writes that: "The Mfecane is a tenacious and still-evolving multiple theme in the historiography of the *apartheid* state. Its basic propositions are integral to a white settler, 'Liberal' history which gestated for over a century before Walker coined the term 'mfecane' in 1928. Walker's neologism, meaning 'the crushing', has no root in any African language, but it crudely conveyed the myth of a cataclysmic period of black-on-black destruction in the era of Shaka (roughly 1810–30)" (p. 487, emphasis in original). Nevertheless, the term has entered the everyday historiographic vocabulary of people who live in the descendant communities of those events and is still widely used in the extant literature on the subject. Its use in this chapter and throughout the thesis is therefore in accordance with both popular and scholarly appellation. Furthermore, Cobbing's (1988) polemic which, beyond contesting the use of the term "*uMfecane*", dismissed its historiography as "terra nullius" discourse and/or as an "alibi" for European colonisation and slavery sparked fierce debate among historians which is evidenced by a huge corpus of literature that both critiques and complicate Cobbing's contributions. Among others, the most notable contribution to this debate has been Carolyn Hamilton's edited volume *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*.

autochthony and difference, or how the Self is necessarily structured by the Other or forms and develops through its interactions and connections with the Other.

Spirit possession, which entails "incorporation" or the encoding of cultural memories in the body, has often been contrasted with "inscription" or the recording of memories in books and audio-visual materials. While inscription has been arrogated as the domain of the elites, incorporation has been read as a form of subaltern discourse or counter-memory to text or inscription (Stoller 1994, 341, 369). This framework enables us to challenge the view that knowledge of the "pre-colonial" past is only possible through a written archive, or that knowledge claims about the pre-colonial are always filtered and/or mediated through the lens of European knowledges and their discursive practices.[65] From this vantage position, this chapter makes two arguments. First, it argues that spirit possession works to centre the "indigenous" in historiographic discourse, and not solely as the object of analysis but as a tool of that analysis. Second, it argues that spirit possession is a means of managing and reconciling histories of internecine violence, especially what has been called – in the historiography of south-east Africa – *uMfecane*. This argument helps us transcend a reading of colonial and pre-colonial histories through an atavistic lens that presents Africans as perpetually traumatised and therefore prone to violent action.[66] Instead, we see that Nguni and Ndau healing traditions are a way of mending and/or re-membering the shattered aspects of our history.

[65] However, this is not to say that there are pristine canons of indigenous historiography completely "unblemished" by outside influences. In fact, the approach I take throughout this thesis is that proposed by Carolyn Hamilton (1998) who argues that there is a "dialectic of intertextuality" between Western and indigenous discourses, or that the archive is not solely a European enterprise but has been co-produced by both European and indigenous subjects (pp. 29–30). This, argues Hamilton (1998), unsettles the bifurcation of history into "colonial" and "indigenous" versions, and shows that the archive is varied and was also subject to influences from those it sought to interpellate (pp. 6, 27–28).

[66] The most dominant scholarship on South Africa's pervasive xenophobic violence is what has been termed the "culture of violence" and/or the "inherited culture" thesis which holds that sporadic outbursts of group violence – including everyday occurrences of violent crime – are a holdover of histories of colonial and

The final part of this chapter attempts to build some scaffolding for a theoretical framework that I develop throughout the thesis in engaging with the question of stigmatising and othering practices in post-apartheid South Africa. It proposes, for example, that the Tsonga-Shangaan – whose double-barrel ethnonym encapsulates the Nguni-Ndau dyad mentioned above – have the "double citizenship" of the medium outside his or her morally sanctioned position. It argues that it is this liminal positioning in the social imaginary that has seen them "displaced" from the South African body politic and sequestered to a zone akin to that inhabited, in indigenous folklore, by cannibals, witches, and other misanthropic entities, a zone of *ubuzimuzimu*.

Personhood in indigenous healing traditions

Personhood in African cosmologies is read in ways that are similar to how it is read in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2009) *Cannibal Metaphysics* where, in Amerindian perspectivism, it is thought that mind, far from being the sole property of human beings, is universal, and that what is discrete is the body. It is therefore this "unity of mind and a diversity of bodies" (de Castro 2009, 56) that allows humans to take on the perspective of, or transform into, non-human Others and vice-versa. De Castro (2009) writes that "this is not a simple logical possibility but an ontological potentiality" (p. 57). This is especially easier to understand when we consider that in Amerindian myth, animals proper are only the ancestors of humans who, for some reason, lost their human qualities, at least in the eyes of their lay human kin (de Castro 2009, 155). For instance, in *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*, Davi Kopenawa remarks that:

> In the beginning of time, there was no game in the forest. Only the *yarori* ancestors, who were human beings with animal names, existed. But the forest, which was still very young, soon turned to chaos, and they became other. These animal ancestors began to paint themselves with annatto dye and gradually changed into game. Since then we, humans who came into being after they did, eat them. Yet at first we

apartheid violence. It is my view that this scholarship reads group violence through trauma or a traumatising event in the past which imprints, in the black psyche, an archetype of violence that reproduces itself in the post-apartheid period. Such reading of violence leads either to a perennial search for its sources in the past and/or a search in the psyches of its victims. This chapter aspires to demonstrate that Africans have indigenous institutions for dealing with histories of violence.

> were all part of the same people. The tapirs, the peccaries, and the macaws that we hunt in the forest were once also humans. This is why today we are still the same kind as those to whom we give the name of game. (Kopenawa and Albert 2010, 386).

Among humans, the ability to assume the perspective of non-human others is particularly the province of shamans who, because they "enjoy a kind of double citizenship" between the human and the non-human world, are best positioned to mediate between the two worlds (de Castro 2009, 71; also see Fratkin 2012, 124). For example, de Castro (2009, 152) writes that the shaman "always move[s] from one point of view to another, transform[ing] into an animal in order to transform that animal into a human (and vice versa)". Rane Willerslev (2004), although taking a slightly different theoretical approach to de Castro (2009), provides us with similar examples of these ideas among the Yukaghirs of northeastern Siberia where "persons can take on a variety of forms, of which human beings are only one" and that "humans and animals can move in and out of different species' perspectives by temporarily taking on alien kinds of bodies" (p. 629).

Similarly, in many African cosmologies, humans can "transform" into non-human animals and vice versa. For example, among the Lugbara of Uganda the dead are said to visit their progeny in the guise of non-poisonous small green snakes (Middleton 1963, 97), while the souls of witches are said to appear in the form of usually nocturnal animals, or any other animal especially if it is seen roaming outside its natural habitat (Middleton 1960, 241). Among many of South Africa's indigenous groups certain kinds of snakes are thought to be vessels for the ancestors, and one is best advised not to harm one should they come across it or should it enter their homestead (Theal 1882, 22; Junod 1913, 358–59; Rennie 1984, 176–77). Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the spirits of dead chiefs are thought to enter into lions or are themselves turned into lions (Lan 1985, 32–34). In other cases, humans can literally shape-shift into animals, while animals can behave in ways that uncannily resemble how a human being behaves. The latter happens when dead ancestors are transformed, as we have seen, into animals, or when living humans are enchanted while still living so that they may assume, after their deaths, any animal form they fancy (Werner 1933, 192; Lan 1985, 34, 160).

However, animals – or rather their spirits – can also enter into or assume human form. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the spirits of hyenas called *shave* can possess a human being who henceforth becomes a witch and passes on the curse to their progeny (Lan 1985, 36). In fact, among some indigenous groups of South Africa, certain animals are considered to have souls. These include, among others, the elephant, the hippopotamus, and certain species of the antelope such as the eland and the kudu (Junod 1913, 59; Kuper 1987, 183). This is evidenced by the belief that should one kill any such animal without taking the necessary ritual precautions – as one does before and/or after killing a fellow human being – he or she may find themselves haunted (Junod 1912, 372; Junod 1913, 57–59, 62, 344–45). This may have its roots in similar beliefs to Amerindian perspectivism, that animals were once human beings who, for one reason or another, lost their humanity (Junod 1913, 321; Werner 1933, 25). And much like in Amerindian perspectivism, a hunter can transform himself into "a thing of the bush" and while in this guise approach and kill their unwary prey with much ease (Junod 1913, 57, 59, 61–62, 322). However, the "double citizenship" of traditional healers is much more apparent in Nguni and Ndau healing traditions where two or more ethnically "different" spirits inhabit or cohabit one human body causing a healer to be both cultural familiar and culturally distant, thus blurring the lines between "Self" and "Other".

The Nguni-Ndau dyad in former KwaNdebele

In KwaNdebele one would be hard-pressed to find a healer who is not trained in both Nguni and Ndau healing traditions.[67] When healing through the Nguni method, a healer is drawing from their lineage

[67] This is hardly an exhaustive list of the types and methods of traditional healing found in KwaNdebele. There are others like *isithunywa*, *mngoma-hloko*, and *malopo*, to name but a few, whose full explication is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice to say that *mngoma-hloko* specifically denotes a Nguni ancestor of a Southern Ndebele heritage, while *malopo* denote Sotho-Tswana ancestral spirits (see Niehaus 2002, 571–72; Sikhauli and Niehaus 2007, 172–74). *Isithunywa* (sing., messenger) and *iinthunywa* (pl., messengers), on the other hand, are said to be the spirits of ancestors who, because of Anti-Witcraft Ordinances, could not openly practice as traditional healers and had to hide their medicine bags inside their Bibles, posing as Christian preachers. Or those who altogether could not actualise their calling through *ukuthwasa* and therefore resigned themselves to healing within the rubric of Christian practice (mainly

ancestral spirits who bestow the gift of divination through "bone-casting", whereas in the Ndau method a healer is drawing from foreign ancestral spirits who bestow the gift of divination through mediumship or the channelling of spirits. While the Ndau method is said to be the most powerful or effectual of the two healing modalities, it is nevertheless incurred through a presumption of a "curse" that afflicts the descendants of those whose progenitors are said to have murdered members of the Ndau ethnic group sometime in the past, but more prominently in the nineteenth-century. Traditional healer Mkhulu Msizi explicates this dyad:

> **Mkhulu Msizi**: It is not common that you find a person who initiates for Nguni spirits while they do not have Ndau spirits. This because the Ndau come in because of a history and heritage we share with them going back to the 1800s. A person who must initiate who has a Ndau ancestor and a Nguni ancestor must initiate for both of them. But he cannot begin with the Ndau ancestors, he must begin with the Nguni ancestor. When he finishes with the Nguni ancestors there will be a time when he initiates for Ndau ancestors […]. The Ndau ancestors are ancestors that we are connected with as a result of a number of reasons in our history and heritage. Our forefathers fought with them, or sometimes they fought alongside them. […] Many of them drowned in waters while others died on the mountains.[68]

Traditional healer Gogo Zizwe also makes a similar comment pointing out, as did Mkhulu Msizi above, that the Ndau ancestors must be "fetched" from the river:

> **Gogo Zizwe**: When we talk of Nguni languages, as you also know we talk of amaSwazi, amaNdebele, amaXhosa, and amaZulu. They are four, when we talk of Nguni languages we talk of these four. These are the people who initiate for isiNguni, so when we talk of Mnguni-hloko we mean that they are initiating for the great ancestor Mnguni [the mythical founder of the four groups]. They differ with amaNdawu, these are foreign ancestral spirits, they are not your family ancestors. They are foreign ancestral spirits that were killed by your ancestors in the olden days. So, when your family ancestors awaken in you, foreign spirits also get the opportunity to enter you. The Ndau are very stubborn ancestors, you have to fetch them from the river, if you ignore them they can cause you to become ill and ruin your life.
>
> […]
>
> **Researcher**: So, you say amaNdawu were killed by your ancestors…
>
> **Gogo Zizwe**: Yes, they were killed by your ancestors in war, on the mountains. They might have either died on the mountains or they got injured and ran away only to die crossing a river. That is why we have to fetch them from rivers because many of them drowned in rivers.[69]

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using prayer and water). Today those who initiate for the latter spirits practice what appears to be a mixture of African Christian practices and traditional healing methods (for example, using crosses and healing with water in addition to bone-casting and connecting with the ancestors).

[68] Interview with Mkhulu Msizi, KwaMhlanga, 2022.

[69] Interview with Gogo Zizwe, Kwaggafontein, 2022.

The notion of "fetching" Ndau spirits who are said to have drowned while crossing rivers is an interesting one. Veteran traditional healer Gogo Mahlalentabeni explained the significance of rivers when initiating for Ndau spirits, describing them as "connecting vectors" between different countries and cultures:

> **Gogo Mahlalentabeni**: uMndawu is an ancestral spirit of the water, you do their ritual in the water not just anywhere. There are spirts of the mountains, there are spirits of the forest, and there are spirits of water, there are different kinds of spirts, there are spirts of the homestead. So, you find uMndawu in the water, there is nowhere else where you can find uMndawu.
>
> **Researcher**: Why in the water, Gogo?
>
> **Gogo Mahlalentabeni**: It is because rivers join together, a river can start in Zimbabwe and enter into South Africa, pass and connect in Maputo and pass into the ocean – the river is one. So, the river is what connects us to the spirits of these people. So, when we want amaNdawu we go to the water because we believe that the spirits of these outside people you can find them in the river. There is no one who does not use a river, there is no one who does not wash in the river. So, relatives of uMndawu spirit when they wash that side, their spirits and our spirits are able to connect because of the river and we are able to get the name of uMndawu in this way. So, we can get the name of the spirits that is possessing one of us here in this way through the river.[70]

Even more interestingly, Gogo Mahlalentabeni explained that Nguni ancestral spirits sometimes shared similar characteristics with Ndau spirits, stating that this is a consequence of those of our forebearers who left South Africa to fight wars in foreign lands who were murdered and hurriedly buried in mass graves or those who were eaten by wild animals:

> **Gogo Mahlalentabeni**: amaNguni are the ancestral spirits of the homestead. But even the Nguni are different, there are family elders (*abomkhulu*) who went to fight in wars and died there. Say there was a war in nineteenth fiftysomething, one of the last wars, so there were these elders who left for that war, and they never came back. But as *mkhulu* is going to war he was a healer, he had a medicine bag, he was *igedla* or a *sangoma*, they left with him and he never came back. So that is where you find ancestral spirits called Mafelempini [the One who Dies in War], Mahlasela [the One Who Attacks], Magwaza [the One Who Stabs], these are the ancestral spirits that signal the act of warfare or killing. These ones are different, these ones are the ones that cause you to become ill. You find that one person has become very thin, another has a stabbing feeling in the stomach where the family elder was stabbed. So, when you do rituals for this person they emerge differently to the Nguni spirits who died here at home. There are these Ngunis who died at home and had their eyes closed, we buried them and gave them all respect including slaughtering a beast for them and told them that they should rest. That one has not had these rituals done for them, they have been buried one on top of the other during war, or they were eaten by animals. […] This is where there is a connection with amaNdawu, where we seem to do a similar thing because of amaNguni who died away in war.[71]

[70] Interview with Gogo Mahlalentabeni, KwaMhlanga, 2022.

[71] Interview with Gogo Mahlalentabeni, KwaMhlanga, 2022.

Nevertheless, pacifying Nguni spirits who died away from home during wartimes is relatively easier compared to pacifying Ndau spirits who were killed by one's progenitors. This is because while one might already know the names and customs of their lineage ancestral spirits, they would not necessarily know the names and customs of a Ndau spirit requiring them to place themselves under the tutelage of an adept of a Ndau heritage and/or one who has been trained in the Ndau healing tradition, and vice versa. With regards the latter, this means that those among the Ndau whose progenitors murdered Nguni soldiers who invaded them, have to initiate for Nguni ancestral sprits and seek out adepts of a Nguni heritage. (I return to this point below.)

Beyond reconciling wartime inter-ethnic violence as discussed above, the Nguni-Ndau dyad also serves to reconcile cases of mistreatment of clients or ethnic others in individual family homesteads. For instance, it might help a family deal with the abuse or murder of a client who, despite their service to the family, were never paid what was due to them or were killed and buried away from their kin. Their awakening as a possessing ancestral spirit demands their proper incorporation into the network of lineage ancestral spirits, while also forcing their abusers – or their progeny – to be versed in their "foreign" traditions. Traditional healer Bheki Mathibela gave an example of this, arguing that "even" whites were now initiating to atone for past abuses towards black people:

> **Bheki Mathibela**: We have amaNguni who go to initiate because of the family members, it's a calling within a family. *IsiNdawu* is when a person goes to initiate because of prior abuse that led to death. For instance, nowadays we have white people who initiate and people get surprised that a white person is initiating. This may be because during apartheid when white people were killing black people, they may have killed someone with a calling, then the spirit is transferred to the murderer. There are however possibilities that the spirit will not occur with the murderer it may haunt the descendants. It is the same with us initiating for Zimbabwean spirits or abaNdawu, this thing about xenophobia doesn't start today it was there even back then. You find that some people came from Zimbabwe or Malawi to this country, when you come here to me you find that I am working with people ['working with people' denotes a healer or the practice of healing people] and you also came because you have some experience working with herbs and then we work together. I then promise you a cow, because back then people paid each other with cattle, or that I will give one of my daughters to you to take as a wife when she comes of age. When [the time has come and] I now have to give you the grown child or the cow I no longer do so. Then me and my family decide that we must remove you, you are a problem. Okay, now we have killed and buried you and your family doesn't even know, your spirit remains here with us. So, you will wake up to

> haunt our descendants. When you awaken you no longer do so in your family but do so here because you were killed here.[72]

While in other cases, this dyad serves to awaken people to their own alterity or the porousness of their own identities. This was especially apparent in my conversation with Godfrey Mabasa, a Xitsonga-speaking Shangaan man from KwaMhlanga, who explained that those among his kin who have a healing gift, seem to be possessed by lineage ancestral spirits who are Zulu-speaking:

> **Researcher**: This Mabasa surname, is it not a Zulu surname, because I have met people who say the Mabasas are Zulus?
>
> **Godfrey Mabasa**: The Mabasas are Zulus, but I am a Tsonga Mabasa [..].
>
> **Researcher**: How so?
>
> **Godfrey Mabasa**: […] If you look at it, my father they called him Mbazima, my grandfather was called Gezani, I don't know why they named him Gezani, you can hear the name, and then his father – my great-grandfather – was Mahamba. You can hear these names; they are Zulu names. […] And another thing I've noticed is that there are people at home who have *amadlozi* [ancestral spirits associated with the healing gift], when their *amadlozi* emerge they speak isiZulu, they will tell you that they are possessed by so and so, and when they speak, they are speaking isiZulu. Then I ask myself that we are Tsongas, why is the person possessing this person speaking isiZulu, then they will tell you that *ixikwembu xa vangoni*,[73] and when they say *ixikwembu xa vangoni* it means it is a Nguni ancestor […].[74]

Nevertheless, even in the above we see that the reconciliation of wartime abuses serves as the most dominant aspect of this dyad since Godfrey apportions his "Zulu" heritage to the "crossing of rivers" and the "wars of Soshangane". In fact, Godfrey's seemingly muddled lineage encapsulates his Tsonga-Shangaan heritage, an identity which has been birth out of a violent amalgamation of the Gaza Nguni with various east coast peoples which is today epitomised by a double-barrel ethnonym. The Nguni-Ndau dyad, especially among the Tsonga-Shangaan, serves to manage and reconcile a past of violent contact and mixing.

[72] Interview with Bheki Mathibela, Phola, 2016.

[73] In Xitsonga orthography, the prefix /xi-/ in *Xikwembu* denotes God while the prefix /swi-/ in *swikwembu* denotes the ancestors. I have used the former appellation without capitalisation to indicate that I am referring to an ancestral spirit, in the singular. I could not use the /swi-/ prefix because it connotes plurality.

[74] Interview with Godfrey Mabasa, kwaMhlanga, 2021.

The Nguni-Ndau dyad as atonement

In South Africa – as I have shown in the introduction – the Nguni-Ndau dyad can be traced back to a series of nineteenth century conflicts called *uMfecane* where several Nguni groups are said to have been responsible for the murder, displacement, and enslavement of disparate groups of east coast peoples, prominent among them the Ndau.[75] Accordingly, those who are possessed by Ndau spirits are generally said to be the descendants of these Nguni groups who share a history of contact and bloodshed with east coast peoples, more especially the descendants of the Gaza Nguni (Junod 1913, 436; Janzen 1992; 37–38; Niehaus 2002, 572; Sikhauli and Niehaus 2007, 171–74). Similarly, in Zimbabwe this dyad can be traced back to invading Gaza Nguni armies who fought against the Ndau sub-group of the Shona in the nineteenth century, and the post-independence political violence of the early to mid-1980s (Perman 2011, 63).[76] In the Mozambican context, Ndau "avenging spirits" are again explicated within a framework of invading Gaza Nguni armies (Junod 1913, 436), and the post-independence political conflict that culminated in the civil war fought by Frelimo (Liberation Front of Mozambique) and the rebel Renamo (Mozambican National Resistance) whose fighters were predominantly drawn from the Ndau ethnic group (Granjo 2013, 218–19).

In South Africa the Nguni-Ndau dyad fosters a degree of solidarity among descendants of erstwhile enemies and therefore serves to manage histories of inter-ethnic violence (also see Ranger 1967; Lan 1985; Rekdal 1999, 468; Niehaus 2002, 572). This is evident in the fact that those who are "called" are sometimes required to traverse space or to cross borders and seek out Ndau ritual adepts who then initiate them, facilitating an exchange in cultural forms. Although some say this cultural knowledge inheres within the neophyte and is therefore not solely the outcome of ritual tutelage. This exchange

[75] It should be noted that the form of slavery practiced by the Gaza and other Nguni groups is not comparable to industrial scale chattel slavery practiced in Europe and the Americas (see Harries 1981; Hughes 2006).

[76] In addition to spirit possession, Diana Jeater (2020, 162) has also shown that post-independence political violence in Zimbabwe is also being managed through *ngozi* rituals which, "bring together victims and perpetrators as joint partners in a reconciliation process".

in cultural forms can be observed in how a single healer will often have, in their possession, all the paraphernalia thought to belong to each of their possessing spirits, regularly alternating between these objects and their associated cultural apparel depending on which spirit is possessing them and/or what method of healing is better suited for a consulting client. For instance, Enos Sikhauli and colleagues (2007) write that:

> […] diversity in form and name of objects may also depend on the multiplicity of spirits that possess individual diviners. A single healer may have a number of outfits, each required by a different spirit who may be Swazi, Zulu, Ndau or other. Each spirit will ask for a specific identifying characteristic to be expressed in the style, patterns and colours of the attire and objects that are associated with it. This makes the assertion of clear-cut boundaries and definitive concepts of identity even more difficult to uphold. (Sikhauli et al. 2007, 175; also see Sikhauli and Niehaus 2007, 174; Nettleton 2007, 133–34; Rennie 1984, 180)

Similarly, Robert Thornton (2009) writes that the claim that one has a Ndau spirit "is not simply a claim to special spiritual access, but is also a claim to an identity and a specific cultural and intellectual heritage" (p. 26). More importantly, however, the alterity of the healer as person who is both familiar and distant works to endear them to their clients who recognise them as "connecting vectors" to unknown regions. In fact, the ability of the healer to affect and/or espouse an identity that is "foreign" to their clientele works to paint them as more effectual. This fetishism of difference is what endears locals to "foreign" healers whose abilities are thought to eclipse those of their autochthonal counterparts.

The fetishism of difference in indigenous healing traditions

In many indigenous healing traditions on the continent, there seems to be a propensity to fetichise that which is not traditional or that which hails from outside the locality under consideration. Because of this, the most effectual healers are often mythologised as itinerant figures who either wandered into society from the disordered outside regions and/or happen to be particularly proficient in establishing and maintaining a rapport with the misanthropic entities that inhere therein. Ole Bjørn Rekdal (1999) gives the example of the Datooga of Tanzania who often seek out Sukuma, Nyaturu, and Iramba healers, and states that this tradition is mutual among these groups who happen to share a recent history of mutual inter-ethnic violence (Rekdal 1999, 459–60). David Lan (1985) shows that among the Shona

of Zimbabwe spirit mediums of the *mhondoro* (or royal ancestral spirits) were usually outsiders who had no known connections with the spirit they claimed was now possessing them. He writes that:

> By contrast one of the characteristics of a medium is that he is a stranger. By convention mediums never belong to or come from the territories that they make their professional home. They are unknown men, possibly dangerous, certainly unpredictable, who wander in from who-knows-where claiming to be possessed by a *mhondoro* who has been profoundly associated with that place for longer that the oldest inhabitant can remember. (Lan 1985, 61)

Similarly, among the Lamba of what was then Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia), the most powerful healers were those possessed by the spirts of chiefs of distant lands, for example, Alice Werner (1933) writes that Lamba healers were mostly possessed by the spirits of Lenje chiefs and "never by the chiefs of their own tribe" (p. 239). While Axel-Ivar Berglund (1972) observed a similar phenomenon among South African traditional healers, that the more ethnically distant a healer was to their client, the more potent their medicines were thought to be. He wrote that:

> Zulu reluctantly and with great hesitation approach non-Zulu diviners, herbalists of another nation have a high reputation. There are people who will go to great inconveniences in order to obtain medicines from Tsonga, Swazi or Sotho herbalists. […] Sotho herbalists operating in Nqutu district admit that they attend to large members of Zulu patients who ignore local herbalists and travel to consult them. Indian practitioners in Stanger claim that many of their patients are Zulu who have, occasionally, said that they approached Asian doctors because they were Indian and not Zulu! (Berglund 1972, 562)

Berglund (1972) thus concluded that, "the popularity of a herbalist increases with distance" (p. 562). Writing similarly about the Mbona religion in Malawi, Richard Werbner (1977) commented that their spirit medium is "usually an immigrant rather than an autochthon" (p. xiii) who attracts a "heterogeneous clientele from diverse ethnic groups" (pp. xv-xvi). While John Rennie (1984) similarly commented that among the Karanga-Shona, "diviners were individual practitioners, who generally lived on their own, and who were called by clients from surrounding villages" (p. 181). It would seem that immigrant healers are attractive because they have – in their arsenal of pharmacopeia – plant and animal medicines not possessed by local healers. For example, Teresa Connor (2003) writes that, "despite charging exorbitant fees, the Mozambican *n'angas* and spirit mediums are well known and held in high regard for their effectiveness, mainly due to their use of medicines not found in South

Africa" (p. 98).[77] Similarly, Natalie Knight (2007) writes that, "Shangaan sangomas are reputed to be amongst the most powerful in the country" (p. 200). However, it can be argued that this status is attained from their conflation with their Mozambican counterparts who are revered for the reasons stated by Connor (2003) above. Nevertheless, apart from the exclusivity of a certain plant and/or animal medicine, it seems that its potency lies not only in its exclusivity, but also in the fact that it originates or comes from a distant land. In fact, there is a large corpus of anthropology literature that shows that the sources of witchcraft are often thought to lie within the family, clan, and/or among one's neighbours (see Middleton 1960, 243–44; Geschiere 1982, 80; Lan 1985, 36–37; Geschiere 2009, 86, 188, 199; Fratkin 2012, 88), a fact which might explain why a cure must by necessity come from a distant place.[78]

Spirit mediums and the politics of resistance in Africa

There are other, more ideological, reasons which render cross-cultural healing traditions attractive to scholars interested in the historiography of African resistance to European colonialism. For example, Rekdal (1999) argues that these healing traditions worked to bridge divides that existed between

[77] However, this can be a double-edged sword since distance can also be equated with witchcraft for similar reasons. For example, Jason Hickel (2014) writes that in Cato Manor, KwaZulu Natal, immigrants are sometimes said to be particularly dangerous because they "bring exotic herbs that South African healers do not know about, and therefore cannot counteract" (p. 111).

[78] An answer to this puzzle lies in indigenous creation myths that hold that in the beginning, earth and sky were conjoined. However, because of humankind's folly the Creator separated them, cutting off humankind's direct access to celestial and/or chthonic entities. Nevertheless, the Creator occasionally sent messengers who by one means or another would climb down from heaven and/or climb up from the underworld to bring aid in times of need. Over time these vertical travels ceased and were followed by the horizontal travels of ancestor-heroes who – since earth and sky still meet at the horizon – wandered into society from distant locales, those places still closest to where earth meets the sky (Helms 1988; also see Junod 1913; Werner 1933; Middleton 1960; Middleton 1963; Ranger 1967; Berglund 1972; Jedrej 1989; Ocaya 1993; Graeber 2017a; Aguilar 2007). Accordingly, the status of a healer as a person who hails from distant locales serves to signal their relative proximity and rapport with celestial and/or chthonic entities. Taken differently, the horizon in which earth and sky meet, is the place in which the complete separation has yet to take full effect and is therefore imbued with residual creative power. Therefore, those who travel to such locales return back into society imbued with this residual power.

varying groups, thus allowing for contact. Nevertheless, this tradition was deliberately overlooked by European explorers, missionaries and colonial administrators for whom such a tradition contradicted the predominant view or narrative of bounded and antagonistic African societies, or what Rekdal (1999) has called the myth of a "tribal mosaic" (p. 464). Furthermore, the project of colonial expansion involved the direct opposite of the reality observed on the ground in that it sought to restrict the movement and connections between different African groups, in particular healers who, as discussed in the previous section, tended to have a large pool of clients from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Rekdal (1999) has thus argued that it is their attractiveness to a cross-cultural clientele which made traditional healers effectual in the millenarian movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in much of the African continent, where they were able to marshal different ethnic groups into more coordinated and formidable anti-colonial resistance movements.

For instance, Terence Ranger (1967), who seems to have pioneered this outlook, writes about the First Chimurenga uprising against the British at the end of the nineteenth century where the priesthood of the Mwari[79] religion and the *mhondoro* spirit mediums were instrumental in fomenting and co-ordinating the risings, bringing together the Shona and the Ndebele who were up until then sworn enemies with a history of mutual bloodshed (also see Ranger 1968). While David Lan (1985) writes similarly about the Second Chimurenga or War of Independence in the mid-1960s where nationalist African elites belonging to the Zimbabwe African National Union (Zanu) and its military wing the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (Zinla) co-operated with the *mhondoro* spirit mediums and the peasants of the Rhodesian countryside to put an end to white minority rule and bring about universal suffrage in that country. What is more interesting is the fact that some of the key *mhondoro* which featured in the First Chimurenga, most notably Nehanda, seemed to have still played a similar role in its second iteration – legitimising the guerillas, recruiting peasants to their cause, and

[79] Also known as Mwari-Mlimo, Mlimo and/or Mwali religion.

bringing into the resistance a wide variety of peoples who resided in the "spiritual realm" overseen by the relevant medium (Lan 1985, 149, 157). Recently, Panashe Chigumadzi (2018) expounds on what she has termed the "Fourth Chimurenga",[80] that is, the removal of President Robert Mugabe from power in late 2017 in a military-backed coup d'état in similar terms. However, while Ranger (1967) and Lan (1985) focus on the "inter-tribal" effect of mediumship on resistance and liberation efforts, Chigumadzi (2018) focuses on its "inter-generational" effect on resistance and/or liberation efforts, or the ability of the spirit to transcend time in its relentless pursuit of liberty.

The Chimurenga movement, in its different iterations, is not an isolated example in the history of the continent's resistance to European rule. John Iliffe (1967) writes about the 1905 Maji Maji rebellion in German East Africa which saw the priesthood of the Kolelo religion work on popular disaffection with European rule (especially around forced labour practices and the collection of hut taxes) to induce people across ethnic divides into open rebellion. Benoni Turyahikayo-Rugyema (1976) writes about the Nyabingi movement (centred on the spirit of a mythical Queen Nyabingi which could possess multiple mediums at time) which informed resistances to Belgian, German, and British rule in parts of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While John Middleton (1963) writes about Yakan religion which fomented the 1918–19 risings against Belgian rule among the Lugbara of Uganda and some ethnic groups in the Congo and the southern Sudan (also see Driberg 1931). Like much of the millenarian movements mentioned above, the Yakan religion was introduced to its adherents by outsiders whose status as strangers served to signal their rapport with and/or control over the entities that inhere in the disordered outside regions.

The dialectic of autochthony and difference

The Nguni-Ndau dyad encapsulates the "double citizenship" of the healer as a person who mediates between the domestic sphere and the disordered regions outside settled human society. In this schema,

[80] The "Third Chimurenga" having been the radical land redistribution of the 2000s.

a consummate cosmological order is one whose coherence is necessarily predicated on maintaining this dialectic. As we have seen, this responsibility is undertaken by healers who, because they serve as mediums for a broad variety of persons, can blur boundaries and therefore act as "connecting vectors" between an ordered human world and the disordered regions beyond. For instance, mediums blur boundaries – and allow for traffic – between the corporeal and the spiritual, the human and non-human, and between autochthons and strangers.

However, mediating between the ordered and disordered regions is not the sole province of mediums, kings are imbued with a similar "double citizenship". For instance, in indigenous oral traditions kings are often mythologised as itinerant figures that either wandered into society from the disordered outside and/or happen to be particularly proficient in establishing and maintaining a rapport with the entities that reside therein for the general good of society. David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins' (2017) *On Kings*,[81] explores the prevalence of what they term "stranger-kingships" in the history of the African continent where kings have either claimed to be outsiders or the descendants of such outsiders, while in other cases native kings have tended to model themselves after foreign monarchs (Sahlins 2017b, 235; Sahlins 2017c, 373). While the subject class is always thought to be the autochthons or the "true" owners of the land, kings have tended to be portrayed as conquerors who entered society from the disordered outside (Sahlins 2017b, 243). To this effect, Graeber and Sahlins (2017) write that:

> The polity is in any case dual: divided between rulers who are foreign by nature—perpetually so, as a necessary condition of their authority—and the underlying autochthonous people, who are the "owners" of the country. The dual constitution is constantly reproduced in narrative and ritual, even as it is continuously enacted in the differential functions, talents, and powers of the ruling aristocracy and the native people. (Graeber and Sahlins 2017, 5)

From this vantage point, the archetypal African kingdom was predicated on what can be termed *the dialectic of autochthony and difference* as a necessary condition for its continued existence. This

[81] Largely drawing from Sahlins' (1981, 1983, 2007, 2014) earlier work on the subject.

dialectic is further demonstrated by the fact that the autochthons, as the putative owners of the land, usually continue to preside over first fruit ceremony rites and by this means ensure the fertility of the land and the general fertility of the nation (Rennie 1984, 175; Kelly 2018, 11). Furthermore, should there be any natural calamity that befalls the (new) inhabitants of the land, only the descendants of these "true" owners can be called upon to propitiate their progenitors and thereby alleviate disaster (Junod 1913, 302). Again, this shatters what Rekdal (1999, 464) has called the myth of a "tribal mosaic" since it demonstrates that "the kingdom is neither an endogenous formation nor does it develop in isolation" (Graeber and Sahlins 2017, 5).

However, more importantly for my purposes, this dialectic shows the ways in which – and the instances when – difference is prized rather than shunned, a point worthy of scholarly interrogation in a country marked by xenophobic violence. Against this background, we must ask: why must the king be estranged from his kingdom? Contrasting E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1948) and Luc de Heusch (1997), Graeber (2017, 70) explains that while Evans-Pritchard made the political argument that the king had to "stand outside" society to "represent society to itself", de Heusch argued, slightly differently, that the king "stands outside" society in order to "represent society before the powers of nature". The latter fact would explain why in many of the accounts, the king or the dynastic founder has tended to not only be a foreigner but also a hunter (Sahlins 2017a, 149). A good example of this trope can be found in Alice Werner's (1933) *Myths and Legends of the Bantu*, where she writes about the legend of Mbega, the Mighty Hunter of Wakilindi (present-day Tanzania) who wandered the countryside clearing it of "noxious beasts". She writes that:

> Now Mbega, though hated by his near kinsmen, was beloved by the rest of the tribe, more especially the young men, whom he took with him on hunting expeditions and taught the use of trained dogs, then a novelty in the country. [...] The land was solerly plagued with wild beasts, which ravaged the flocks and destroyed the crops. We hear most of the swine, which still, in many parts of East Africa, make the cultivator's life a burden to him. Mbega and his band of devoted followers scoured the woods with the dogs, put a stop to the depredations of the animals, and supplied the villagers with meat. [...] He remained at Kilindi for many months, and not only cleared the countryside of noxious beasts, but secured the town by his magic against human and other enemies. He possessed the secret of raising such a thick mist as to render it invisible to any attacking force, and could supply charms to protect men and cattle from lions and leopards. He seems also to have had some skill as a herbalist, for we are told that he healed the sick.

> In these ways, and still more "because he was he," he made himself universally beloved. (Werner 1933, 133–34)

Mbega's travels and feats win him acclaim, he eventually settles in a foreign land and its inhabitants ask him to be their chief, after he accepts he thereafter marries one of the daughters of the autochthons and settles down. His progeny, or rather his grandsons and daughters, those who lose out in the fight for his throne, leave and settle elsewhere and found rival dynasties of their own whose rulers however still legitimate themselves by claiming descent from the legendary stranger-king. John Rennie (1984, 172) gives the example of successive Karanga-Shona kingdoms whose rulers harkened back to the powerful Mwenemutapa kingdom in order to legitimate themselves. What the legend of Mbega does is to condense the features of the *hunter*, the *healer*, and the *king* into one epic narrative. In fact, the hunting vocation, much like that of healers and kings, can be hereditary and entail similar ritual ablutions (such as sexual abstinence), or the inversion of said ablutions through the transgression of moral conventions (Junod 1913, 60). All this is because the hunter – like his cognate vocations – mediates between the homestead and the disordered outside regions. In fact, the *hunter* and sometimes the *warrior* are some of the few tropes that Sahlins (2017a) identifies in the literature on stranger-kingships. Others include the *turbulent prince* or the *troublesome son* who – either through a failed attempt to usurp the throne from his father or by losing out to other pretenders to the throne – has been disinherited and exiled from the kingdom. Here King Dingiswayo and King Shaka make for obvious examples (see Kunene 1979; Golan 1990).[82]

For the prince, the time spent in the wilderness – away from his people and from the comforts of his father's palace – serve to demonstrate his estrangement from his people so that when he comes into the throne he does so as a virtual stranger. His ability to endure the hardships of a hermit's life, and his demonstrated skill in braving the dangers that lurk in the wilderness symbolises either his

[82] Another category is that of *the exploit* who has offended against "kinship and common morality" by either committing incest, parricide, or any other infraction which results in their exile (Sahlins 2017a, 152–53).

rapport with and/or his control over the forces of nature (Sahlins 2017a, 158). Similarly for healers, the seemingly aimless wandering in the wilderness symbolises, at one level, the first attempt to establish a rapport with the non-human forces found there, while at another level, it symbolises the journey to the "disordered regions of the mind" (Douglass 1966, 96). This is because, writes Mary Douglas (1966), "ritual recognises the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. Energy to command and special powers of healing come to those who can abandon rational control for a time" (p. 95). Similarly for the prince, their exile and subsequent wandering in the wilderness allows them to gain a rapport with and/or control over the forces domiciled there. This ability to control the forces of nature is what endears the prince to his would-be subjects who – after witnessing his marvellous feats – make him their sovereign, thereby tasking him with mediating between the realm and the misanthropic forces that lie beyond.

The domestication of difference

In their exploration of stranger-kingships, Graeber and Sahlins (2017) argue that the founding charters of said kingdoms invariably described the coming of an "unruly stranger" who after his conquest is in turn conquered by the subject people who "domesticate" him, tampering his violent nature. At first the king is resisted; however, it is his command of force that renders any violent opposition to him futile, thus necessitating the devising of other stratagems for countering his power. Such stratagems may take the form of marriage rites with one or more of the daughters of the putatively autochthonous population (Sahlins 2017a, 169; Sahlins 2017b, 224). Focusing on the Shona of Zimbabwe, David Lan (1985) provides comprehensive examples of this intricate system, using some of the founding myths of the Korekore. For instance, it is said that:

> Chimombe travelled from the north bank of the Zambezi to the south and made a home in the place from which Nyamapfeka's people had been accustomed to take salt. Nyamapfeka set out to win back this land but a fog came up and Nyamapfeka's people were unable to find their enemies. They devised a new strategy. They sent Nyamapfeka's daughter, Semwa, to seduce Chimombe. She was successful and he married her. One night, after Chimombe had fallen asleep, Semwa cut his throat. Where the blood fell a river formed. Semwa returned to her father who became owner of the salt pans. (Lan 1985, 82)

Lan (1985) provides many more such examples which encapsulate the dialectic of autochthony and difference. He explains that in these Shona myths, the conquerors first begin by succumbing to the power of magic (in other words, the autochthons) and provide the wife who goes on to kill her husband and thereafter return to her father. Thus defeated, the autochthons then end up providing the wife to their conquerors (Lan1985, 84). Lan (1985) argues that the provision of a wife to the conquerors by the autochthons symbolises their provision of fertility to the former – both agricultural and biological – in the form of rain-making magic and the literal perpetuation of the royal lineage (Lan 1985, 87–88; also see Kelly 2018, 18–19).

This formulation also helps explain the prevalence of incest in some foundation myths (for example those of the Lugbara of Uganda, the Lobedu of South Africa, and the Owambo of Namibia, among many others), in that it is a means of subverting the dialectic. For instance, in another Korekore myth, Nebedza succeeds his father and becomes chief only after he has had sex with his sister Nehanda (Lan 1985, 76). Lan (1985) explains that this is a means of usurping the powers of autochthons as the "true" owners of the land to provide fertility to the conquerors. He writes that:

> The "trick" Nebedza plays, more cunning than any dreamed up by the other conquering heroes, is to treat a member of his own lineage as if she were his wife. The result is that the Mutota lineage can supply itself with its own fertility, biological and natural. They neither conquer strangers nor marry them to win the ownership of Dande. It belongs to them by right. (Lan 1985, 88).

Other means of domesticating the king include the installation or coronation rituals (presided over by priests derived from the autochthonous population) marked by performances that depict the symbolic death of the king in the hands of the autochthons, followed by his "rebirth" as a new social being who, although he retains his foreign identity and acquaintance with the wilderness, now uses this power for the benefit of his subjects (Graeber and Sahlins 2017, 7; Graeber 2017, 70; Sahlins 2017a, 171, 185;

Sahlins 2017b, 230).[83] Sahlins (2017a, 171) argues, therefore, that this "conquest" is "reciprocal". He writes that:

> It is a general rule of stranger-king formations that even as the foreign rulers impose their authority on a subjugated native people, they are in turn domesticated in the process. In critical respects, the stranger-kingdom is a system of dual sovereignties in which the immigrant rulers and their indigenous subjects reciprocally encompass one another. Having transformed the country into habitable and productive space in the first place, the native people are already practiced in taming the wild. They do something similar in taking charge of the installation rites of their rulers of foreign derivation—who come out of an uncontrolled outside world with antisocial dispositions as well as beneficial powers. (Sahlins 2017b, 230)

This reciprocal conquest and the extent to which its violation was strictly proscribed is shown in Mazisi Kunene's (1979, 70–71) *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, in a passage that tells of its violation by King Zwide kaLanga:

> Zwide was the king of the Ndwandwes of the Nxumalos.
> He was the son of the frightful Queen Ntombazi.
> In a house set aside for the purpose
> She put the skulls of many famous victims.
> Everywhere along the walls gazed skulls of once-great men.
> There were the heads of Mlotha of Matshalini;
> Of Zayi; of Ngudlubela, the once-famous hero of Nguniland.
> Queen Ntombazi was, like a wizard, feared by her own children.
> It was she who egged Zwide on to interminable battles.
> She made him pursue all victims into their fortresses of stone.
> Never before in Nguniland was known such a disgrace.
> A hideous crime it was to drive people away from their homes!
> The vanquished must be left to reap their own crops;
> They must have their wounds washed by the victor.
> This was sacred law of Nguniland.
> Perchance it was this blasphemy of the Ancestral laws
> That made Zwide rave as if possessed by an uncontrollable force.

Here we are told that the enemy, after his defeat, must never be displaced from their homeland, that they must continue to work it and harvest its produce (presumably sending some to their new masters as tribute). More importantly, we are told that the conquered "must have their wounds washed by the victor" (Kunene 1979, 71). However, Zwide, as we have seen, is said to have parted

[83] Graeber and Sahlins (2017) argue that one way to check the power of the king is to render him divine (i.e., invested with the personality and arbitrary powers of a deity). However, once divine the king ought to be rendered sacred or set apart from his subjects. This virtual isolation of the king thereafter limits his use of arbitrary violence. Graeber and Sahlins (2017) have termed this phenomenon "adverse sacralization" (p. 8).

with these sacred laws. And this does not merely reflect the biases of Zulu court historians, since Philip Bonner (1982) writes similarly that:

> Whereas Dingiswayo incorporated peoples, leaving ruling lineages intact, and merely appropriated oxen for consumption or to exchange for goods from Delagoa Bay, Zwide obliterated his victims' material bases of life. Not only oxen but cattle were seized, fertile river gardens were annexed, and whole populations were forced into flight. (Bonner 1982, 23–24)

Jill Kelly (2018) echoes these sentiments, arguing that Zwide, in his attacks on neighbouring kingdoms, did not seek to incorporate the ruling houses of these kingdoms into his own as vassal chiefs, as it was tradition, but sought to eliminate them altogether (p. 14).

Nevertheless, it is this incorporation of the vanquished that allows the autochthons to then provide a wife, and sometimes even a "prime minister", to the conquerors (as remnants of the defeated Ndwandwe in Nongoma eventually did to their Zulu conquerors), thus "domesticating" them. The domestication of the king transmutes his dangerous power which he derives from the disordered outside regions into something that benefits the common good. In fact, the communal distribution of power attained from distant regions is what separates a king and/or healer from a witch. For example, John Thornton (2003) writes that, "while witches might be found everywhere, they were especially dangerous among those in authority who had abused their power to exploit the people" (p. 282). As a result, continues Thornton (2003), "kings, rulers, and others in political authority were especially vulnerable to such criticism if their public actions were perceived as being rooted in greed" (p. 283). Similarly, Sahlins (2017a) writes that, "access to the metaperson authorities on behalf of others is the fundamental political value" while "access on one's own behalf is usually sorcery" (p. 60).

What has been demonstrated thus far is that there is power in difference hence the need to simulate it, either by kings or traditional healers whose "pretended sojourns" in the wilderness serves to invoke their ostensible rapport with and/or control over the forces that inhere therein. Given the many ways in which it has been shown that difference is fetishised in indigenous cosmologies, the pertinent question to ask is: which forms of difference constitute dangerous power and which are

considered benign or outright beneficial? Difference, as a source of power, must be controlled or domesticated through initiation rituals for healers or coronation rituals or marriage contracts with autochthons for kings. All this culminates in the safe incorporation of difference in the social structure. Therefore difference, when domesticated, results in good outcomes for society – that is to say, it brings civilisation, new technologies, medicines, and so forth. However, difference when untamed – in other words, the failure to reconcile the dialectic – constitutes dangerous power. The extreme version of this is when foreigners or perceived cultural outsiders are homologised with witches or are seen to be especially prone and particularly adept at practicing witchcraft.

Imaginaries of misanthropic zones

In *Terrific Majesty*, Carolyn Hamilton (1998) argues that although Africanist scholars tended to express a lot of scepticism about the tales of cannibalism reported by many European travellers about nineteenth century south-east Africa owing to their prejudices, she maintains that cannibalism was nevertheless felt to be a pervasive threat in much of the region in that period (p. 211). However, Hamilton (1998) explains that the notion of cannibalism (*ubuzimuzimu*) that preoccupied many Africans entailed – unlike the exotic reveries of European travellers – a kind of political philosophy that counterposed the existing moral order within a circumscribed polity helmed by a sovereign with the disorder and/or chaos that existed on its margins. This is to say, argues Hamilton (1998), that cannibalism in this context did not literally describe the practice of anthropophagy but described an imagined existence outside the social and moral order furnished by the king and his administration (Hamilton 1998, 211–12). She writes that:

> "Cannibalism" was the major trope for the representation of social disruption, a state of cattlelessness and extreme famine. "Cannibals" did not live in settlements, but in the bush or in caves. They were bandits who would kill people and eat them and the produce of their gardens. For fear of these marauders, "no one used to travel alone," proclaimed Stuart's informant Jantshi. Not all those who were dislocated were deemed to be cannibals; some were seen as their victims, as refugees who were also prey to wild animals. (Hamilton 1998, 212)

Similarly, in *To Swim with Crocodiles*, Jill Kelly (2018) explains that in the olden days, among the Zulu, the outside space beyond the kingdom constituted a space of *ubuzimuzimu* or chaos and danger,

inhabited by "man-eaters" or cannibals called *amazimu* (p. 23).[84] Of course, in this latter context, *amazimu* were those who did not pledge their loyalty to a sovereign and were because of this deemed to exist in a state of *ubuzimuzimu*. Adam Kuper (1987), in his study of South African indigenous folklore, explains that the cannibals that are often contrasted with humans are in fact witches who have been uncovered or find out as opposed to those who are still the subject of gossip (p. 196).[85] Kuper (1987) explains that in indigenous folktales, cannibals are contrasted with humans who keep domestic animals and cultivate the land, while cannibals are shown to live on both humans and animals as game, and are lazy to work the land and instead subsist by stealing human crops. However, when cannibals do keep animals as pets, these are usually wild animals who, in the human world, are considered witch-familiars (Kuper 1987, 171, 176). For example, the baboon, of which Kuper (1987) writes:

> Baboons visit the fields where woman are cultivating, and offer to take care of their babies, then running off with them. They steal crops and have to be caught with elaborate strategems. Because of their resemblance to men, baboons (and sometimes other apes) may also enter the homestead in disguise (wearing clothes), even – almost – tricking people into marriage. (Kuper 1987, 177; also see Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 280)

More interestingly, Junod (1913) writes that baboons and apes in general "are considered degenerate human beings, who lost the habit of working and of tilling fields, and thus fell into their present miserable condition" (p. 321). A similar explanation is provided for *amazimu* who are thought to have been people who – during the disturbances of *uMfecane* and some of the draughts that occurred during that period – were driven into cannibalism and thereafter refused, even after the hardships had passed, to give up the practice and were thus deemed to have lost their humanity since they regarded their

[84] Also called "*madimo*" in Sotho-Tswana and "*amazimuzimu*" in Southern Ndebele parlance.

[85] Writing about the Shona of Zimbabwe, Lan (1985) comments that "the typical act of witchcraft is cannibalism or, more accurately, necrophagy. Witches kill people, including their own children, or rob graves to find human flesh to eat. They commit incest and adultery. They run about to do their evil deeds naked and at night. They ride on the backs of hyenas. They can transform themselves into hyenas, crocodiles or snakes at will" (pp. 35–36).

fellow human beings as game (Junod 1913, 74, 487; Werner 1933, 172). However, more fascinating is the means by which these "man-eaters" were got rid of, for instance Werner (1933) writes that:

> Those man-eaters who refused to give up the practice when the necessity for it had passed fled to the mountains, pursued by universal execration, and eked out a wretched existence in dens and caves, sallying forth, when occasion offered, to attack lonely travellers. Moshesh, paramount chief of the Basuto, spared no pains in putting an end to these horrors, though he refused to exterminate the criminals, as his councillors advised, provided they would turn from their evil ways. *He gave them cattle, and encouraged them to till the soil, and when that generation had died out cannibalism was a thing of the past*. (Werner 1933, 173, emphasis added)

Kuper (1987) explains that "the tales represent a world in which human society is opposed to, even at war with, a wild animal society" (p. 195). Or put differently, the tales reveal the cosmological clash between the cultivated human world and the wilderness that lies beyond which threatens to encroach on and disrupt or disorder the homestead (Kuper 1987, 178, 191). The fact that cannibals are said to be shapeshifters who, from time to time, take on human form, albeit unable to altogether shed their tails (Junod 1913, 234; Werner 1933, 174) works to emphasise the crossing and/or transgression of boundaries. The fact that they are meant to represent the wilderness – that threat that lies beyond organised human society – is represented by beliefs that they are "infested with lice" (Junod 1913, 234), and have "long, unkept hair" (Werner 1933, 174).[86] Their backwardness, we might also speculate, is also indicated by the fact that they walk in single file (see Werner 1933, 188).

In Kunene's (1979) *Emperor Shaka the Great: A Zulu Epic*, King Shaka is said to have slayed a "forest giant" who obstructed villagers from sowing and reaping their fields. Similarly, in folktales, cannibals are in fact thought to be of great stature, hairy, and overall "beastly" in their appearance and are sometimes said to be possessed of magic (Werner 1933, 172; Kuper 1987, 171).[87] The giant in Kunene's (1979) epic is presented similarly as having an imposing figure whose size is compared to a

[86] This latter quality they share with traditional healers (Werner 1933, 239). In fact, Lan (1985) comments that among the Shona some of the senior healers were those who did not bathe with soap, while others did not bathe altogether, something which Lan (1985) speculates could be attributed to an attempt, on their part, to emphasise their connection with the wild (Lan 1985, 161).

[87] Among the Lugbara of Uganda cannibals were also represented similarly (Middleton 1954; Middleton 1960).

"mountain" while his skin is compared to "ox hide". The slaying of the giant, who we are told, subsists by stealing crops, will allow people to "celebrate their harvests" (pp. 61–63), or the "wild beasts, which ravaged the flocks and destroyed the crops" in the legend of Mbega, the Mighty Hunter of Wakilindi (Werner 1933, 133).

These stories, when read together with those that are current in KwaNdebele, and elsewhere in the country, are particularly suggestive. For instance, the Shangaan, like the cannibals who eat their young, is said to prioritise his produce when confronted with an imminent attack, salvaging his relished groundnuts while abandoning his offspring to the mercy of the enemy. However, in other cases, the Shangaan is revealed to be strongly built, tall, dark skinned and is sometimes said to ride on the back of a crocodile and, like cannibals, walk in single file. In fact, the crocodile along with the hyena regularly feature in the witch's menagerie of familiars (see Junod 1912, 417, 467–68).[88] Lan (1985) argues that this is because "hyenas and crocodiles kill in private, either under cover of night or by dragging their victims under water" (p. 39). Similarly, witches meet in the desert under cover of darkness to devour their human victims (Junod 1913, 462–63), and like *amazimu*, witches are principally thieves, "they steal mostly mealies or the products of the fields" (Junod 1913, 465),[89] sometimes they may merely send one or more of their familiars to destroy the fields/crops out of spite (Junod 1913, 468). When they tire of performing this crime they change human-beings into beasts of burden and put them to work tilling their fields (Junod 1913, 324–25, 470). However, their most

[88] However, there are instances where the crocodile is associated with traditional healers and/or healing (interview with Gogo Khosi-Khosi, Kwaggafontein, 2022), and sometimes with king- and/or queen-ship, for example among the rain queens of the Balobedu queendom.

[89] The homologising of witches with thieves is much more apparent in Rennie's (1984) account about the Karanga between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. He writes that: "Witches (wizards) were believed to eat human flesh, both by capturing people alive and by disinterring corpses. They had owls, lions, leopards and crocodiles as familiars. When detected by the *mwavi* ordeal, which was also used to detect theft and sorcery, they were punished. Persistent thieves, like witches, could be killed, but it was apparently more usual for them to be beaten or driven out of the community" (Rennie 1984, 178).

heinous crime is that of obstructing fertility, enchanting pregnant women into giving birth to snakes or other types of animals (Junod 1913, 471; also see Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 288).

From this vantage point, it can be argued that immigrants and other perceived cultural outsiders have come to substitute the place of *amazimu* and have accordingly been displaced to that chaotic and misanthropic zone beyond the cultural heartland (the place of *ubuzimuzimu*). If home space is a space of habit, of routine, and of the controllable, then the unhomely space "out there" is a place of unrollable forces, a zone possessed of, and inhabited by, all manner of misanthropic virtualities. Bronwyn Harris (2002) has identified this phenomenon in South African newspapers where foreigners are represented as coming from an amorphous space beyond the country. She writes that:

> […] Africa and the foreign African are represented negatively. 'Africa' appears as a homogeneous, undifferentiated place. There is no recognition that this is a large continent comprised of many different interests and nations, including South Africa. Rather, it is seen as 'the troubled north', a vague space marked by wars, woes and poverty. In this way, South Africa is divorced from the rest of the continent. Africa appears as a negative space 'out there', totally separate from the space 'in here'. (Harris 2002, 175)

Similarly, Hashi Tafira (2018) argues that South Africa, in the popular imagination, is thought to exist apart from the continent. That while South Africa is thought to be a modern and industrialised state, the rest of the continent is seen as a backward, chaotic space. He writes that:

> South Africa is construed as some kind of European country: developed, industrialised and laden with opportunities. Some progressives in the township I came across, in polite demeanour, refer to immigrants as "our brothers and sisters from Africa." The mere fact that they come from "Africa", unconsciously and inadvertently overrides this "politeness." As indicated above, Africa is a place where terrible things happen and everything that can be terrible is terrible. (Tafira 2018, 75; also see Mamdani 1996)

Those coming from this chaotic space "out there" have come to assume, in the popular imagination, attributes once ascribed to the witches and/or cannibals of folklore. Here we can draw examples from the work of Jason Hickel (2014) who argues that immigrants in Cato Manor, KwaZulu Natal, are often discussed through a "register of inside/outside distinctions". He writes that:

> Immigrants are often called *abantu abangaphandla*, people of the "outside." This status partially explains their mysterious power. In KwaZulu-Natal, the most powerful witches are said to be foreign ones, for the "outside" registers as simultaneously powerful and dangerous. People rationalize this belief by pointing out that witches from places like Mozambique bring exotic herbs that South African healers do not know about, and therefore cannot counteract. (Hickel 2014, 111)

More importantly, Hickel (2014) explains that these beliefs are rooted in a logic that casts witches as people who "trouble the boundaries between culture and nature" (p. 111). He writes that:

> Witches are said to go about naked (instead of clothed) during the night (instead of day), eat raw meat (instead of cooked), and associate with familiars of ambiguous taxonomy, such as baboons and bush babies, that destabilize the distinction between human and animal. These ideas seem to lie behind the allegations of some Cato Manor residents that immigrants are known to cook and eat human children. These putative acts of cannibalism signal a perceived blurring between human and animal categories; they flag *an excess of nature and a deficit of culture*. (Hickel 2014, 111–12, emphasis added)

What we can discern from Hickel's (2014) work in Cato Manor is what John Middleton (1954, 1960) calls the "inverted" attributes of people who reside outside the bounds of society. This inversion can be either moral and/or physical (Middleton 1954, 195; Middleton 1960, 250). In the former, this could mean things such as engaging in cannibalism, incest, and eating raw, rotten and/or other "bad" meat, while physical inversion can take the form of beings whose bodies are covered in hair, or creatures who are either extremely large or extremely small, among other traits. From this formulation we can infer, onto these beings, a kind of power that accrues to interstitial or "marginal" persons which inheres in the interstices of the social structure, or outside organised or ordered human society (see Douglas 1966, 162).

However, there are other and more mundane explanations for what could be at play. For example, Michael Neocosmos' (2006) *From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners'* furnishes us with one such explanation which centres on South Africa's apartheid spatial planning and the history of the migrant labour system. From this vantage point, citizenship was proffered on urban dwellers and denied to those coming from the rural hinterlands and the territories beyond, whose sojourn in the city only lasted as long as their term of service. He writes:

> The history of this political economy, especially of migrant labour in Southern Africa and its understanding provide the necessary background for a specific conception of 'the nation' associated with African nationalist discourse in South Africa. It is a notion of the nation which is a fundamentally urban one, centred on the cities. As a result it tends to exclude the rural in the 1980s, and eventually transfers this exclusion to the non-South African rural hinterland whence migrants had emanated and where current immigration originates; 'illegal immigrants' in South Africa are implicitly or explicitly seen as coming from the 'backward rural' areas of the continent, or from 'failed states', they are ultimately the same thing: the impoverished Other. (Neocosmos 2006, 16)

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we revert to the preternatural phenomena with which we began our discussion (a fact which proves that the mundane and the mystical are interlinked, or that the mystical is an allegorical means of commenting on the mundane), since those who come from the hinterlands are by and large imagined as "still" practising the "true" traditions and are therefore thought to be more "culturally adept" than those living in urban and peri-urban settlements. This is because those on the margins have always been romanticised as existing in harmony with nature, however the inverse of this schema is its predilection towards "animalising" and "spiritualising" indigeneity (Malkki 1992, 30; also see Appadurai 1988; Daston and Park 1998).[90] We see this predilection to naturalise in the "civilising" rhetoric of colonial discourse where indigenous peoples were often homologised with the "chaotic" natural environment that had to be cleared out to make way for colonial settlement and expansion (Chigumadzi 2018, Chapter 2). This is best exemplified by Australian Aborigines and the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic who were relegated to either "living fossils" and/or fauna and flora in the taxonomic schema of nineteenth century Western science (Sibley 1995, 26; Klein 2022, Chapter 9). The predilection to spiritualise indigenous others is best exemplified – in South Africa today – by the fear directed at mostly Zimbabwean and Mozambiquan immigrant hawkers who are said to be particularly adept at witchcraft. This is a trope that is often extended, among South Africans, to people of a Venda and Tsonga-Shangaan heritage, the two ethnicities are also conflated in popular discourse and interpellated as "Shangaan".

Reflections

This chapter has explored the Nguni-Ndau dyad in South Africa's indigenous healing traditions as a means of managing and reconciling histories of inter-ethnic violence commonly associated with *uMfecane*. It argues that present-day possessions of Nguni mediums – by spirits of a Ndau heritage –

[90] I think here about the province of Limpopo (which has the largest concentration of people of a Tsonga-Shangaan heritage) which is often, in a rather playful manner, represented as existing apart from South Africa, as undeveloped (or stuck in the past), and containing vast swathes of wilderness and therefore viewed as a place of habitation for all manner of misanthropic creatures (i.e., baboons and/or other witch-familiars).

catalyses an exchange in cultural forms and works to foster a culture of tolerance among descendants of erstwhile enemies. This tradition challenges what has become a dominant trend in the scholarship of inter-ethnic violence in post-apartheid South Africa which attributes it to histories of colonial and apartheid violence, a view which has led to a perennial search for the sources of contemporary violence either in a traumatic past and/or in the psyches of ostensibly traumatised Africans. This view undermines the ingenuity of African institutions to manage histories of inter-ethnic violence, often fostering alliances whose very coherence is paradoxically buttressed by said histories (the millenarian movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are a historical testament of this longstanding tradition).

This chapter further situates the Nguni-Ndau dyad within what it has termed *the dialectic of autochthony and difference* in indigenous cosmologies, encapsulated in the folkloric trope of either a healer, a hunter, and/or a stranger-king who wanders into society from the disordered outside regions who – after conquering and/or endearing himself to the autochthons – ushers in a consummate cosmological order. I argue that this trope betrays a cultural ethos which fetishises difference over originality. However, this chapter has also shown how such a cultural ethos can be inverted, giving rise to a culture of intolerance where perceived cultural outsiders are homologised with the misanthropic entities that are thought to inhere outside settled human society. This is best exemplified by the Tsonga-Shangaan who, I argue, have been displaced from the South African body politic and sequestered to a zone akin to that inhabited – in indigenous folklore – by cannibals, witches, and other misanthropic entities (a zone of *ubuzimuzimu*).

Chapter 6 – "*uZimu LiNdebele*": Ethnic pride and national belonging among the Southern Ndebele

It's around half-past 11 on a Saturday morning, 27 March 2021. It's partly cloudy, it looks as though it might rain so I pack up a hoodie in my backpack. Inside the bag there are information sheets, consent forms in three different languages, a hand sanitizer and face masks bought from Clicks pharmacy. I board a taxi in front of Somarobogo Primary School in the Tweefontein-E village (at the cost of R16 per single trip) and I head for the plaza in Kwaggafontein (a village located some 16 kilometres north-east of Tweefontein) where I withdraw some petty cash and board another taxi to Verena (at the cost of R20 per single trip).

I arrive at the rank and consult a queue marshal who quickly points me to the appropriate minibus taxi. Inside the taxi I find a handful of people already waiting to fill the quota. Everyone is wearing a face mask except for one middle-aged woman who has it hanging beneath her chin. The marshal comes and scolds a young girl seated at the backseat, who has removed her face mask to enjoy some pie before we depart for Verana. The marshal angrily shouts, "Even without Covid we don't eat in the taxi!" He then quickly moves away to handle business elsewhere in the rank.

The middle-aged woman, no doubt emboldened by the marshal's absence, complains, "They want to control everything, we are from far, must we not eat?" The marshal returns to deliver some bad news: "Do you all know that electricity will be off from 1[pm] until tomorrow morning at 7[am]?" People exclaim in anger, present company included. Some take out their cell phones and immediately start dialling to warn their friends and relatives. I also worry about how I will contact my research participant, Shagashe Chiloane, an isiNdebele musician and businessman, when I get to Verena if there is no network. I text Shagashe, explaining that should there be an electricity outage at 1 pm I will be at the "Fourways" where he said I should disembark and call him for further directions.

In the meantime, people keep trickling into the taxi and sooner than I had expected the taxi is full and we are ready to leave the rank. The driver comes in and starts the taxi, Big Zulu's hit song "Imali" starts playing and we drive off. A woman seated beside me opens a soft drink but immediately realises her mistake and shyly exclaims, "Eish, ngikhohliwe!" meaning, "Eish, I forgot!" and puts the cap back on and places the drink in her shopping bag. We both laugh.

The drive to Verena is mostly pleasant; it's an open road with tall grasses on either side, while some rocks and trees and one blue-grey mountain can be seen in the distance, which makes for a picturesque

view. The driver switches to Maskandi[91] for the rest of the trip. I get to Verena's "Fourways" where Shagashe said I should disembark and then call him. It is now around half-past one and I try to call him but the call doesn't go through. I check to see that there is no network. So, the queue marshal was right after all (Eskom had said there would be loadshedding in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality area from five to half-past seven in the morning, but this had not happened, so one learns not to trust an entity that fails to keep to its own schedules). Luckily the network returns, as it happens this was momentary power outage (perhaps caused by a glitch in the system) and I am able to get in contact with Shagashe.

I tell him I'm seated outside Galitos, a fast-food eatery situated next to the Verena taxi rank in what looks like a small shopping complex. There is a petrol garage, a tavern where loud music can be heard blasting out, and what looks like a general dealer's shop. Next door there is a Usave Shoprite supermarket. The place looks busy enough with a few cars parked all about, and people seated disparately in small groups, with some walking in and out of the space. Shagashe arrives and we talk for a very long time before we eventually get down to business and begin the interview. We finish just before four o'clock and I board a taxi back home.

The interview was timely because on 25 March 2021, Thando Mahlangu, a Ndebele cultural activist I had interviewed the previous year in 2020, was thrown out of Boulders Mall in Centurion, located less than half an hour's drive south of Pretoria, for donning traditional Ndebele garb. Shagashe thus saw it fit to tell me of a similar experience using Mahlangu's Boulders Mall incident as a reference point. In 2017, Shagashe and two of his business partners, with whom he had formed a music group called the Ndebele Movement, were told by a Metro FM music compiler that the station could not playlist their music because it was "foreign". The compiler had mistaken them, says Shagashe, for the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. An "insult", it would seem, that fed into widespread beliefs that the Southern Ndebele "originate" from Zimbabwe while they themselves insist that though some of their numbers might have indeed "ended up there" they are nevertheless autochthonal to the South African nation-state, an assertion that some Ndebele feel is increasingly being put to doubt.

[91] Maskandi is a subgenre of what has been termed "Zulu folk music", utilising acoustic guitars and concertina instruments. One of its distinguishing features is its isiZulu praise poetry, interspersed between verses, usually extolling the singer's own heroic deeds.

Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele

Batjhwile laba abathi bayazi. (Those who think they know it all have spoken)
Bathi isiNdebele lilimi lehlanzana, (They say isiNdebele is a language for a few)
Bathi amaNdebele alihlanzana. (They say AmaNdebele are a small group)
Nabatjhoko bathi bayazi. (They think that they know)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Batjhiya iMhluzi batjhinge eSoshanguve, (They *'Ndebeles'* leave Mhluzi and settle in Soshanguve)
Batjhuguluke babe BaTswana. (They become Tswana people)
Basuka eMathula batjhinge eSoweto, (They leave Mathula and settle in Soweto)
Batjhuguluke babe BaZulu. (They become Zulu people)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

AmaXhosa ayalithanda isiko labobaba, (Xhosa people love initiation schools -*like Ndebele people*)
Isenzo *tshwenya* sikhona elimini le'Sotho, (The word *tshenya* is found in SeSotho - *like in IsiNdebele*)
BakwaKekana namhlanjesi bathi maPedi, (The Kekana's consider themselves as BaPedi)
Kodwana babelethwa ngithi laba. (But they are from AmaNdebele lineage)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Kuthiwa umlando awunakhasi elingakatlolwa, (They say history has no blank pages)
Kodwana lakwethu ilimi kwakungelekulumo, (But IsiNdebele was a language for speaking only)
Kwakungasilo ilimi lokutlolwa, (It was not a language that was written)
Ngombana lingangelwandle nemilambo. (Because it's huge as oceans and rivers)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Nawukhuluma isiZulu ufumana isiNdebele, (You find isiNdebele when you speak isiZulu)
Nawuthetha isiXhosa ufumana isiNdebele, (You find isiNdebele when you speak isiXhosa)
Nawukhuluma isiSwati ufumana isiNdebele, (You find isiNdebele when you speak isiSwati)
IsiSotho, SePedi ne-Afrikaans yeSewula Afrika inesiNdebele. (SeSotho, SePedi and Afrikaans have IsiNdebele)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

UZimu uMvelinqangi. (God is the beginning)
UMveliqangi wabakhona ngaphambi kwamaNgisi. (God existed before colonisation)
U-Mose wawela wagoduka, (Moses was circumcised)
Ithuna lomufi lenjiwa mhlana abekwako, (The grave of the deceased is dug on burial day –Ndebele ritual as in the Bible)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

I-Ethnogonometry ziimbalo! (Ethnogeometry is mathematics!)
Iimbalo ezinemithungelelo yesiNdebele. (Mathematics with Ndebele patterns)
I-Jabulani yibholo eyararhwa ngeBhegere yePhasi ka-2010, (Jabulani is a soccer ball used for the 2010 football World Cup)
Yayigwalwe imigwalo yesiNdebele, (It was designed with Ndebele patterns)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Gadesi sekunemihlobo embatha iphephethu nerogo, (Nowadays our clothing customs are disrespected).
Sekunamasokana ambatha imitshurhwana, (There are men who wear women's garments)
Bathi izinto ziyatjhuguluka, iye ngiyezwa. (They say things change, yes I understand)
Kodwana lezi zona zitjhugulukela bani? Zitjhugululwa ngubani? (But they change for who? By whom?)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Kubayini bangavezi umjeka ogwalwe isikhethu
Otholakele e-Johanneburg? (Why are they hiding the calabash that was discovered in Johannesburg?)
Kubayini bangatjho bonyana bekuhlala amaNdebele kuleya ndawo? (Why are they not saying that amaNdebele used to live in that place?)
Kubayni bangafuni ukusibuyisela iphasi? (Why are they refusing with our land?)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Boke labo abatjhigamisa isikhethu, (All those who disrespect isiNdebele)
Nalabo ababona imibala yesikhethu njengezulu likaZimu, (And those who view Ndebele colours as heavenly colours)
Ababona isikhethu njengethingo lekosazana, (Those who view isiNdebele as a rainbow)
Basatjho bonyana amaNdebele alihlanzana. (Are still saying AmaNdebele are a small group)
Okutjho bonyana izulu likaZimu ngelehlanzana. (Meaning the heaven is made for a small group)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Mhlamunye irhodlo lezulwini ligwalwe isikhethu, (Maybe the heaven's entrance is painted in Ndebele)
Mhlamunye u-Petru umbatha iporiyana ugida ingadla, (Maybe Petrus wears a Ndebele traditional tie and does a Ndebele dance)
Mhlamunye umkaLoti umbatha umbhalo, idzila neenrholwani, (Maybe Lot's wife wears traditional garments)
Mhlamunye u-Maria ubetha ifengwana ugida *Uwani.* (Maybe Maria, plays Ndebele music instruments and does a Ndebele dance)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Kambe uZimu akathandi ukuzikhukhumeza, (God does not like bragging)
Waziwa ngemisebenzi yakhe kwaphela. (He's known through His work)
AmaNdebele akaziwa ngamehlo, ngombana akazikhukhumezi, (AmaNdebele don't brag, they are not known through the naked eye)
Aziwa ngemisebenzi yawo kwaphela. (They are known for their work)
Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Mhlamunye abezimu ziingelosi zamambala, (Maybe ancestors are authentic angels)
Mhlamunye iinyanga baporofedi besintu, (Maybe traditional healers are traditional prophets)
Mhlamunye ingoma nequde yikuliso yamambala, (Maybe initiation schools are a better life transition)
Mhlamunye ukusabalala kwesiNdebele kusabalala kwakaZimu, (Maybe the spread of isiNdebele is the spread of God)
Mhlamunye ukusabalala kwesiNdebele kusabalala kwakaBaba, (Maybe the spread of isiNdebele is the spread of the Father)

Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele. (Maybe God is Ndebele)

Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele, (Maybe God is Ndebele)
Mhlamunye… (Maybe…)
Mhlamunye uZimu… (Maybe God…)
Mhlamunye uZimu, (Maybe God)
Mhlamunye… uZimu, liNdebele. (Maybe… God, is Ndebele)
UZimu liNdebele, (God is Ndebele)
UZimu liNdebele. (God is Ndebele)
LiNdebele! (He is Ndebele)
UZimu liNdebele. (God is Ndebele)

Bongani Masilela
South Africa, 2020[92]

[92] Poem and translation provided by Bongani Masilela, personal email communication, 16 September 2023.

Introduction

On social networking sites such as X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, one often comes across a repeated expression by some Ndebele that reads, often prefixed with a hashtag, "*uZimu liNdebele*" (which directly translates to "*God is Ndebele*"). In passing this phrase reads, at best, as harmless pride in one's cultural identity and, at worst, as downright ethnic chauvinism. However, after a careful reading of the phrase coupled with its (rather very short) etymology and some bit of Ndebele history, one quickly realises that it has a persecutorial tone to it. For instance, the title of Bongani Masilela's (2020) poem *Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele*,[93] which popularised the neologism, does not state God's ethnic heritage as a fact but puts it as a proposition, in that "*mhlamunye*" directly translates to "possibly" or "perhaps". In his poem, Masilela decries, among other concerns, the dispossession of Ndebele lands, the betrayal of those who deny or hide their Ndebele heritage when they are among other ethnic groups, as well as repudiates the claim that the Ndebele are a numerical minority, while at the same time he states and takes pride in the notion that God's chosen often number in the minority. Masilela thus ends his poem not as he began it, with a proposition, but with an affirmation that indeed *uZimu liNdebele* (*God is Ndebele*), an affirmation that has gained some currency in social media circles.

Similarly, on 1 September 2021, just a year after Masilela's poem came out, the now famous Ndebele cultural activist Thando Mahlangu, in collaboration with several local artists,[94] released his debut song titled "*Vuka Ndebele*" (which can be translated as "*Wake up Ndebele*" or "*Rise up Ndebele*"). The song features some verses that speak to how some Ndebele change their language when they get to the city, or other zones of economic activity, mixing isiNdebele with other people's

[93] "Bongani Masilela – Mhlamunye uZimu liNdebele" Published on YouTube on 02 August 2020 by Channel: Sounds of Bongani Masilela https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urDjoocEB7g Accessed on 11 June 2021.

[94] Namely: Thulibathi, Blessing Christing, Audrey Kozwana, Zodwa Mabena, Mhlokonywa Ka Bungela and MaCasset.

languages, and adopting foreign traditions. Other verses call upon all Ndebele, across the divide,[95] to unite and stake their claim in all sectors of life in South Africa, or risk being overshadowed by other groups. The music video for the song was published on 15 November 2021, on the social media platform YouTube, and features Thando Mahlangu and several of his collaborating artists, mostly dressed in a combination of colourful beads and fabrics either threaded, woven, and/or painted in Ndebele geometric shapes, in a deliberate display of visual indexes of ethnic difference (see Klumpp and Kratz 1993). The backdrop of the set consists of thatched huts beautifully decorated with iconic images of world-renowned Ndebele mural art, interspersed with brush sceneries boasting a few goats gracefully browsing in the background.[96]

Beyond artistic or aesthetic expression, this persecution motif also permeates social and political discourse and is deeply rooted in histories of dispossession and dispersal. For instance, the

[95] In the apartheid taxonomic schema, the Ndebele were delineated into the "Southern Transvaal Ndebele" and the "Northern Transvaal Ndebele". The former were further divided, amongst themselves, into the Ndzundza section ruled by the Mahlangu clan, and the Manala section ruled by the Mabhena clan, with both clans vying for the paramountcy of the entire group, which has since been granted to the Manala section by the 2004 Commission on Traditional Leadership, Disputes and Claims, also known as the "Nhlapho Commission", and upheld in subsequent court battles. Nevertheless, the matter remains "unsettled" in the eyes of many Ndzundza Ndebele who remain convinced that they constitute a distinct group with divergent customs and traditions. The Northern Transvaal Ndebele were also further divided, amongst themselves, into the Kekana, Ledwaba, Langa, and several other sections, also embroiled in their own leadership squabbles. The Southern Transvaal Ndebele would later be apportioned the KwaNdebele homeland, while their Northern brethren were consigned to the Pedi and Tswana homelands of Lebowa and Bophuthatswana. This was because even though the latter were largely considered to be an offshoot of the Southern Ndebele, they were thought to be wholly "Sotho-cised" because of their long contact and/or "miscegenation" with their Pedi and Tswana neighbours (Lekgoathi 2009a). This delineation somewhat persists in the post-apartheid period, although the appellation "Transvaal" has altogether lost currency. Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2009a) provides a comprehensive discussion of these acts of apartheid ethnicisation. Today, however, the Southern Ndebele are, in popular parlance, designated plainly as *amaNdebele*, while their northern brethren are usually called *amaNdebele-* and/or *Matebele-a-Moletlane* and *amaNdebele-* and/or *Matebele-a-Kekana*. The latter appellation is sometimes transliterated as "*amaNdebele wakwaGegana*" by the Southern Ndebele.

[96] Watch: "Vuka Ndebele (official music video)" Published on YouTube on 15 November 2021 by Channel: Thando Mahlangu https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhckGP3Kbg8 Accessed on 15 December 2021.

Ndebele's defeat by commandos of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) in 1883 was followed by the dispossession of their land and their subsequent dispersal and indenture on white farms, beginning a long and arduous period of servitude which lasted until the late 1960s (James 1987, 36–37, 51). This was done deliberately to prevent the Ndebele from regrouping and posing a threat to the ZAR government (Lekgoathi 2013, 36; Phatlane 2001, 64). Nevertheless, some Ndebele did escape and regroup at KwaJejazani (in present day Mpumalanga province, near Stoffberg), with the largest numbers trickling into the area when the South African War (formerly called the Anglo-Boer War) provided some opportunity for more Ndebele to break free from bondage. However, the end of the war in 1902 saw this group once again dispersed onto white farms and had whatever weapons they had accumulated commandeered by the British, who also pressed them to return cattle they had raided from Afrikaner farmers, while the Afrikaners held on to their loot (Delius 1987, 15–16; James 1987, 36).

Again, when the apartheid government was partitioning or Balkanising South Africa into ethnic homelands in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ndebele, along with the Swazi, were initially left out of those plans, nor had they been considered in earlier arrangements through the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936.[97] There thus existed a view, confirmed by historians, that the Ndebele were fated to assimilate into other, more dominant groups, and disappear. Even here, the

[97] It should be noted, however, that the Balkanisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s signalled a marked intensification of segregationist policies than had been seen during the days of the Union government, as the National Party concentrated its efforts into the creation of quasi-independent geopolitical entities, propagandised as "inclusion" and/or "recognition" for each of South Africa's ethnic groups. It is against this background that calls, coming from within each of these ethnic groups, for recognition became more salient, signalling the triumph – at least to a limited extent – of apartheid statecraft. This is evidenced by the Southern Ndebele's increasing calls, in the late 1960s, for a homeland of their own and for an isiNdebele radio station. Other, less obvious, signs of the internalisation of apartheid policies took the form of the commodification of Ndebele identity (see Lekgoathi 2012, 64–71), also expressed as a marker of sovereign self-determination (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 52). It should be stressed, however, that calls for self-determination and the move to commoditise Southern Ndebele cultural forms are processes that are also catalysed by globalisation and are therefore not merely survivals of their apartheid antecedents.

justification given was that the Ndebele were too few to warrant a homeland of their own and instead had to make a home for themselves in the adjacent homelands of Lebowa and Bophuthatswana, respectively earmarked for the Pedi and Tswana ethnic groups in the apartheid taxonomic schema (James 1987, 51; Lekgoathi 2003, 54–55; Lekgoathi 2012, 65; Phatlane 2001, 65; Phatlane 2002, 405).

Furthermore, in 1960 when the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was, through its Radio Bantu programme, establishing vernacular radio stations for virtually all the ethnic groups in the country, the Ndebele were again initially left out, leading to the creation of the Ndebele Ethnic Group (NEG) in 1965, a cultural organisation which rallied around the need to increase the curation of isiNdebele content on Radio Bantu (Lekgoathi 2003, 55; Lekgoathi 2012, 62–65; Nielsen, 1996, 6). These prejudices saw several Ndebele activists (traditional leaders and councillors) come together to petition the apartheid government for an Ndebele homeland, and for the creation or inclusion of an Ndebele station among the constellation of stations in Radio Bantu.[98] These activists feared that their incorporation into other homelands would entail political and economic marginalisation (Lekgoathi 2003, 54–55). A fear that was indeed justified, at least in the case of the homeland of Bophuthatswana where the Ndebele, along with their non-Tswana brethren, experienced persecution in the late 1970s to the early 1980s, being subjected to forced removals from certain areas of the homeland, suffering periodical police raids on their homes, and being denied work seeker permits, among other abuses (James 1987, 52; Laurence 1986, 21–22; Lekgoathi 2003, 59–70).[99]

[98] In *Ximatsatsa: Exploring Genre in Contemporary Tsonga Popular Music*, Ignatia Madalane (2011) writes similarly about the Tsonga-Shangaan who were only allocated a Xitsonga radio station six years after the inception of the apartheid's government Radio Bantu programme, which initially catered for isiZulu, isiXhosa, and the Sotho-Tswana language group (pp. 2–3). Madalane (2011) argues that this situation persists in the post-apartheid period where the public broadcaster or the SABC continues to underrepresent both Xitsonga and TshiVenda content across the different genres (p. 4).

[99] Commenting on the treatment of non-Tswana by the Bophuthatswana government, Patrick Laurence (1986) wrote that: "Accusations of ethnic discrimination were vehemently denied by President Lucas Mangope.

These are concerns that, although under a somewhat different guise, continue to preoccupy the Ndebele today,[100] championed in the main by organisations such as Thando Mahlangu's KwaNdebele Movement which promotes, among other causes, the #WeNeedAmaNdebeleOnTV campaign,

Yet the language used in the National Assembly by his Minister of Land and Rural Development, Mr David Mogale, was nakedly hostile. He spoke of illegal squatters—often used as a synonym for non-Twanas—and the need for effective machinery to 'purge infested areas for once and for all'. In 1985 a special anti-squatting squad was deployed, particularly in the Winterveld. The homeland police rapidly acquired a reputation for brutality and by October last year the area was reported to be 'seething with anger'." (p. 22). However, Deborah James (1987, 52–53) explains that the situation was different for the Northern Ndebele who were living in the homeland of Lebowa which, although earmarked as a homeland for the Pedi "nation", did not mete out the same discriminatory treatment towards the Ndebele as was done in Bophuthatswana.

[100] For instance, the reigning Ndebele monarch King Makhoseke II kaMbongo in his 2021 address at the annual commemoration event of King Silamba, a nineteenth century Manala Ndebele king who led the Ndebele against the ZAR (see Lekgoathi 2013, 36–37), spoke to the marginalisation of the Ndebele in the country, citing among other concerns, the failure of the post-apartheid government to return land stolen from the Ndebele during the wars of dispossession. He explained that this was not a situation that had begun today, but that even when the Tomlinson Commission (that is, the 1950 Commission for the Socioeconomic Development of the Bantu Areas, a somewhat precursor of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 which birthed the homelands system) was going around apportioning land to various black communities, the Ndebele were left out, mainly because, the King argued, whites were well aware that they had a claim to the most valuable of land. He explained that that the Commission could thus not mention the Ndebele without mentioning the land upon which the two cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria are built. Furthermore, the King accused the ANC-led post-apartheid government of an agenda to destroy the Ndebele nation. He referred to the now banned SABC Covid-19 health messaging advert advising people to "wear a mask" and "not be a Mabhena". This is because the surname Mabhena (which is the king's own patronym) has, through chance, come to be colloquially used, in social parlance, to refer to a "foolish" person or a *mampara* following a South African National Defence Force's (SANDF) basic training video wherein a recruit referred to as "mabhena" is seen struggling while the training instructor is heard shouting "Mabhena, please disappoint me again!" and "that Mabhena is just tall and lazy for nothing, *yeses*!" This then led to a social media trend (mostly on X) where people filmed and posted video clips of themselves failing at various tasks. No doubt trying to ride this social media wave for public health purposes, the SABC failed to consider the potential ramifications of their advert which was understandably interpreted as state-sanctioned ethnic prejudice, prompting some Ndebele (including some members of the Manala-Mbhongo royal family) to protest outside the SABC offices on 6 January 2021. See "King Makhosoke ll, address Komjekejeke 2021" Published on You Tube on 8 March 2021 by Channel: Flare FM Stereo https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PGI52oRnAhc Accessed 11 February 2022.

demanding the increase in Ndebele television content on the SABC's channels 1 through to 3. And struggles by a similarly named music group, the Ndebele Movement, whose leaders were behind the #PlayMoreNdebeleContent campaign, bemoaning that Ndebele musicians are not playlisted on some of the country's radio stations,[101] a fact which they attributed to the Ndebele being "mistaken" for their namesakes in Zimbabwe and accordingly castigated as "foreign" to the South African nation-state.[102]

Other struggles are championed by civic organisations such as the Moloto Rail Corridor Concerned Citizens (MRCCC) who call attention to the ostensible economic neglect of KwaNdebele by the ANC-led post-apartheid government, demanding the implementation of the Moloto Development Corridor (a now cancelled R9-34 billion rail system project). These grievances have also given rise to regional parties whose politics are premised on a membered past of "good" homeland governance and an imagined future of sovereign self-determination.[103] While contemporary discourses of colonial dispossession and dispersal have animated a longing for a return to lost ancestral heartlands. This is exemplified by calls made by outfits such as the Ndzundza Top Five Royal Legacy, a cultural

[101] In *From Paul to Penny: The Emergence and Development of Tsonga Disco 1985-1990s*, Ignatia Madalane (2015) writes similarly about Tsonga disco musicians who complain that they are not being playlisted in radio stations other than those designated as Tsonga (p. 172).

[102] These are in the main youth-led movements that leverage mainstream and social media (YouTube, X, Facebook, and WhatsApp, among others) to popularise their message and garner support. In *Re-imagining the Nation*, Nosipho Mngomezulu (2014) argues that young people are often interpellated as "the future in waiting: a liminal position on the way to adulthood" while they are in fact often involved in shaping discourses about national belonging, either by "subverting state forms of identification" and/or "by using new media to uphold conservative communalist views" (pp. 280–81). Similarly, the KwaNdebele Movement, and other organisations of its ilk, are youth-led formations that seem to be on the forefront of shaping and directing discourse on what a Ndebele identity should mean and/or entail in post-apartheid South Africa.

[103] In *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, Tom Nairn (1977) described nationalism as Janus-faced, "simultaneously looking backwards and forwards" (Mngomezulu 2014, 77). This analogy has been used by many commentators to describe ethnicity. This point makes sense when we consider how ethnicity has been defined in much of the literatures as either connoting "common descent" (Weber 1997, 15) or a "commonality of fate" (Hale 2004, 465), suggesting both origins and futurity (also see Young 2004, 7).

organisation fighting for the restoration of the graves of the founder of the Ndzundza Ndebele, King Ndzundza kaMusi and his son and heir King Mrhetjha kaNdzundza, both located in KwaSimkhulu, near Belfast. In their petitions for the restorations of the two graves, those who lead this group state that they are haunted by the dreams of ancient kings who find themselves still inhabiting deserted spaces, or lands whose inhabitants have long since been displaced, leaving the spirits to roam, or wander about, without anyone to tend to their graves.

I argue that all this reveals a move towards a conception of cultural identity that is starkly proprietary, encapsulated by its use as a fungible commodity, or as a token that determines where one can live, work, and derive a livelihood. This is evidenced by the need to "exchange" one's cultural identity while in economic zones dominated by other groups and the call, therefore, for the economic development of one's own homeland where they will be "entitled" to live and work, signalling both the sedentary and segmentary aspirations of insular politics.

Thando Mahlangu and the sartorial "warfare" of identity politics

On 24 March 2021, Thando Mahlangu, a 36-year-old Ndebele activist from the Boekenhouthoek village, posted a video clip on his X social media page showing his confrontation with a Boulders Mall manager in Midrand, Johannesburg, in a Clicks pharmacy. In the short video Thando is seen sporting his trademark porcupine quill and cowhide crown, an uMbhalo blanket,[104] and isiTitirimba (a cowhide "breechcloth"), while the mall manager, Jose Maponyane, is seen sporting a red blazer, a black shirt, and black trousers. In the sartorial "warfare" that followed, Maponyane accused Thando of being dressed "indecently" and instructed staff at Clicks not to sell him anything. Thando and his business partner, Nqobile Masuku, who recorded the incident on her cell phone, charged that it was absurd that he (Thando Mahlangu) could not dress up in African garb in Africa.[105] In some quarters, this incident

[104] A brown-yellow-blue-red-green blanket commonly worn by the Ndebele as part of their traditional garb.

[105] In the comments section there were a few big names who chimed in, expressing their support for Thando Mahlangu and admonishing Jose Maponyane. Among these notables were then Minister of Transport Fikile Mbalula

would later be described as a clash between two Africans – one who embraces his African heritage and another who eschews it in favour of "modern" and/or "Western" cultural forms – a clash ostensibly underpinned by complexes of inferiority and self-hate.

This debacle would win Mahlangu a lot of sympathy among his Ndebele ethnic group who saw in him an advocate to champion the cause to get more recognition for Ndebele cultural forms and for the recognition of the Ndebele as an extant ethnic and/or cultural group in South Africa. In the days that followed, several outfits ranging from national and regional political parties, NGOs, taxi associations, and cultural organisations, made efforts to support Mahlangu offering, in the main, buses and mini-bus taxis to bus in supporters and sympathisers from a wide variety of backgrounds who all descended – in late March and early April – on Boulders Mall to register their support for Mahlangu. The first of these events were organised by the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) who descended on the mall on 25 March 2021, accompanied by various traditional and religious leaders. This cohort of activists held a meeting with mall management to discuss and make demands around issues of "diversity", "inclusion", and "empowerment".[106] This prompted Andrew König, the CEO of Redefine

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and the former Public Protector Thuli Madonsela who tagged the Clicks X social media page asking, "What's up? Any lessons from the last #unconsciousbias debacle?" This was, of course, a call back to Madonsela's comments regarding an advert promoting a Uniliver South Africa hair product called TRESemmé, published in a Clicks website back in September 2020, comparing blonde and African hair, labelling the former as "normal" and the latter as "frizzy and dull". In the ensuing public outcry and social media backlash Madonsela had commented that the advert was not evidence of racism, as many were saying, but rather "unconscious bias". Unsurprisingly, Madonsela drew a lot of criticism for those comments which saw many labelling her an "apologist" for white supremacy. The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) were among Madonsela's harshest critics in this regard. TRESemmé quickly held a meeting with the EFF and other stakeholders, agreeing to their demands, and issued a statement assuring the public that they will be setting a "Diversity and Inclusion Assets Committee" to review their advert campaigns to ensure that they "promote diversity and inclusion". See Unilever South Africa Response on Use of Racist Images https://www.tresemme.com/za/media-statements.html Accessed on 11 December 2021.

[106] About the word "empowerment", Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) write that "in the postcolony, it connotes privileged access to markets, money, and material enrichment. In the case of ethnic groups, it is frankly

Properties (the company that owns Boulders Mall), to issue a statement announcing that Jose Maponyane had been suspended pending a disciplinary hearing, and promising that their centre mangers will, henceforth, be required to submit to "diversity training", and that the company will begin periodical reviews of their internal policies to ensure that they are aligned with those of a "diverse nation".

On 26 March 2021, the now late and erstwhile Chairperson of the National House of Traditional Leaders, Ikosi Sipho Etwell Mahlangu[107] sent out an invitation, through his X social media account, calling on sympathisers to "wear their cultural and traditional attire" and descend on the mall on 28 March 2021, "in support of a campaign to reclaim South Africa, build patriotism and an awareness of the pride of who we are". From here on, the mall ironically became a space to lodge claims around ethnic belonging, self-determination, and empowerment as many Ndebele (and others from a variety of ethnic backgrounds) answered the chief's call and descended on the mall dressed in their varying traditional garb, engaged in jubilant singing and dance. Following this, Mahlangu was quickly interviewed by various media houses. In one of the interviews conducted by Newzroom Afrika, a visibly distressed Mahlangu can be seen sobbing, stating that he dreads the possible disappearance of his Ndebele culture and traditions.[108] The notion of *ukufelela* or *ukutjhabalala* (fading away) is a common refrain among Ndebele activists and expresses anxieties about their continued existence as a group.

On 30 March 2021, Mahlangu was again interviewed by Newzroom Afrika when he was coming out of a meeting with mall management accompanied by traditional leaders from the Ndzundza

associated with finding something essentially their own and theirs alone, something of their essence, to sell" (p. 15).

[107] Son of renowned Prince James Senzangakhona Mahlangu, leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF) affiliated KwaNdebele Youth Congress (KWAYCO) (see Phatlane 2002, 411).

[108] See "Ndebele author and activist, Thando Mahlangu joins Newzroom Afrika's Cathy Mohlahlana" Newzroom Afrika 25 March 2021 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke3uuXZ5ECc&t=424s Accessed on 30 March 2021.

Mabhoko Tribal Council. Responding to the media, who were waiting for the delegation to make a comment, Thando stated that they had submitted a memorandum of demands to the management, including a petition to have Boulders Mall make space for a shop that will sell Ndebele artware. Not missing an opportunity to raise an issue he had been canvassing for some time, Mahlangu raised concerns around the dearth of isiNdebele content on the SABC, arguing that this was an issue that needed urgent fixing. (I expand on this point in the next section.) Sinetjhudu Mtshweni, part of the Ndzundza Mabhoko Tribal Council, spoke after Mahlangu, stating that the area on which the mall is built is Ndebele land, lamenting that there was nothing on site pointing to that heritage and history. He went on to state that the Ndebele demand that the mall be given a name that will reflect this heritage, as well as a name that will serve as a reminder of the incident of "humiliation" that took place there. Mtshweni further commented that:

> [...] What was done by Thando or what was done to Thando, we are not saying it's a good thing, however, it has helped open our eyes that there are still people who do not look at us as human beings when they see us walking around here in the city, perhaps they take us for animals? From today we say that they should appreciate us as fellow human beings. Today we say they should mark that there is a Ndebele nation in South Africa, recognised even by the Constitution of this country![109]

This debacle also saw Mahlangu partner with Aranda Textile Mills, the company that produces the archetypal "Basotho" blankets and the "Ndebele" uMbhalo that Mahlangu is known for defiantly donning, ultimately leading to the design and production of a "Thando Mahlangu blanket" which currently sells for R695 per unit. The Thando Mahlangu-Boulders Mall debacle would go on to be heard by the Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights of Communities (CRL Rights Commission),[110] a Chapter Nine institution,[111] between March and April

[109] See "Thando Mahlangu details his meeting with Boulders shopping center management" Published on YouTube on 30 March 2021 by Channel: Nwszroom Afrika https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvOoWsyO1do Accessed on 30 March 2021.

[110] "Thando Mahlangu | Mall owner appears before CRL Commission" Published on YouTube on 14 April 2021 by Channel: eNCA https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9gkwy5bwlHU Accessed on 14 April 2021.

[111] There are six institutions found in Chapter 9 of the South African Constitution, *viz*: The Public Protector; the South African Human Rights Commission; the Commission for Gender Equality; the Auditor

2021, and saw Maponyane being ordered to apologise to Mahlangu and submit himself to diversity training, while Redefine Properties was similarly ordered to review its policies and furnish their staff with cultural and religious diversity training.[112]

Surprisingly, this was not the first time that Mahlangu had encountered this kind of treatment. Back in 2018 he was thrown out of a Johannesburg Gautrain station for similar reasons, in a confrontation that culminated in a R1,5 million lawsuit.[113] These experiences have nevertheless emboldened his activism, especially his role in the KwaNdebele Movement, a cultural protest organisation behind the #WeNeedAmaNdebeleOnTV on X and other social media platforms. However, the KwaNdebele Movement should not be confused with the Ndebele Movement, an isiNdebele music band formed by Shagashe Chiloane and Mandla Masango who, as it happens, were also the subject of a public scandal a year prior in 2017 when a Metro FM music compiler refused to play one of their songs accusing them, they claim, of being "foreigners".[114] I unravel both the KwaNdebele Movement and the Ndebele Movement stories in the following sections.

"Ndebele music is foreign": the Ndebele Movement saga

The Ndebele Movement, a music band founded by Shagashe Chiloane and Mandla Masango in 2013, produces a genre which the group calls "Ubuntu music", a sound that Chiloane maintains is an

General; the Electoral Commission; and the Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Rights of Communities. All these institutions are set up to protect human rights and to buttress the country's democracy.

[112] "Findings and Recommendations Re: Cultural Violation of the Rights of Mr Thando Mahlangu, the Boulders Mall Incident" Streamed live on Facebook on 29 April 2021 https://fb.watch/5aThgKsLMk/ Accessed on 29 April 2021.

[113] "Gautrain faces a R1.5m lawsuit over Ndebele cultural activist's 'humiliation'" By Sipho Mabena, The Citizen 12 July 2019 https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/courts/2153708/gautrain-faces-r1-5m-lawsuit-over-ndebele-cultural-activists-humiliation/ Accessed on 23 November 2021.

[114] Interview with Shagashe Chiloane, Verena Fourways, 27 March 2021.

ensemble of the *sangoma* drum,[115] Afro-jazz, and a range of other African sounds meant to rekindle a sense of return to traditional values. Within a year of their formation, the Ndebele Movement had produced their debut song titled "*Speperembe*", a song that was well received in Verena, a rural village in the former KwaNdebele, where the group formed. However, it was not until 2016 that the pair started getting some airplay via the SABC's isiNdebele radio station Ikwekwezi FM, with their song "*Utjwala*". This is the same song that would later be rejected by the SABC's Metro FM. Far from being the regional station that Ikwekwezi FM is, Metro FM has a wider and more diverse audience (since it is an English-medium radio station) and would have therefore exposed the band to a national audience. However, after they submitted their song, the group was shunned by the station, prompting them, along with their manager Zodwa Mabena,[116] to request a meeting with station management. Upon meeting Nkosinathi Nthangeni (popularly known as Vj Nutty), the station's music compiler, the band claims that they were told their song could not be playlisted because their music is "foreign",[117] an accusation which led to a confrontation within the station's premises.

Following this confrontation, the Metro FM's Nthangeni asked the group to send in another song which worked to placate the two artists who, along with Mabena, decided to leave the station, consoling themselves that it might have been that the compilers did not like the specific song "*Utjwala*" hoping that they might have better luck with their second offering. However, the group later had an epiphany that when Nthangeni called their music "foreign" he had mistaken them for the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. The group came to this conclusion when eating in a fast-food restaurant in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, where after overhearing a Zimbabwean Ndebele woman speaking what "Sounded like

[115] A percussion instrument usually made from cowhide which is used by traditional healers during cultural ceremonies and healing sessions.

[116] Zodwa Mabena, a musician in her own right, is a 2016 South African Traditional Music Awards (SATMA) winner.

[117] Interview with Shagashe Chiloane, Verena Fourways, 27 March 2021.

isiZulu but was not quite isiZulu",[118] their manager then explained to them that Nthangeni had in fact "confused" them with this Ndebele woman, or more precisely, her kind from Zimbabwe. Chiloane explained to me that he felt "disrespected" by Nthangeni, saying that he had "thrown them in" with Zimbabweans.[119]



Figure 3: A *City Press* street pole ad headlining the Ndebele Movement's claims of discrimination at Metro FM

When some time passed, and the trio realised that they were not going to get any feedback from the station, they decided to approach the *City Press* newspaper, which wrote an exposé with the headline, METRO FM: 'NDEBELE MUSIC IS FOREIGN' (see Figure 3). However, this did not suffice to goad the station into giving the band some airplay, which saw the issue escalating to the highest levels of the SABC with the public broadcaster's spokesperson, Kaizer Kganyago, contending that, "They are lying. We did not reject their music because they are Ndebele. We do not care. Music is judged by quality as well as the criteria our radio stations have".[120] Irrespective of whom you believe, the

[118] Interview with Shagashe Chiloane, Verena Fourways, 27 March 2021.

[119] Interview with Shagashe Chiloane, Verena Fourways, 27 March 2021.

[120] "Radio spat over Ndebele 'foreigners'" Channel24, 12 November 2017 https://shorturl.at/H4o80.

Southern Ndebele – along with a few other ethnic minorities – have indeed been neglected by the SABC relative to putatively dominant groups such as the Zulu and the Xhosa. This continued marginalisation has provoked struggles that mirror those of the 1960s which saw the Ndebele agitate for better representation in the South African media space, a topic to which I now turn.

The KwaNdebele Movement and the fight for the SABC

When the apartheid government established Radio Bantu, the Southern Ndebele (along with their northern brethren) were initially excluded from this plan, and the Ndebele were thus expected to be content with a one-hour *NgezaMandebele* show on Sundays hosted via Radio Zulu (today Ukhozi FM). The demand for more Ndebele content on the SABC's Radio Bantu saw the founding of the Ndebele Ethnic Group (NEG) in 1965 and the Ndebele National Organisation (NNO) in 1967, both advocacy groups established to champion Ndebele demands for more state recognition. These groupings would later merge to form the Transvaal Ndebele National Organisation (TNNO) in November of 1967. Among the leadership and supporters of these organisations were councillors and some Ndebele royals across the divide (from the Ndzundza, Manala, and Kekana sections). Although these groupings initially began with the fight for more Ndebele content on Radio Bantu, they now worked in concert to petition the government for a Ndebele homeland, a goal which they achieved when the Southern Ndebele were apportioned a homeland of their own in 1979, while in 1983 they were able to get their own Radio Ndebele, the precursor to Ikwekwezi FM (Lekgoathi 2012, 66–67; Lekgoathi 2003, 55; Nielsen 1996, 6–7).

In this section, I show that there are continuities in the struggles of the Ndebele to make a place for themselves in the country, and to stake their claim on the country's resources. These new demands centre around the call for more isiNdebele content on SABC's television channels, demands that are also morphing to encompass issues that go beyond mere representation in the national broadcaster, to larger socio-political issues, championed in the main by the KwaNdebele Movement.

On 26 January 2021, the KwaNdebele Movement protested outside the SABC offices in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, amid news that the public broadcaster was planning to phase out the isiNdebele news segment on its Channel 1. This came after there had already been complaints, across social media platforms, that the isiNdebele news segment was given limited airtime compared to other news segments presented in other, more dominant, languages. The KwaNdebele Movement thus demanded that the isiNdebele news segment also be given the 19h00 to 20h00 prime time slot (currently reserved for isiZulu and isiXhosa news), while isiNdebele, isiSwati, Xitsonga, and TshiVenda only occupy the 17h30 to 18h00 slots, respectively, on SABC channels 1 and 2. (According to the Broadcast Research Council of South Africa [BRCSA], the broadcast day is usually delineated into eight dayparts, namely: early morning, mid-to-late morning, lunchtime, early-to-mid afternoon, late afternoon, peak or prime-time, late evening, and night time. These dayparts correspond to a variation in composition and the size of the audience. The prime-time daypart tends to be, across a broad variety of channels, between 19h00 to 21h00, while the late afternoon daypart – sometimes also called early fringe – tends to be between 15h00 to 18h00. It goes without saying that for television, the prime-time slot tends to draw the highest concentration of viewers, making it the most sought-after daypart.)

Specifically, isiNdebele and isiSwati share the 17h30 to 18h00 slot (hereafter referred to as the early fringe time slot and/or early fringe slot) while the prime slot is shared between isiZulu and isiXhosa on SABC Channel 1. For SABC Channel 2, the early fringe time slot is shared between TshiVenda and Xitsonga, while the prime slot is shared between Afrikaans and the Sotho language group (categorised as Setswana, Sesotho, and Sepedi). This has produced some public discord with some claiming that the public broadcaster is giving preferential treatment to isiZulu, isiXhosa, Afrikaans, and the respective Sotho languages.[121] Although the KwaNdebele Movement was eager to

[121] The SABC has since announced, on 9 January 2023, that it will "soon" be launching a 24 -hour "indigenous news" channel, which will cater to all South Africa's 11 official languages. The SABC's Moshoeshoe Monare explained

jump in and defend the place of isiNdebele news on the SABC, their struggle is much larger in that they are advocating for more isiNdebele content on the broadcaster beyond the news segment, demanding a general increase of isiNdebele television content, and the recognition and promotion of Ndebele artists and/or audio-visual content creators.

For instance, on 14 June 2021, Mahlangu published, across his social media pages, an open letter which he addressed to the SABC, the president, and the ruling ANC, petitioning, among a litany of other issues, for an increase in isiNdebele content across the SABC's channels and radio stations. The letter, which was shared and reposted by many sympathisers, makes reference to how Ndebele artists are marginalised in the country – not being given equal airplay and/or playlisted relative to artists from other ethnic groups – and links this marginalisation to the closure, in the early 1990s, of a number of firms in KwaNdebele, and further tying this to an overarching agenda to keep the Ndebele under the yoke of oppression since the ANC took over the reins of government in 1994, purportedly evidenced by the naming of municipalities in the erstwhile territories of the KwaNdebele homeland after freedom fighters who hail from outside said territories. Mahlangu then calls for the Ndebele to vote out the ANC, sloganeering that "*sikhathi sokuziphathela, maNdebele*" ("it's time that we, the Ndebele, take up the reins and govern ourselves"). Interestingly, "*Siyaziphathela*" ("We are governing ourselves") is also the African Independent People's Organization's (AIPO) slogan (see Figure 4),[122] a regional political party headed by Thando Mahlangu's ally and friend, Hotnot Masemola. The letter reads:

> To SABC TV & All it's 18 SABC RADIO STATIONS, ANC and the President of the Country.
> Currently amaNdebele are fighting for IsiNdebele languege to be taught at Schools. Sipho Mahamba in Delmas KwaHlanga is leading the fight. Why should we fight for our languege to be taugh at schools were amaNdebele are situated. Because this got a direct impact in developing our languege and culture.
> SABC celebrated it's 85th birthday and it only had one IsiNdebele TV Drama called Ikani and again the Drama was only 13 part episode. SABC have 18 Radio stations and 17 of the stations are not playlisting music with IsiNdebele languege in it. Why are you not playlisting the music with IsiNdebele languege

that the various channels will be called, in their respective languages, "At home". Watch: "SABC to launch a 24-hour channel in indigenous languages", Published on YouTube on 9 January 2023 by Channel: SABC News https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1jqHVvQIZA Accessed on 9 January 2023.

[122] A regional political party with seats in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality.

on your radio stations? Why don't you have Ndebele Content on your TV Channels? SABC 1, 2, 3 and SABC News channel. Things that are happening were amaNdebele are situated are not covered by the SABC News. AmaNdebele needs to stop paying TV licenses.
South Africa is Celebrating 27 years of Freedom in South Africa, yet amaNdebele never had a Minister in a Cabinet. KwaNdebele there is no development. All KwaNdebele Firms were shutdown, Siyabuswa firms, Kwaggafontein firms, Tweefontein firms, and now eKandustrial firms are closing down one by one, since the ANC Government took over in 1994. All the programs that were development to AmaNdebele were taken to develop Nelspruit by ANC Government. KwaMhlanga stadium use to play professional soccer now it's only for government events. AmaNdebele are struggling accessing clean water from their taps, since 1994. The ANC Government have captured our Kings. Now KwaNdebele it's called Nkangala District.
Currently we have municipalities that are named after people who never came to KwaNdebele, or never stayed KwaNdebele. "Thembisile Hani Local Municipality and Dr Js Moroka" why can't we have this municipalities named after amaNdebele Kings? ANC Government took everything from AmaNdebele. They have since promised amaNdebele, Moloto Rail Corridor, since 1994 and until today nothing had happen, only the roundabout at four ways and yet the PUTCO Buses continues to kill our People, it continues to make abafelokazi, it continues to close homes by killing families. It continues to take away bread winners and make intandani. Everytime there is a PUTCO bus accident the Government will promise us Moloto Rail Corridor. It's time amaNdebele take back their power, sikhathi sokuziphathela, maNdebele. We need to vote ANC out.
AmaNdebele have Dr Esther Mahlangu's who is respected around the world and yet she's not recognized in South Africa not even Mpumalanga government recognized her. Dr Esther Mahlangu BMW Art Car made its first appearance at three exhibitions of Art Cars in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa in late 1991. Thereafter, it traveled to Germany and then exhibited elsewhere around the world. 25 years later, BMW worked with Dr. Esther Mahlangu again on BMW Individual 7 series.
And then the Luxury vodka house Belvedere partnered with Dr Esther Mahlangu to create a limited-edition aesthetic for Belvedere RED. And then a South African patron of Rolls-Royce commissioned Dr. Esther Mahlangu to create a unique work of art for the Gallery of a one-of-a-kind Rolls-Royce Phantom. And yet Not even a single building or a road is named after Dr Esther Mahlangu in South Africa. She doesn't even have a statue in South Africa yet the ANC Government have build statues for other musicians in the country.
For example We have artist such as Sisco Tee, Zodwa Mabena, Ode, Klip Gang, Lilow NTK, Mega & Cube, Audrey Kozwana, ManPhezulu Thulibathi, Ndebele Movement, Mhlokonywa kaBungela, Ndzundza, Dr Nothembi Mkhwebane who are making music with IsiNdebele Content that can be playlisted on any radio station.
Right now Ndebele nation have one of the biggest songs among the biggest songs in South Africa which has about 100 000 plus views on YouTube. And yet the song is not getting playlisted on 17 SABC radio stations. The song this week is sitting at number 24 on Top 200 most Shazamed tracks in South Africa. Yet there's only one national radio station in South Africa that's playlisted the song title "Woman On Top" by Ndebele On Top alonsgide En-Jay Da King and that's their home station, Ikwekwezi FM. The music is submitted on all the stations I'm mentioning here, yet nothing is happening.
There was an incident back in 2017 between a musical group known as Ndebele Movement with Metro Fm. Where by, the ex Metro fm's music compiler allegedly said he won't play Ndebele Movement's music because "Ndebele Music Is Foreign"
As the results Music with Ndebele content is not playlisted on Channel O, MTV base, Trace, Live Amp and other television music platforms or shows? and this got the direct economical impact in it. We do have the quality music they need, we do have the talent that they need. But amaNdebele are not given an opportunity. All I'm requesting is for the ground to be level.
Dear SABC, Ndebele Nation also pay TV Licences. Now SABC is relocating Ikwekwezi FM back to it's headquarters in Johannesburg Auckland Park, and yet all other radio stations are based at their own Provinces respectively. Ikwekwezi FM is the only radio station that is not broadcasting from the people who speak the languege they are broadcasting in and practicing the culture
Dear (MNET) Multichoice, Ndebele Nation also own decoders and we pay them. Its time as amaNdebele nation exercise our buying power.

Mahlangu's petition letter is a textbook example of what some scholars have called "the dialectics of flow and closure" (Meyer and Geschiere 2002), since on the one hand he demands, in almost secessionist undertones, for the Ndebele to govern themselves while also emphasising the global appeal and/or reach that the various Ndebele artists and entrepreneurs have had (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 636, 649).[123] This "secessionist impulse" can also be observed from a wide cross-section of society, for example in the call for an independent Western Cape by the Cape Independence Advocacy Group (CIAG) which dreams of building a "first world nation on Africa's southern tip",[124] or through the Cape Independence Party which espouses similar aspirations but with a more politically direct strategy,[125] or in the recent publication of a declaration statement by several Afrikaner organisations – most notably Solidarity Movement and AfriForum – petitioning the state for geographically based "special cultural zones" wherein their constituents can pursue "self-determination".[126] Nevertheless, Mahlangu ends his petition letter by advocating for protests to resist the relocation of the isiNdebele language radio station Ikwekwezi FM, which was at the time scheduled to be moved from Hatfield, Pretoria, to the SABC's headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. Mahlangu, and others involved in this fight, argued that the station should remain in Hatfield where it

[123] In *The Perils of Belonging*, Peter Geschiere (2009) elucidates what is at play here. He argues that although local forms of attachment seem to want to close the community against global "flows" they are in fact imbricated with processes of globalisation (p. 26). He writes that, "This is why it is misleading to see the upsurge of autochthony movements in Africa as reflecting attempts to return to 'traditional' realities […] Such a traditionalizing view severely underrates the degree to which the autochthonous subject is shaped by broader processes: struggles over local belonging are closely intertwined with the desire to be recognized as a citizen of the world" (pp. 26–27). Therefore Geschiere (2009) argues that a return to the local in fact, "expresses a determined effort to get access to the national arena and through this to the processes of globalization" (p. 116).

[124] See "Becoming the Cape of Good Hope again" by CIAG https://www.capeindependence.org/ Accessed on 7 May 2024.

[125] Even though said strategy seems to be legging in view of their failure to procure enough signatures to make it into the 2024 national and provincial elections ballot.

[126] See "Afrikaner leaders issue joint declaration" by Politicsweb 21 April 2024 https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/afrikaner-leaders-issue-joint-declaration Accessed on 7 May 2024.

is closer to the Ndebele, or be moved to KwaMhlanga, the former capital of the KwaNdebele homeland, going so far as to make an offer of a building that the SABC could use to house the station, free of charge.



Figure 4: AIPO's election poster for South Africa's 2024 national government elections (photo by the thesis author, R573-Phumula Street intersection)

In fact, on 14 April 2021, the KwaNdebele Movement, under the umbrella of the KwaNdebele Coalition Structure, a loose affiliation which included the KwaNdebele Movement, the Ndzundza Mabhoko Traditional Council, and other protest organisations such as the Moloto Rail Corridor's Concerned Citizens (discussed below) organised and executed a march to the SABC's offices in Hatfield, Pretoria, meeting and airing their grievances with station management (see Figure 5). When it became clear that the SABC would not budge on its decision to relocate the station, the Ndzundza Mabhoko Traditional Council took the matter to the Johannesburg High Court, losing the case on 12 July 2022, marking an end to the struggle to retain the station in Pretoria or to have it moved to

KwaMhlanga. Nevertheless, the struggle to increase and popularise isiNdebele content across the SABC's radio stations and television channels continues, championed in the main by the KwaNdebele Movement.

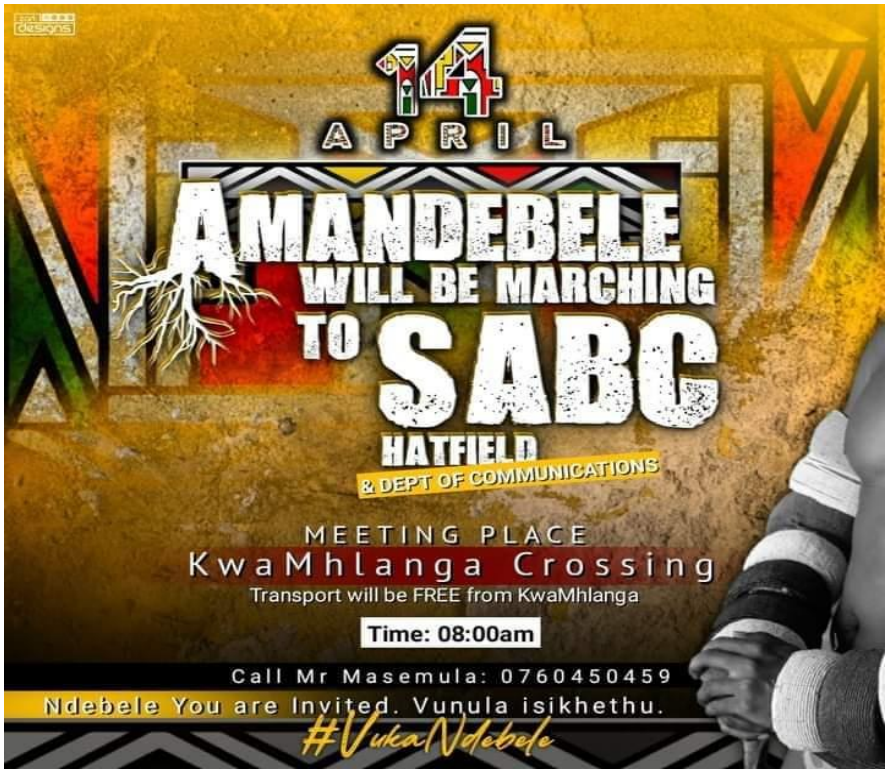

Figure 5: A poster calling for all Ndebele to join a march to protest the relocation of Ikwekwezi FM from Pretoria to Johannesburg

The KwaNdebele Movement came into existence on 1 August 2016, led by Thando Mahlangu, Skhumbuzo Masango (a.k.a Skhumba La! Masango) and Nqobile Masuku, among others.[127] The organisation has to date held protests at the Union Buildings, outside the Ikwekwezi FM studios in Pretoria, outside the SABC headquarters in Johannesburg, and outside what is now the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies (formerly the Department of Communications) offices in

[127] In his self-published *KwaNdebele Talent Connection: A Television Presenting Book*, Thando Mahlangu (2017, 87) lists some of the "leaders" as: Promise, Bikwaphi Ntuli, Prudence, Hlengiwe Masango, Nelly Masimula, Busisiwe Shabangu, Mavis Nostsheni Ntuli, Johanna Mabena, Msiza Rina (Mbali), Moses Mahlangu (Tunwana), Lydia Dimakatso Zambane, Vincent Kabini, Thandi Mthombeni, Bakwateleni Jiyane, Joseph Mahlangu, Thoko Phuti, Darly Zabo Masilela, Marcus Mkoneni, Melice Nomathemba Skhosana, Tshepo Welcome Mahlangu (a.k.a Boyfriend), and Sikhumbuzo Magubane. I use scare quotes for "leaders" because I believe many of those listed were largely people who came out to support but were not necessarily leading the movement.

Pretoria.[128] Mahlangu tells the story of the KwaNdebele Movement's formation in his self-published book *KwaNdebele Talent Connection* in a section or chapter titled *The Journey of the Campaign of We Need AmaNdebele On SABC TV*:

> The campaign started on the 1st of August 2016 … we started on social media... Social media gave us the voice and the platform to advertise in it for FREE.
>
> […]
>
> We did a poser that we seculated on social media, and we made it our profile pictures on WhatsApp and this came after me Thando Mahlangu and Skhumbuzo Masango sat down and discuss our challenges as AmaNdebele because as we were looking at the SABC as it is the only public broadcaster in South Africa and yet they don't support IsiNdebele and as the results out talented actors and actresses they don't have jobs and platforms to tell our own stories.
>
> Currently (2017) what we have as AmaNdebele on the SABC channels is only 17:30 pm news, and most people are happy about that, they don't see a challenges as we also went on the ground level and campaign.
>
> Afrikaans language its got a soupy called 7 De laan, and they have other series and they have News as well, actually the Afrikaans speaking people own the SABC 2 channel. They also have their own reality show, and game shows.
>
> We had to raise an awareness about this campaign and about our challenge of not having IsiNdebele language on SABC channels, because AmaNdebele there are more than 5.5 Million and yet Statistics South Africa claims that AmaNdebele they are only less thatn 1.1 Million in South Africa. We had to go on the ground level wearing Isikhethu [traditional Ndebele garbs] and convince people to support us and assist us with the transportation money, so that we can travel around the country doing an awareness about our Language, culture and our dress code. Then we were later on joined by Nqobile Masuku, who became our memory capture, as she was taking our every movement, and we also managed to have a meeting with our legend, uGogo uNostokana Mahlangu known as gogo Esther Mahlangu who is famous about wearing and promoting IsiNdebele.
>
> […]
>
> Another sad reality is that at Middelburg is a place of AmaNdebele but at the schools they are learning IsiZulu for some reason, and yet AmaNdebele they are not saying anything about this.
>
> Yes we do have IsiNdebele Radio station that doesn't support the growth of AmaNdebele and IsiNdebele, and they are not assisting in promoting the language as 90 percent of their play listed songs are Xhosa and Zulu songs. We even went head on with them on SHIFT program that was aired on SABC 1 at 1:00 am every week days and they still told us that AmaNdebele they are doing a music that is not quality. The show was pre-recorded and was flighted on the 26 January, the same day we were delivering the memorandum to the SABC Head office at Auckland Park Johannesburg. (Mahlangu 2017, pp 38-40)

[128] The Department of Communications and Digital Technologies was formed in June of 2019 following a merger between the Department of Communications and the Department of Telecommunications and Postal Services.

I interviewed Mahlangu on 28 October 2020, he echoed much of what he writes in his book, citing how some members of the KwaNdebele Movement have camped outside the Union Buildings for 43 days (at the time of the interview) with President Cyril Ramaphosa refusing to meet with them. He contends that such treatment is proof that the Ndebele nation is "not taken seriously" in the country, at least not by the ANC-led South African government. Mahlangu made examples referring to the relocation from KwaMhlanga (or more accurately, the integration) of the KwaNdebele legislature to Nelspruit (now Mbombela) which saw the "loss" of "machinery", that is, construction vehicles that were largely used in the construction and maintenance of public roads. This remains to this day a recurring theme in local political discourses of discontent. He commented:

> […] People like Ndaweni Mahlangu [Mpumalanga Premier from 1999 to 2004] sold us out because they were promised positions, they were promised that they will be premiers, that they will be vice presidents. That is the time when people like Matthews Phosa [Mpumalanga Premier from 1994 to 1999 and current ANC NEC member] came to take away our machines [*iingaragara*]. Nelspruit was just a wilderness, but a city was built in 24 years and now the legislature which was in KwaMhlanga was relocated there, and all the comrades that were vocal, that were intelligent were taken to Nelspruit. When they got there, they became quiet because they were also promised money, they were given houses, cars and a R40 000 salary and they thought themselves covered. And so, if you want to make noise, they threaten you with taking all these things away.[129]

These are ideas that are also espoused by AIPO's president, Hotnot Masemola who, during the Thando Mahlangu's Blanket launch on 2 December 2022, made similar utterances:

> Why are our places not being fixed by our people, who live with us? I once asked a question, saying where does EFF come from? The answer was Limpopo. And I asked, where does the ANC come from? No one here knows where the ANC is from […], the ANC is from KwaZulu Natal, [founded by] John Langalibalele Dube, first president of the ANC. […] When we opened this organization [the African Independent People's Organization]…and thank you to those who voted for us, we were able to garner six seats at the municipality, in totality, including the district, thank you! When we established it, we were with Ndebele businesspeople [referring to members of the Moloto Rail Corrido Concerned Citizens group, discussed below]. I said look we are at the Union Buildings protesting a party we've voted for, but now they don't even want to come and receive our memorandum, but next year [2021] we are going to the local government elections, are we still going to be voting for them? They kept quiet, then I asked them; what are we going to lose when we vote the ANC out? They said we lose nothing. Then I asked, what do we gain if we vote for our own party to take over government? They said we will gain much. Then I said it is obvious, we need our own homegrown party. They agreed but they worried about who was going to be the one to establish such a party […]. Then I said if that's your problem, worry no more,

[129] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

> a party will emerge. And a party was formed, and it was named AIPO. Guess where we had our founding meeting? We held our meeting at the Fene [Tribal Office in Enkeldoornoog-B, in the Thembalethu village, near KwaMhlanga], at the chief's place, KwaFene. In that first meeting we discussed about the need to found an organization that will stand for the Ndebele. […] We must fix our own things, let us unite and build our home, this KwaNdebele, this home that was demolished by this [ANC] government which has no respect for our home. […] Our solutions lie in politics, without political interventions there won't be anyone to save us. We must take the reins in all our municipalities, and if possible, we must take the province [of Mpumalanga]. In the coming years we will be entering into the provincial elections, the reason is that we want to take that parliament in Nelspruit and bring it to Middelburg, that's our talk. If you vote for AIPO and it wins, we will never leave you here and go run our government in Nelspruit! The same Nelspruit that has taken everything from us. The government must come back home. Our people must have access, they must be able to board a taxi and in short while arrive in government offices, and not board a taxi to go to Nelspruit. If you go to Nelspruit, you will spend a lot of time on the road, but if you board a taxi to go to Witbank, you won't be too long, you will get back home in time.

The mention of construction vehicles (*iingaragara*) and their use as a reference point when invoking a nostalgia for the old homeland government, is ironic when considering how such equipment was purchased. For instance, Joanne Yawitch (1986) criticised KwaNdebele's political elite in their purchase of that equipment which was done at the expense of social spending. She writes:

> KwaNdebele's rulers were from the start hopelessly ill-equipped to deal with the situation of human misery and poverty. For instance, in 1981 they did not include pension and disability grants in the financial estimates, leaving the aged, disabled and destitute without any state support. The following year R4,3 million — more than half the amount budgeted for social services, education and agriculture — was spent on an impulsive purchase of construction equipment. (Yawitch 1986, 24)

Another interesting and recurring theme in both Thando Mahlangu and Hotnot Masemola's rhetoric, is their constant comparison of the Southern Ndebele with the Zulu nation. For instance, in the beginning of this section I briefly discussed how Mahlangu and his KwaNdebele Movement contend that isiZulu is given preferential treatment on the SABC (along with isiXhosa and Afrikaans). While Hotnot Masemola, in his speech at the Thando Mahlangu Blanket launch event (which was heavily attended by traditional leaders), made similar utterances, emphasising the need to take political power and work with Ndebele traditional leaders, whom he said were being undermined by the ANC government, being given measly salaries while the Zulu monarchy gets allocated a budget of "millions, and millions". In fact, these voices of discontent can also be found among Ndebele royals themselves, who bemoan the ostensible erasure of Ndebele participation and sacrifices towards freeing the country from the yoke of apartheid oppression. And the ANC's betrayal post-1994, which is said to be exemplified by the marginalisation and/or neglect of the Ndebele language, and the neglect of Ndebele

traditional structures of leadership. Here is an excerpt of my interview with Chief Siphosezwe Mahlangu, the Mpumalanga chairperson of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa), who passionately raised some of these concerns:

> **Ikosi Siphosezwe Mahlangu**: […] The Ndebele nation was the last nation that was supposed to attain independence, which the Ndebele refused. Now they were taken as champions by the ANC which was waging a struggle at that time, for the freedom of black people […]. If you remember when Mandela came out of prison, when he came out of Robben Island, the King he visited first was King Mabusabesala, Mabhoko II, the son of Mayitjha. He came to respect Ingwenyama, to recognise him that he was able to fight against independence and defeat it. But today, and for reasons that don't make sense to the Ndebele nation, you don't find the Ndebele language in government complexes, you don't find the Ndebele language on TV, the Ndebele language you don't find it in all [government] departments that are there. Ndebele traditions are marginalized, there is no progress where the Ndebele live. If you check all the things that happened in KwaNdebele that developed the schools, recreational facilities…football centres, check all the places we have…and factories, they were all built by the former KwaNdebele government. But when you see this government today, you will see that there is very little that we can point to and say that this is what we as the Ndebele nation have benefitted. Even our kings, they don't enjoy the same benefits as the other kings. In this Mabhoko nation that fought against and defeated independence, we don't even have *ubungwenyama* [paramountcy status] in terms of the Nhlapho Commission and other commissions that were established. But it is known that when the ANC came back from exile it was welcomed by the Ndebele […], but today you don't find the Ndebele nation, even in government we don't have managers. You can look at the whole of South Africa there is no single municipality that has been named after a Ndebele. Look at the buildings that are in South Africa, there is no single one named after *Ikosi* or *Ingwenyama*, or just a hero coming from the Ndebele nation. Look at the whole national cabinet, there is no single Ndebele whether they be a Ndzundza or Manala, no single one who is a minister in this government, from 1994 until today. And we cannot only blame that to the government, but we must also blame the Ndebele themselves. […] So, the Ndebele nation today is very much marginalized, to the same extent as was the case during the apartheid government, because during apartheid times the Ndebele were ashamed to speak their language. So, today you can go to any hospital or a court, or any institution, you will find that there is nowhere where [there are forms] written in isNdebele.[130]

I return to the wider socio-political considerations being raised above. Mahlangu also champions these concerns while focusing mainly on his KwaNdebele Movement's #WeNeedAmaNdebeleOnTV campaign, adding an economic dimension to his argument, arguing that the provision of more Ndebele content on the SABC and other broadcasters (he has also met and made proposals to privately-owned channels such as M-Net) would bring about, not only recognition and dignity for the Ndebele, but also economic empowerment to the area and people of KwaNdebele. I provided some pushback, asking if he had not considered that the Ndebele received less coverage than, say, the Zulus merely because they were a numerical minority in comparison. His response was quite considered and evoked memories of

[130] Interview with iKosi Siphosezwe Samuel Mahlangu, Tweefontein-E, 1 January 2021.

colonial dispossessions of ancestral Ndebele lands. It is worth quoting our conversation in this regard at length:

> **Thando Mahlangu**: […] If you turn on the TV you will see that there are Zulu news. If you watch during the day, Zulu news are on. When you watch in the evening they are on. Now that's job creation, from floor managers to news anchors, people who hold the boom, people who write scripts, people who set up the lighting, you know, that's job creation. That's what we want for the Ndebele people.
>
> **Researcher**: What would you say to someone who says it's simply a matter of demographics, of proportionality, that Zulus have bigger numbers?
>
> **Thando Mahlangu**: That's a lie, that's a lie! The Zulus have brought themselves to that position, and they are right [to do so]. This is why I say King Zwelithini has power because he has demonstrated that he has power, that he rules, and he indeed does rule. You see when it comes to the SABC it's a public broadcaster, that means it provides a community service, the SABC policy document that they published in June still says the same thing that they said 26 years ago, that is, we will treat all the languages equally, you know. Let's analyse this "equality", this word "equal" it means there are Zulu news at 1 [o'clock] in the morning, that means Ndebele news will come in at 1 [o'clock] in the afternoon, that's equality. If Zulu news come in at 7 [o'clock] then Ndebele news will come in at 7 [o'clock] … because the SABC's main aim is not to generate profit, it is to promote and protect and develop the language, that's the main aim of the SABC, to also unite the Black nation after we had been oppressed by apartheid. They themselves say we are going to promote those who were oppressed, those in the rural areas, but so far they don't care about those in the rural areas, you see?
>
> **Researcher**: So, to what would you attribute this discrimination of the Ndebele, their exclusion from the SABC and other places if you say it's not because they are a numerical minority, [because] I think they are.
>
> **Thando Mahlangu**: You think so because that's what statistics tell you. This is why I was telling you that KwaNdebele starts from Daveyton [a township in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality area in the Gauteng province]. That is why we have people like Nomuzi Mabena [rapper and 2016 MTV VJ Search winner] who stays in Daveyton, who doesn't know how to speak the Ndebele language. How many Ndebele are out there who don't know their language? How many Ndebeles who did not study isiNdebele? As I speak to you now, we have Ndebele sisters here in KwaNdebele who have not studied isiNdebele but isiZulu, right here in KwaNdebele. I am trying to paint a picture for you that shows that many Ndebeles are oppressed. There are Ndebeles who live in Pretoria who don't know that that place is KwaMnyamane [the name the Southern Ndebele called Pretoria – today called Tshwane – prior to their displacement by the forces of Mzilikazi who in turn lost it to the Voortrekkers, culminating in its renaming in the early 1850s]. KwaMnyamane is Ndebele land, that is why the King, Nyabela, that's where he passed on, in Denneboom [interviewee meant to say, "Wonderboom"], that's where he planted his *knobkerrie* and it became a big tree, his grave is there because it was a place settled by the Ndebele. That is why Komjekejeke [a Ndebele heritage site located in Walmansthal near Tshwane] is not in KwaNdebele but is in Pretoria which is Ndebele land. So, now I am telling you that our fellow Ndebeles are many in Soshanguve, they don't speak isiNdebele they speak isiPitori. So, now if you come across that particular person and you are an employee of Statistics South Africa and you ask them since you live here what language do you speak? You hear they speak isiPitori [a "street" version of Sesotho spoken in townships such as Mamelodi and Soshanguve, among other townships, around Pretoria]. What radio do you listen to? They will tell you what radio they listen to, then when you leave that person, you are going to conclude that there are no Ndebeles here. But you were speaking with a Mtshweni person, there are Mtshwenis, Skhosanas, Mahlangus [and] Mabhenas in Pretoria, in Daveyton, you understand? So, now

> when you hear me, I say the Zulus have brought themselves to that position, as they should, it's because they understand power.[131]

When I followed up on Mahlangu's claim that there are many Ndebele in the country who are not counted by Statistics SA, asking him if he thought these were people who did not know any better because they were raised that way, or people who wilfully dissociated themselves from the Ndebele identity out of shame? His response drew from a popular narrative that it was the apartheid government which carried out a programme of demoralisation and economic neglect and marginalisation to destroy the Ndebele identity fearing the re-emergence of the once powerful chiefdom that resisted colonial rule.[132] This narrative also tends to implicate the ANC-led government for, at worst, continuing this programme, and at best, failing to deliver to the Ndebele nation the promises made to them for their contribution in the fight against apartheid. Mahlangu made examples of government facilities where he says one always finds forms written in English, isiZulu, Afrikaans, and Sesotho but never in isiNdebele. And how some of the people who work in those local government facilities are not Ndebele, but are mostly from mostly Mbombela who are being imposed on the Ndebele. Here is an excerpt of our conversation in this regard:

> **Researcher**: Regarding the Ndebeles who live outside KwaNdebele, those who do not know isiNdebele, do you think it's intentional, that they are hiding their identity or that simply it's a matter of having grown up in an area where Sotho is spoken, and that they are growing up speaking that language? Or is it a matter of saying I don't want to identify with that identity, I am ashamed of that identity?
>
> **Thando Mahlangu**: No, they do not associate themselves intentionally, it was done to them intentionally so by the previous government and the current government because…why am I saying the current government? It is because the previous government knew that Ndebeles are a dangerous nation when united, that is why we are constantly being broken apart, that is why Dannilton and Siyabuswa are now under Limpopo, it's Ndebele land but now it's under Limpopo. With us this side, when they did not know whether we should be under Pretoria or Nelspruit they put us under Nelspruit. But if you look, I can leave

[131] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

[132] In the early 1990s, the Ndzundza Ndebele monarch King Mabhoko II, predecessor to the reigning King Mabhoko III, made requests to participate in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa) negotiations using a similar argument, citing the Ndebele's sacrifices in fighting the ZAR government in the late 1800s, including the KwaNdebele government's refusal to accept independence in the 1980s. His Intando Yesizwe Party became one of the signatories to the 1991 Codesa I Declaration of Intent, which was in effect the first step towards establishing South Africa's constitutional democracy.

here from KwaMhlanga and go to Pretoria in less than 45 minutes, but if I have to go to the legislature in Nelspruit, I will drive for more than four hours, but I fall under Nelspruit. Why shouldn't I fall under Pretoria, you understand? So, this thing was done deliberately by the current government, it suppresses our language. If you go to any government department you will find all translated papers, the English one, the Afrikaans one, that Afrikaans is still dominating in our country I don't understand. There is Sesotho, there is Setswana, [and] there is isiXhosa. Even their doors when you come in, there is where they have written greetings "Dumelang!" "Ashe!", or there is a board written "Qhaphela lapho ama-steps!", you know? It's written in English, in isiZulu, [and] in Afrikaans. Where is isiNdebele? Go to Thembisile Hani [Local Municipality], there at the offices, you will find that nothing is written in isiNdebele. Even the people occupying those offices are not Ndebeles, they are Nkosis who have been taken from Nelspruit and brought here [and] they are now in charge […]. So, now this government has toyed with us, they have taken the economy from us, and they know if they take away your wealth you get desperate, you can do whatever. So, now our Ndebele nation was intentionally broken up, that's why when you check the statistics it will tell you that we are 1,2 million, this KwaNdebele alone has more than 1,2 million people. So, how can we as Ndebeles be only 1,2 million? […] So, our government is failing us, it has failed our language. This is why as young Ndebele people we have decided to stand up and said we are going to fight for our language. We wrote Ndebele books and promoted the language. What makes these other Ndebeles from outside not to speak isiNdebele is because they are not like us, they are not exposed to isiNdebele, you understand? Some of them have discarded the language, not because they wanted to, where are you going to initiate in the suburbs? Where are you going to host your traditional ceremonies? They have taken you and put you there, the economy is in Pretoria, in Johannesburg. How are you going to initiate there? The place where you are supposed to initiate, they've bult firms and flats there.[133]

Mahlangu was quite emphatic about the promotion and use of isiNdebele language, not just on the SABC and other television channels, but also the use of isiNdebele in government facilities (in particular, those located in the KwaNdebele area). He also expressed shock and anger at the fact that some schools in KwaNdebele were still teaching isiZulu:

Thando Mahlangu: When I talk of language, I want to talk about the PanSALB [Pan South African Language Board], PanSLAB is the most useless organisation in our country, it represents languages, but it doesn't have power. We are fighting alone with people like Sipho Mahamba so that schools in Delmas should teach isiNdebele, where is PanSLAB? The schools there [in Delmas] teach isiZulu. Now you see that once we bring isiNdebele in the schools how many posts for Ndebele teachers would be created? Now that's job creation, my brother. Posts for some of us who write books in isiNdebele will be created, now that's money there, you understand. That's how big is the economic activity. We are marching, on the 23rd of October we were marching to the Union Buildings, where was PanSLAB? We have been marching to the SABC for the past five years saying we want Ndebeles on television, where is PanSLAB?[134]

Shagashe Chiloane (whom I discussed in the preceding section) also raised similar concerns around the "apathy" of some Ndebele towards promoting the language. He commended Sipho Mahamba (Ndebele cultural activist and director of Endumbeni Cultural and Creative Arts Centre in Delmas) in

[133] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

[134] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

his fight to get some schools in Delmas that were not teaching isiNdebele to include the language in their repertoire of subjects. Chiloane also explained that this is a problem that also exists in his own Verena village (near Kwaggafontein), where he says schools do not teach isiNdebele but teach Sepedi instead. A situation which he argues has produced Ndebele people who do not have a grasp of their own language:

> **Shagashe Chiloane**: Recently I was talking with this person and they said *ai wena ukhuluma isiNdebele khulu* [you speak isiNdebele a lot/could also mean you speak "deep" Ndebele] and I had just spoken a simple word such as *umraro* [a problem] and they are not used to that word, which is another problem because you are in Verena where they teach Sepedi in schools and they also teach isiNdebele but you will find a person who is a Ndebele who is concerned that you are speaking deep Ndebele, how come? […] I must mention this guy Sipho Mahamba, he was able to fight, him and his team, last year or the year before that, in Delmas, that they must introduce isiNdebele in the schools as a compulsory subject, they were not teaching isiNdebele.
>
> […]
>
> **Researcher**: What is he, Sipho Mahamba?
>
> **Shagashe Chiloane**: He's more like an activist, just like Thando [Mahlangu] and Skhumba [La! Masango]. So, he managed to get isiNdebele included [in the curriculum], last year [2020] they included it [isiNdebele] and there was a celebration. So, he's busy with the schools which is way too crucial, school is more crucial in a way that if isiNdebele is in the schools, it's a done deal, you have won! [[First] it's the school, comes the music, comes film, [and] then it's the fashion.[135]

The fight to promote isiNdebele as a language subject extends to the country's universities, championed mainly by organisations such as the Ndebele Students Association (NSA),[136] an organisation with chapters across South Africa's universities which mainly, among other goals, recruits students from a broad variety of academic streams to enrol for isiNdebele as an elective module, whilst encouraging linguistics students to specialise in isiNdebele. This fight is also championed by "native" linguists such as William Jiyana who teaches at the University of Mpumalanga and Abram Sibanyoni who teaches at the University of South Africa (Jiyana and Sibanyoni, both educated at the University of Pretoria, are erstwhile leaders of NSA). In fact, in a video clip posted on X on 11 October 2022, Sibanyoni laments that the Ndebele do not have a university of

[135] Interview with Shagashe Chiloane, Verena Fourway, 27 March 2021.

[136] Formerly AmaNdebele@TUKS (ANT).

their own and that they must therefore make do with a satellite campus of the University of Mpumalanga which offers a limited range of options for isiNdebele students:

> We don't have our own university, just like the Venda speaking nation where they've got [the] University of Venda, and the Pedi speaking nation where they've got the University of Turfloop, and amaZulu...University of Zululand, the amaXhosa...University of Fort Hare. And now they have the University of Mpumalanga [referring to its satellite campus located in Siyabuswa, near Kwaggafontein], but that University of Mpumalanga it's a...it's a Faculty where they only produce […] intermediate [education graduates]. If you want to do FET you have to go down to Nelspruit, if you check the kilometres it's around 300 and something. So now, the universities that are closer that are offering isiNdebele [...] it's the University of South Africa which is in Pretoria, and the University of Pretoria [also located in Pretoria]. So now that is also...it's a hindering process that amaNdebele...in terms of education they are still at the very low level because we don't have facilities to equip our people. It may not only be the language but in many fields, hence they are not represented, that is to answer why you don't see most Ndebele people in politics, you don't see most of the Ndebele people in the engineering department. Now for us to survive as a group we need schools, we need universities, we need colleges that are going to help our Ndebele speaking nation in all these different fields that we need to be represented in.

Mahlangu, Shagashe, Mahamba, Jiyana, and Sibanyoni are not alone in this fight. Local musician Sbusiso Ngemani Mahlangu is another young man fighting to promote isiNdebele content, specifically on the SABC's Ikwekwezi FM. Sbusiso, along with Shagashe, was also responsible for the Facebook #PlayMoreNdebeleContent campaign which they started back in 2020. Two years earlier, during the Ikwekwezi FM's 35-year birthday celebrations, Sbusiso Mahlangu raised similar concerns that the lineup of artists hired to perform at these celebrations did not include any Ndebele artists,[137] prompting the latter to call for the boycott of the event, which Sbusiso says ultimately led to a poor turnout.

In late 2018 the efforts of the KwaNdebele Movement were seemingly bearing some fruit as the production company Coalstove Pictures was bringing *iKani*, a 13-part Ndebele television drama series, to the SABC. Ironically, the synopsis of the drama centred around a protagonist who, after having been raised in a Zulu family, finds out that they are actually Ndebele and subsequently embarks on a journey to find their "roots". (To add to the irony, Mahlangu argues that the script for what would ultimately become *iKani* was initially meant for an isiZulu drama series, which was previously rejected until it was hurriedly picked up and converted to an isiNdebele script due to mounting pressure on the SABC

[137] In truth, the lineup did include at least two isiNdebele artists, *viz*. Zodwa Mabena and Nzunza.

to curate isiNdebele content.) Although Mahlangu highlighted the contributions of the KwaNdebele Movement's #WeNeedAmaNdebeleOnTV campaign in getting the much awaited first-ever Ndebele television drama series, he expressed frustration that most of the actors (especially those with leading roles) were not themselves Ndebele, nor did they hail from KwaNdebele. In making this point, he was no doubt espousing essentialist conceptions of "Ndebele-ness". Mahlangu, however, took time to explain that it was not merely that the actors were not Ndebele but that they could not speak the language and thus unwittingly made a mockery of the Ndebele accent. This was a point that was expressed by many across social media platforms once the series started airing. In this regard, it is worth quoting my conversation with Mahlangu at length:

> **Thando Mahlangu**: The SABC [Channel] 1 tried and brought us some drama called *iKani*, that *Ikani vele bebayenze ngekani* [direct translation: "that *iKani* was indeed forced on us", or "true to its name, *iKani*, they were forcing this show on us". The name *iKani* can mean to "force" or to "persist" depending on context]. The then Minister of Communication, Ma'am Nomvula Mokonyane, I have such respect for her, more respect than the president because she was able to listen to our grievances, when we were protesting we went to the Department of Communications.
>
> **Researcher**: When was this?
>
> **Thando Mahlangu**: This was… *iKani* was last year [2019] which means we marched in 2018 […]. When we delivered our memorandum on a Friday it rained afterwards, it always rains when we do our things [symbolising luck]. After we had delivered our memorandum, we gave them seven days to respond, they responded within four days, they sent the correspondence into the SABC because it falls under Communications. She [then Communications Minister Mokonyane] instructed that they should explain why they don't have amaNdebele in the SABC and that they should explain when they intend to include amaNdebele and tell me [the Minister] when you have met with amaNdebele. She gave them five days [to act]. The SABC came running where they were, the Chairman, they called us here into the [community] hall here [in] KwaMhlanga. After that they called us into Siyabuswa community hall, Ma'am Nomvula Mokonyane is the one who ensured that the SABC goes around consulting in all the provinces. This thing was originally intended for Ndebeles and then they said it's an opportunity to extend it to all provinces, but what was the point, all the people they visited are already included. So, what was the point, they were wasting money those guys.
>
> **Researcher**: Did they ever fulfil those promises they made?
>
> **Thando Mahlangu**: The SABC came to us after they had sat down with Mduduzi Makhathini [I think here Mahlangu is referring to SABC Board Chairperson Bongumusa Makhathini] I said to them that without wasting time if you have not come to tell us exactly how you plan to include amaNdebele it would be better if you leave now, they refused. The Minister [Nomvula Mokonyane] was putting pressure on them, they stalled and told us there are no slots in the SABC. We then sent a message to the Director General of Communications, he then put pressure on them, that is why they eventually commissioned *iKani*. *iKani* is a story that had been pitched to the SABC for a very long time and they never took it. It was not a Ndebele story, but because there was a demand and heads were about to roll, they decided to take *iKani* and turn it into a Ndebele drama. On top of that the SABC commissioning editors, because they have friends, they must also eat the money, they said let's take [actress] *sis* Florence Masebe to act

in a Ndebele drama, speaking isiNdebele. Mind you she is not a Ndebele but they want her to act as a Ndebele. You see the problem is not that she was acting in a Ndebele drama, the problem is that she was acting as a Ndebele and she can't speak isiNdebele. She does not live among the Ndebele, she is not from KwaNdebele, she can't speak isiNdebele, she can't sound like a Ndebele. They then mixed with others and then they took two or three isiNdebele actors. We let it air until it finished, it had 13 episodes, after 26 years, to show that the SABC does not take us seriously! After it was done airing, we wrote to the Public Protector [Busisiwe Mkhwebane] and said they have brought us this *iKani* blunder, this is not what we wanted, because the wealth did not come here. Number one, the production was not from KwaNdebele, the actors who were dominating there are not Ndebeles, the actors who are dominating there are not from KwaNdebele. The Public Protector said meet with the SABC and [the Department of] Communications and see how you sort things out, if it's not working out come back to me. We have gone back, that is why on the 23 [October 2020] we were marching to the Union Buildings, to say that drama they brought we do not know it, we do not recognise it.[138]

As I noted earlier, Thando is not alone in his rejection of the television drama series *iKani*, Ndebele poet, Thembisile Mkhatshwa, is among those who also hold strong views about the show. Mkhatshwa argues that *iKani* is an example of how the Ndebele have come to be disregarded in the country while ultimately arguing that the Ndebele have also played a part in creating the conditions for their own disenfranchisement since, she claims, they work in silos and seek to succeed alone without bringing other Ndebele into the fold. Our conversation in this regard is also worth quoting at length:

Thembisile Mkhatshwa: You know where it pains me with *iKani*, it's when they take a Sotho person to act a Ndebele role as if we don't have Ndebele actors while we have them in abundance. And good actors at that! With that [example] they have revealed to others who could otherwise help the Ndebele to progress that here everyone only cares about their pockets, there is no longer the idea that we should help each other up, we only pay lip service to that while our actions tell a different story. Perhaps someone can say [regarding *iKani* creator] that the guy had no one else to help him but Florence [Masebe], and maybe Florence insisted on bringing her own actors that she trusted and they decided that they were going to learn isiNdebele. But when a Sotho speaks Ndebele you can hear [that they are not Ndebele], even myself when I speak Sesotho and there is a Sotho person nearby, they can tell that this person is not Sotho, she speaks well but she's not Sotho.

Researcher: Were the actors in that drama all non-Ndebele speakers?

Thembisile Mkhatshwa: Most of them were non-Ndebele speakers. I think there were only two or three Ndebele-speakers. […] And we have Ndebele movies [sold in minibus taxi ranks and by vendors outside shopping malls], those people can act, they portray isiNdebele the way it's supposed to be. So, if you just go take a Xhosa girl to act the role of a Ndebele girl…first they don't know Ndebele traditions, they will tell her we want a bubbly Ndebele girl. She doesn't know what a bubbly Ndebele girl looks or acts like. So, she's going to be Joburg bubbly, you understand? […] There is *Kwakhala Nyonini*,[139] […] you see in *Kwakhala Nyonini* there was a part which was portraying Ndebele girls, and they used Ndebele girls for those roles! The way those girls performed those roles it was beautiful, it was genuine, the father…look at Madlanduna [the protagonist of the show], imagine if you give that role to a Pedi [actor], it wouldn't

[138] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

[139] A 1980s classic Zulu drama series which is still highly circulated via (mostly bootleg or pirated) DVD sales and through social media sites such as YouTube.

> be the same. Those characters are not the same. When a Pedi actor plays that role, it becomes less convincing, it's not coming from inside, they have just learned briefly. This is why I always say that I love artists who are coming from school, but I respect an artist who was born with the gift. So, you can be born with the gift and then go to school because at the end of the day school is important. But a gift should be something you were born with.[140]

The date 9 April 2023, saw the premier of another isiNdebele 13-part episode television drama series, *Komkhulu*, produced by Rhythm World Productions which aired on M-Net's Mzansi Magic channel. This offering was much loved and received very positive feedback from the Ndebele community across social media platforms. However, with even greater irony, *Komkhulu* centred around traditional leadership succession squabbles, and was described by Mzansi magic as "a tremendous series steeped in mysticism, chronicling the rise and fall of one of the most famous and powerful chiefdoms, while reminiscent of the most beloved cultural folk tales".[141] The SABC also brought its second offering in the form of an action film *Ipande Ye Sono: Root of Sin* (see Figure 6) by production company Ego Visuals KwaMhlanga. The film aired on 16 July 2023, on SABC Channel 1.

[140] Interview with Thembisile Mkhatshwa, Kwaggafontein-A, 6 March 2021.

[141] "Mzansi Magic's first Sindebele drama Komkhulu takes the Sunday Night spotlight" by Mzansi Magic News 15 March 2023 https://www.dstv.com/mzansimagic/en-za/news/mzansi-magic-s-first-indebele-drama-komkhulu-takes-the-sunday-night-spotlight Accessed on 18 October 2023.



Figure 6: SABC 1's *Ipande ye Sono* (2023) movie poster

Notwithstanding these small victories, a recurring theme in Thando Mahlangu's rhetoric centres around the exclusion of the Ndebele from economic opportunities. He gives the example of bourgeoning shopping malls all over KwaNdebele which, he maintains, do very little for the residents save for employment opportunities that pay meagre salaries, all the while immensely enriching the mall and its individual shop owners. To this effect, Mahlangu also tells me that he is part of the Moloto Rail Corridor Concerned Citizens (MRCCC), another protest organisation formed in September, 2020, mainly by local businesspeople and some politicians, specifically to protest what they insist is an unnecessary delay in the implementation of the government's Moloto Corridor Development programme (said to be valued between R9 and 34 billion). The MRCCC is often seen carrying placards that read "KGANI ASISIBO BA LA E SEWULA AFRIKA" (meaning, "AREN'T WE ALSO SOUTH AFRICAN?"), with the majority wearing white t-shirts written "WE ARE READY & PREPARED TO DIE FOR THE RAIL" on the back, while a few other members also don traditional Ndebele garbs, in particular the uMbhalo blanket. The MRCCC protests, in particular, the long promised dual 67

kilometres carriageway from Siyabuswa to Moloto which Mahlangu rightly argues that, if implemented, would radically improve the economic situation in the former KwaNdebele:

> **Thando Mahlangu**: Why are they not building firms? Why don't we have mines? Why are we not building firms? But they are building malls because that's the only space they can spend. Now, I was checking that it has been a year since Phola Mall was opened, it was opened September last year [2019], how much have they made in KwaNdebele where we say there is no wealth? But how much has Phola Mall alone made from the Ndebele? If only it was firms, people from Soweto would come to work here. If the parliament in KwaMhlanga was still operational, people from Nelspruit would come and live here. The economy here would grow because all those people would buy food here, they would pour petrol here, those people would live here and pay rent, you understand? But all those things are not happening, we don't have economic activity, and this has been done to us by our fellow Ndebele, by our own government which promised us lies. So, that's why now I fully support Moloto Rail Corridor Concerned Citizens because I also fall under KwaNdebele. These people [MRCCC members] also come from KwaNdebele, because this Moloto rail will bring a lot of job opportunities. Imagine when they are building a train, they will start with hiring people. Second, they will have to hire people who will operate those trains. Third, they will hire securities who will guard those trains. Fourth, the women who are street vendors [will benefit], because people who use these trains will buy from them as they disembark these trains […]. So, now everywhere there is a train station it will be a mini city just like Mamelodi, just like Soshanguve, you know, economic activity. In the train stations it is packed, there are all kinds of people, people are making a lot of money there. So, we want that economy, people don't understand.[142]

Mahlangu insists that the delay in the implementation of the programme is due to corruption at the upper echelons of the government:

> **Thando Mahlangu**: They have taken the money in Mpumalanga, the money for Moloto Corridor has been eaten by people like Cyril Ramaphosa, that is why he is unable to come and address us there at the Union Buildings [the MRCCC had been camping there for forty+ days at the time of our interview, and only had an official come out to receive their memorandum a year later in September 2021, which saw the group finally leave the site] because all we want is for him to come and tell us when is this train going to start. So, now he is failing to appear and tell us the day in which this train will start, because budgets were released, [feasibility] studies were done [and] people went to China to undergo training for this coming train. […] We delivered a letter to the Public Protector three weeks ago and so far the Public Protector has responded very positively, and since now she has committed herself by the letter she sent us. We have also seen her in interviews talking about this issue, on Morning Live, she has also went to Ikwekwezi [FM] and she spoke in isiNdebele. What I like about her is that she is a Ndebele, they are busy throwing stones at her, they don't take her seriously. Now, what is important is that she did not just wake up and decide to take up this issue, it is us who went to her, and her office is meant to take up such complains. So, now she is chasing them with something that is written down, written down even by the President, because now the Moloto Rail Corridor falls under the Presidential Projects. In truth all presidents who come into that office are supposed to see it that that project is carried out, that is why all ministers of transport as they come into office, they discuss that issue but they are not doing it because they see that this thing has very dangerous politicians who have eaten who are now stepping on this thing, you understand? They then fail and move on, the next one does the same. it's very tough but we are standing here firmly, we are going nowhere![143]

[142] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

[143] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

Nevertheless, the project was eventually cancelled in 2021, prompting an outcry from the MRCCC. The cancellation of the project also caught the attention of the Manala Ndebele monarch, King Makhosoke II. During a visit from former President Jacob Zuma on 14 June 2021, in the king's Great Place in Klipfontein, near KwaMhlanga, King Makhosoke II expressed concern that the project had been cancelled, commenting that it would, if implemented, help with the R573 Moloto road which has become a deathtrap for motorists, causing countless car crashes and deaths. Zuma expressed "shock" that the project had not been implemented, stating that his administration had given the project the green light. He then urged that the MRCCC (which he said had previously visited him to discuss the project) and the king should send a delegation to Pretoria to enquire with the Cyril Ramaphosa administration.[144]

As I conclude this section, there are two points that appear to be at the centre of Thando Mahlangu's rhetoric: (a) that the Ndebele are excluded from the South African national project, and; (b) that this exclusion is primarily economic. Mahlangu draws continuities between the apartheid and post-apartheid governments, crediting the former for its genesis of the project of social and economic marginalisation of the Ndebele, and the latter for continuing this programme. Naturally, Mahlangu's solution to this problem is two-fold: it entails making the Ndebele "known" to all South Africans (thereby dispelling what he calls the myth of Zimbabwean origins), and correcting past disenfranchisement of the Ndebele by making sure that they, to use a popular term, get their fair share of the pie (needless to say, the pie is an allegory for the South African economy).[145]

[144] "Former President Jacob Zuma and his son Duduzani Zuma visited the Ndebele kingdom king Makhosonke ll" published on You Tube on 17 June 2021 by Channel: Ndebele TV https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLkEqChTTag Accessed on 10 February 2022.

[145] While Thando Mahlangu claims that the Ndebele have yet to have a more visible presence on television screens (save for the infamous *IKani* drama, and more recently, the much acclaimed *Komkhulu* drama), one might point out that there have been some characters in major TV productions such as *Isidingo*, *Scandal,* and *Isitha, The Enemy* that are supposed to be understood as "Ndebele" (albeit these have largely been supporting cast roles).

A case of "mistaken" identity?

Just as the Tsonga-Shangaan are said to have been founded by a renegade Zulu general, the Southern Ndebele are similarly thought to have broken off from the Zulu under Mzilikazi kaMashobane (see Maluleke 2005, 23–24). Mahlangu and others I have interviewed reject this view, including a related view which conflates the Southern Ndebele with their Zimbabwean namesakes. Concerns over this conflation are incapsulated in Shagashe Chiloane and his Ndebele Movement's claim above that a Metro FM music compiler who allegedly accused them of being "foreigners" and/or who described their music as "foreign", had mistakenly "thrown them in" with Zimbabweans. Beyond sharing a common name, Mahlangu insists that there is very little that ties the Southern Ndebele to their namesakes in Zimbabwe. He maintains that some Ndebele might have "ended up" in Zimbabwe rather than having "originated from there". Mahlangu makes a similar argument in regards the narrative that the Southern Ndebele are an offshoot of the Zulu.

> **Thando Mahlangu**: You know there are people who claim that amaNdebele come from the Zulus, this is not true, Ndebeles come from Embo. We have a grave of Musi – it is there in KwaZulu-Natal. Musi was not a Zulu, he was a Ndebele. So, now the Zulus used to live in…there is a place called Emhlangeni, Ndebeles lived there. Not that they come from inside the Zulus, that they came with Mzilikazi, that is a story, you see? It is a fairy-tale created by someone else, because our Ndebeles moved around and engaged in a lot fights, that is why we have Ndebeles in Zimbabwe, we have Skhosanas in Zimbabwe, even Xhosas they are there in Zimbabwe. So, now why they do not question the Xhosa identity? We have Zulus in Zimbabwe, you understand? So, now they are just being too familiar with us because they don't take us seriously as a nation. So, when our people were going around fighting wars they would settle everywhere, so the ones who are in Zimbabwe simply ended up there, not that they originated there, they just ended up there, you understand? So, they don't take our nation seriously.[146]

On 11 January 2022 Mahlangu shared a video (broken down into nine parts) on his X social media page. The video seems to have been originally published on the SABC's isiNdebele news segment and narrated by the SABC's Sitjhaba Mahlangu. It has, however, since been circulated across social media platforms such as X, TikTok, and Facebook. The video features a segment where Makhosini SoMbusi Mahlangu (introduced as a historian and writer) sets out to dispel the "myth" that the Southern Ndebele are, one, from Zimbabwe and, two, an offshoot of the Zulu nation.

[146] Interview with Thando Mahlangu, eSheldon, 28 October 2020.

Makhosini traces the history of the Southern Ndebele (specifically the Ndzundza section) to King Ndzundza kaMusi whom he maintains reigned in the 1600s, and that the Ndebele only came into contact with the leader of what would later be the founder of the Ndebele kingdom in Zimbabwe, King Mzilikazi kaMashobane, in the early 1820s. Makhosini preambles this meeting with what viewers can read as a curse on the reigning monarch of the time, King Magodongo kaMgwezana, who had killed his uncle, a regent who was refusing to give up power, against advice to the contrary from the royal soothsayer. This act of avunculicide (and possibly, regicide) saw the arrival of Mzilikazi, a refugee from the Mfecane wars of King Shaka. Makhosini describes Mzilikazi as a prideful leader who refused to be a vassal to either of the two kings, fleeing from Shaka in 1823 and murdering Magodongo (and a few of his sons) in 1827 before emigrating north with some Southern Ndebele captives. The latter is taken to explain the presence of some Southern Ndebele among the Mthwakazi Ndebele of Zimbabwe.

Makhosini also insists that although the Southern Ndebele have some relation with the Zulu, they are however not the latter's offshoot.[147] First, he argues that the relations between the Southern Ndebele and the Zulu only began in the 1900s during the reign of King Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo who was "exiled" to Ndebele land, in Middelburg where he eventually passed on. And second, he asserts that the late King Goodwill Zwelithini KaBhekuzulu sheltered, in the early 1970s, among the Ndzundza Ndebele prior to his ascension to the Zulu throne and owing to the succession disputes that threatened his life. This was because his sister, Princess Nonhlanhla KaBhekuzulu who was married to the KwaNdebele anti-independence activist Chief Klass Makhosana Mahlangu, had arranged for him to take shelter in the then homeland of KwaNdebele. Third, and finally, Makhosini explains that the link between the Ndebele and the Zulu also emanates from the fact that the reigning Ndzundza monarch King Mabhoko III and now King Misuzulu kaZwelithini are cousins, since their mothers,

[147] This is a hot topic contested even on radio shows, where the Ndebele often call in to refute this notion, claiming existence prior to the consolidation of the Zulu empire in the early nineteenth century.

Queen Mother Siphila Dlamini Mahlangu and late Queen Mantfombi Dlamini Zulu, are daughters of the erstwhile eSwatini monarch King Sobhuza II.[148]

The view that the Southern Ndebele hail from the Mthwakazi Ndebele of Zimbabwe is also held by some Southern Ndebele, albeit a minority. Whereas most of the Ndebele, according to Sifiso Ndlovu (2017), are of the view that the Southern Ndebele are descended from a Nguni group that had emigrated out of present-day KwaZulu Natal prior to the wars of *uMfecane*, this is a view that is widely supported by most historians and other academics interested in this topic (see James 1987, 24; Lekgoathi 2009a, 63; Nielsen 1996, 3; Ndlovu 2017, 83–85; cf. Maluleke 2005, 23–24). For instance, Derrick Nielsen (1996) comments that, "The most common misperception in the history of Transvaal Ndebele is that they are somehow related to Mzilikazi's Ndebele presently located in Zimbabwe. This is not the case, however. The best historical scholarship suggests that the Transvaal Ndebele settled in the interior of the trans-Vaal region by at least the seventeenth century" (p. 3). While Sekibakiba Lekgoathi (2009a) writes that, "the Ndebele are scattered communities of Nguni origin, offshoots of a large Hlubi polity which migrated from the KwaZulu-Natal midlands between 300 and 500 years ago, settling in groups of varying sizes in parts of the Transvaal" (p. 63).

Interestingly, the claim made by Thando Mahlangu that, "our Ndebele moved around and engaged in a lot of fights" corresponds with scholarly views on pre-colonial African societies (see Hughes 2006, 25–29; Mbembe 2017, 104), however it becomes an aporia when juxtaposed with current claims on autochthony. Hence elsewhere, groups that make a claim to an autochthonal existence, argues Peter Geschiere (2009, 122), usually try to "fix history and deny any movement". Again, this is a relatively recent trend, as evidenced by oral traditions or founding charters that point

[148] Watch Makhosini Mahlangu's segment: "AmaNdzundza, amaZulu no Mthwakazi" Published on YouTube on 15 January 2022 by Channel: Makhosini Mahlangu https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2fAl287amc&t=9s Accessed on 18 January 2022.

to society being founded by culture heroes who came from distant locales (see Middleton 1954; Helms 1988; Graeber and Sahlins 2017; Rennie 1984, 172; Mohale 2014, 2).

Reflections

The obsession with the SABC and other forms of media representation speak to how claims to the country's resources are increasingly being made based on a claim to autochthony. Apprising the country, and the world, of the fact that one (or, rather one's cultural identity) exists within the bounds of South Africa, is important to dispel the myth that the Southern Ndebele hail from Zimbabwe and are therefore "foreign" to the South African nation-state, as was purportedly claimed by a certain Metro FM music compiler in the previous section. Popularising this fact is important to ensure that the Ndebele can entrench their claims to the South African economy as full and "authentic" citizens.[149] In this way cultural identity has become a *fungible commodity*, or token that determines where one can live, work, and/or derive a livelihood. This is evidenced by the assertion that the Southern Ndebele become timid when they get to zones of economic activity dominated by other groups, that they change their language, cultural practices, and assimilate into those groups, thus "exchanging" their identity for a putatively dominant identity that will give them access to resources (such as jobs, rental spaces, and a protective "homeboy" community or association). Therefore, popularising one's cultural identity, via increased media representation, is believed to be a panacea to this conundrum. If the Ndebele were known in the country, as they are known "throughout the world", they would be recognised as South Africans and therefore be fully entitled to live, work, and/or derive a livelihood whenever they settle in any of the country's economic hubs. This view is compounded by a conception of the national economy, explains Jonny Steinberg (2008, 1), as "finite lump" which inevitably "invites conflict, for it assumes that access to resources is a zero-sum game". From this vantage position, it can only be full

[149] Geschiere (2009) astutely observes that "autochthony presupposes national citizenship" (p. 116), and that "autochthony is certainly not replacing the nation-state […]. It is rather grafting itself upon the framework of this state" (p. 213).

and/or "authentic" South Africans that can be entitled to access said limited resources, since "if the economy is understood as a finite lump, then visible and relative prosperity among foreign nationals is viewed as theft of national resources that ought rightly to belong to South Africans" (Steinberg 2008, 1–2).

This makes it easy to understand the emphasis put on claims that the Southern Ndebele "did not originate from Zimbabwe but simply ended up there". Claims that the Southern Ndebele have "roots" in parts of South Africa, as allegorised by chthonic and/or arborescent myths of the fabled King Nyabela who is said to have planted his knobkerrie in Wonderboom, Pretoria, which then blossomed into a wild fig tree (the Wonderboom Tree in the Wonderboom Nature Reserve), said to have the widest crown size of all the trees in the country.[150] In fact, Thando Mahlangu enunciates a model of ethnic belonging that is reminiscent of the romance of nineteenth-century European nationalism, a model imported and implemented in much of colonial Africa and arguably "perfected" in South Africa during the Balkanisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s. For instance, Steinberg's (2008) reading of patrimonial politics in post-apartheid South Africa (or the conception of "entitlement" to access state resources as defined by one's citizenship),[151] is eerily reminiscent of apartheid-era homeland politics, wherein quasi-independent governments were allocated their own budgets by the central government, which was, in turn, dispensed with as patronage by the homeland's political elite who used it to entrench their support among their respective clients and/or constituencies (Szeftel 1994, 191–92). Even among ordinary "citizens" of such homelands, access to jobs, residence permits, clinics,

[150] Some variation of the story says that Nyabela was rather buried under the tree, thus boosting its growth capacity. Meanwhile others state that the king in question was Musi KaMhlanga, the father of Manala and Ndzundza. Nevertheless, the tree is carbon dated to a thousand years old. See "Tree with the largest crown" by Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment 27 March 2019 chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.dffe.gov.za/sites/default/files/legislations/treeswithelargestcrown.pdf Accessed on 21 November 2023.

[151] Also see Mngomezulu (2014) who writes similarly about Mauritius where patrimonial relations or "backing" is entrenched in the political system (p. 221).

schools, and other government services came to be defined by one's citizenship, which was in turn determined by one's ethnic identity (Szeftel 1994, 192). Even at that time, "the use of ethnic identity as the measure of entitlement in the allocation of inadequate resources [had the] obvious consequence of politicising ethnic boundaries" (Szeftel 1994, 192). From this perspective, exclusion becomes a means of eliminating competition for scarce resources from putative outsiders (Szeftel 1994, 192–93). Said "outsiders" need not be those who hail from outside South Africa, nor those who hail from outside the province, but those who hail from outside old homeland boundaries, who are said to occupy and/or "monopolise" public administration positions in local government. Sometimes said "outsiders" might be those who, although they hail from within the territory of the former homeland, have the "wrong" cultural identity. This is reflected in the pretended amnesia around the heterogenous origins of the homeland of KwaNdebele in discourses that claim it as a "purely" Ndebele refuge, thus excluding other groups that were equally instrumental in its inception.

Peter Geschiere (2009) alerts us to this "segmentary tendency" in autochthony discourse, which tends to be exacerbated by squabbles over "spoils" or resources proffered on grounds of such claims or affiliation, leading to the need to settle the question of who "really" belongs in the community (Geschiere 2009, 27, 67; also see Monson 2015, 47).[152] This "segmentary logic" among the Southern

[152] Geschiere (2009, 81) writes about the notion of the "community as stakeholder" in development projects, which inevitably leads to the creation of various associations of "autochthons". In KwaNdebele, this manifests in the form of "committees" who go to nearby mines, schools, and/or other sites of opportunity advocating for and insisting that local companies and/or local community members should be contracted or employed. If such demands are not met, this often leads to protests that derail the commencement of that particular project until said demands are met. Sometimes these tactics can take on "mafia-type" undertones where if demands are not met, violence or vandalism follows. To this effect, Geschiere (2009) argues that "it may be important, even urgent, to study more closely the genealogy of the notion of 'community,' which is so closely related to the idea of belonging and plays such a central role in development discourse on Africa" (p. 77). Furthermore, Geschiere (2009) argues that those who drive development on the continent must be cognisant of the fact that instead of being "traditional" and/or "given", the notion of "community" has a "situationally determined history and is subject to constant (re)construction" (ibid.). Such

Ndebele themselves is already demonstrated in the fight for kingship or the paramountcy between the Ndzundza and Manala sections, with some notables arguing that the two groups are in fact distinct "tribes" with their own divergent traditions and customs. One must therefore wonder if projects, such as the now cancelled Moloto Corridor Development programme, were implemented what sorts of fissions would spring up when conversations around which companies are entitled to contract with or bid for government tenders, and which groups should make up the workforce? In other words, "who is 'really' local and thus entitled to profit from the new project?" (Geschiere 2009, 67). Thus Geschiere (2009) cautions against such "development" which he maintains has the potential to exacerbate "latent divisions" already extant within a group (p. 27), thereby magnifying small divisions to proportions that pose a threat to social cohesion.

Furthermore, the reader would have noticed that throughout the foregoing discussions, there tends to be a repeated reference, by Ndebele culture brokers, to the Zulu nation as an example against which the Ndebele should model themselves, including demands that Ndebele royals should be afforded the same treatment afforded those of the Zulu monarchy. This is no surprise since the Zulu, under the Inkatha Cultural Liberation Movement (later the Inkatha Freedom Party), seemed to have achieve what other apartheid-era organisations and/or movements of its ilk failed to achieve. For instance, Morris Szeftel (1994) writes that while other homeland political organisations were fading into obscurity on the eve of South Africa's transition into democracy, the Inkatha Freedom Party was able to reinvent itself and re-merge with significant votes, retaining its control over the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) after the 1994 elections, including gaining some representation in the national cabinet (Szeftel 1994, 193).[153] More importantly, this enabled the Inkatha Freedom Party to make

(re)constructions have the potential to take on ever more exclusionary postures, especially where resources are concerned (also see Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 649).

[153] No doubt a major part of these successes can be attributed to the capable leadership of Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi who had garnered, in the 1980s, an insurmountable media prominence unmatched by any of his contemporaries in southern Africa (Hamilton 1998, 184).

demands for the constitutional recognition of the Zulu monarchy and allowed it to put in place a federal structure which proffered KZN with some degree of regional autonomy (Szeftel 1994, 193–94). The constant references to the Zulu nation and Zulu monarchy can be read as a desire to enact a kind of "ethnic federalism".[154] This is evidenced by the bourgeoning of regional parties such as AIPO whose slogan is "*Siyaziphathela*" ("We are governing ourselves"), who campaign for votes by mobilising a Ndebele ethnic consciousness anchored on memories of colonial and apartheid dispossession and oppression and a remembered past of good homeland governance. The saving grace of such mobilisation, at least so far, is that it has only sought to mobilise on grounds of perceived ethnic persecution and a romanticised view of the old KwaNdebele government, and not necessarily by exploiting existing ethnic prejudices (although this remains a site of potentiality).

[154] A system first developed in the Soviet Union and touted for implementation in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s and eventually enshrined in the constitution in 1991 (Young 1986, 448–49; Young 2004, 17).

Chapter 7 – In-between ethnic and national identity: The Tsonga-Shangaan and the ambivalence of liminal belonging in South Africa

Introduction

On 6 April 2022, the community of Diepsloot township, north of Johannesburg, held an anti-crime march following the murder, in an apparent crime spree, of its four residents. The march was later joined by members of Operation Dudula, an anti-migrant protest organisation with para-military overtones, helmed by Nhlanhla "Lux" Mohlauli, the group's de facto leader at the time. This march continued until late in the evening where it seemed to have morphed into a door-to-door search for illegal firearms. These acts of vigilantism culminated in the death of a Zimbabwean immigrant, Elvis Nyathi.

In the early hours of the morning of 7 April 2022, Nyathi and a friend were seated in the former's shack when an angry mob came knocking on the door in search of weapons. In a panic, the pair ran prompting the mob to chase after them, only managing to catch Nyathi who was then searched and taken back to his shack which was also ransacked for weapons. It later emerged that Nyathi and his companion had run not because they were in possession of weapons but because they had no "papers".[155] Nyathi's confession to this effect unfortunately did not save his life as the mob blithely

[155] Running while one is innocent might seem suspicious but there is an important context that might explain why running in this case was the best cause of action for two undocumented immigrants. A 2010 Report of the Forced Migration Studies Programme (FMSP) mentions that during the May 2008 "xenophobic" attacks in Diepsloot, a group of young men went around asking to check the "papers" of those suspected of being foreign nationals, those who could not produce said papers were immediately attacked and had any of their valuable belongings taken from them. One of the informants quoted explained that this was important because foreigners who did not have papers were prone to criminality since they were not known to the state, while those with papers were more cautious because they could be caught if they committed a crime (Misago et al. 2010, 78). Against this background, we can surmise that Nyathi and his friend were aware that their undocumented status would be considered sufficient ground for culpability.

ignored his pleas of innocence before proceeding to beat him with sticks, ultimately dousing him with petrol and setting him alight.

Thus, South Africans woke up on 7 April 2022, to images of small patches of ash along with corroded inside wiring of car tyres on Thubelihle Street in Diesploot, remains of what used to be Elvis Nyathi, a husband and a father of four. The then Minister of Police Bheki Cele, accompanied by the National Commissioner of Police Sehlahle Fannie Masemola, quickly visited Diepsloot and promised to commit more manpower and resources to the township and deal with the problem of crime. The then Minister of Home Affairs, Aaron Motsoaledi, also visited Diepsloot to reassure the community about his department's efforts to deal with the problem of "illegal" immigrants. Throughout this debacle, very little concern and sympathy was shown for the deceased man and the family he had left behind – no doubt made more vulnerable by his untimely and tragic death – by the ANC's political elite which has come to espouse, along with a few other smaller and emerging parties, an opportunistic anti-immigration stance.

In a few days, this event would be followed by another, still in Diepsloot, which fortunately did not end in a death. This time, however, it would be a South African citizen who would come face-to-face with a police officer who doubted his citizenship because he spoke a "suspicious" dialect of Xitsonga. This event, which was captured by cell phone and circulated across various social networking sites (in particular, X), saw some members of the Tsonga-Shangaan community express concerns about their own status as full citizens in the country. The most prominent among these concerns were those of the Tsonga-Shangaan who inhabit the Mpumalanga province's lowveld regions, such as Bushbuckridge, who felt endangered by the fact that their dialect, which closely resembles the one spoken in southern Mozambique, makes them vulnerable to similar accusations. Interestingly, the lowveld dialect, much like the dialect spoken in Mozambique, borrows heavily from Nguni speech

forms since those populating these regions descend from the remnants of the Gaza Nguni empire.[156] That a dialect permeated with a repertoire of Nguni expressions should be singled out as particularly "unSouth African" poses interesting questions, especially since Nguni is often considered the quintessential South African identity.[157] Elvis Nyathi was himself a Zimbabwean man of Ndebele descent. He spoke Zimbabwean Ndebele, a language that can arguably be described as a dialect of isiZulu, one of the most dominant Nguni languages in South Africa. However, in the weeks following his passing, it was this apparent Nguni heritage that invited the suspicions of Operation Dudula members who accused him of having "bought" his name.

This chapter uses fragments of biographies from the margins to explore a range of themes which give insights into how the Tsonga-Shangaan are interpellated in daily discourses of difference. It demonstrates that much like the Southern Ndebele who have come to view themselves as a marginalised group sometimes "mistaken" for their namesakes in Zimbabwe, the Tsonga-Shangaan have also come to view themselves as similarly stigmatised since they are often interpellated as interlopers and "illegal" sojourners in South Africa. It argues that this is a consequence of the fact that

[156] Mbhaneyele Maluleke (2017) gives an example of these organic infusions of Nguni speech forms into Xitsonga in the first Xitsonga translation of the Bible which he explains is inundated with "Zulu" words which he in turn attributes to the "Zulu conquest" of the Tsonga (see especially pages 118, 125–26; also see Mushwana and Chauke 2018, 441). While Anitra Nettleton (1988) shows these Nguni influences in the material culture of the Tsonga-Shangaan, especially their figurative sculptures which entail head rings for male figures and peaked hairdos for female figures, apparently rendered in the Nguni fashion leading to their initial misidentification as "Zulu" in the literature and in the catalogues and exhibitions of various art galleries and museums (also see Nettleton 2007).

[157] "Nguni" is a generic term that designates a cluster of linguistic and cultural groups believed to have historically formed part of a single ethnic group, distinguished from the Thonga and the Sotho-Tswana groups. Today, ethnic groups believed to form part of this ethno-linguistic cluster include the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and the Swazi. Although the Gaza Nguni were an offshoot of what used to be the Ndwandwe-Nxumalo polity headquartered in KwaNongoma, part of what later became known as Zululand, today those who see themselves as their descendants are rarely seen as forming part of this ethno-linguistic cluster and are therefore defined outside of that interpellation. I expand on this point in the section "Zwivhuya Makondo and the question of who is Nguni in South Africa".

they confound both civic and ethnic categories of belonging. Firstly, because they are often conflated with their counterparts in Mozambique with whom they share a pre-colonial past. And lastly, because they bear nominally "Zulu" names while they do not form part of this putatively autochthonal identity, a fact which renders them betwixt and between a Nguni and some other identity, one considered less authentic or autochthonal to the South African nation-state. This paradoxical status is epitomized by their double-barrel ethnonym, which betrays an ambivalent state of *liminal belonging*.

Jack Ngobeni and the politics of moral personhood

Jack Themba Ngobeni was born in 1987 in Oskraal in the North West province. His mother Agnes Mokobane, a Tswana woman, hails from Okraal, while his father David Ngobeni, a Tsonga-Shangaan man, was born in Giyani in the Limpopo province but was brought up in Oskraal where he met Jack's mother, Agnes. In the early 1980s, David and Agness relocated to the then KwaNdebele homeland, in the Kwaggafontein village, where Ngobeni and his siblings were brought up.[158]

After matriculating in 2004, Ngobeni went to study IT at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria but soon had to drop out of the programme due to financial and family difficulties resulting from his parents' divorce. As it turns out, his father who by now had another family to support, felt no longer compelled to help with tuition, a fate which saw Ngobeni return home dejected, eventually settling for a basic computer course in a local school.

During his high school days, his mother, who was a hawker, often enlisted Ngobeni to help with the family business, handing him a basket filled to the brim with fruits and vegetables and sending him off to do door-to-door as he came back from school. Although he was not bothered by this responsibility, Ngobeni struggled when entering some people's yards where he was sometimes met

[158] Note that it is customary for an expecting mother to leave her husband's homestead and return to her parents' homestead for the purposes of giving birth.

with discrimination, being called derogatory terms such as "*ishangane*" and "*umhlotjana*",[159] while sometimes patrons refused to pay for services received, prompting him to get into physical fights in order to protect his wares.

Ngobeni chronicled for me how his family's small vegetable business evolved from selling using a basket to using a wheelbarrow and, eventually, setting up a stall outside what was then still a supermarket, but has since become the Kwagga Mall, "We got a corner there and we started selling […]. This was started by my mum for the sake of survival because, one, she was not working at that time and she was trying to sustain life raising four children, you understand? And Dad was the only one who was working, so she was trying to balance life, you understand?"

In 2008, Ngobeni got a job in a KFC eatery in Bronkhorstspruit. It was while he was working at the KFC that one afternoon he attended a political gathering addressed by Buti Manamela (then National Secretary of the Young Communist League, a youth wing of the ANC-aligned South African Communist Party) in the township of Zithobeni, near Bronkhorstspruit, that Ngobeni developed an interest in politics. In 2010, Ngobeni resigned from his job at KFC, fully immersing himself in his political work, travelling between Mpumalanga and Gauteng for that purpose. However, in 2012 he once again returned to his home in Kwaggafontein on a full-time basis and joined a local branch of the ANC and its youth wing. In 2015, Ngobeni would be elected Chairperson of the ANC Youth League in Ward 27, a position he held for three consecutive one-year terms. When I interviewed him on 20 October 2020, he was still chairperson of a branch of the ANC Youth League, albeit of a different ward, Ward 29. However, he added, "Procedurally I'm not the Chairman because the Youth League has been dissolved, we haven't gone to Congress, you understand, we've lapsed."

[159] The term *umhlotjana* is a diminutive of the word *umhlobo*, which loosely translates to kind or ethnic group. In the context in which it is used above, it denotes a "lesser ethnic group".

When I interviewed Ngobeni, he presented as a very proud Tsonga-Shangaan man. This was not surprising to me for two reasons. First, he is a local politician, and as a politician I expected him to be outspoken, a stereotype he confirmed. Second, at the time when I interviewed him, he added the descriptor "WamoTsonga" ("The Tsonga") to his Facebook handle. Despite his obvious pride in his Tsonga-Shangaan heritage, Ngobeni expressed some disappointment in the Tsonga-Shangaan population in KwaNdebele who, he insists, "hide" their identity and refuse to speak Xitsonga in public, while others, especially those with "Zulu-sounding" surnames, passed themselves off as non-Xitsonga speakers.

This reality was, however, not surprising to Ngobeni who was well awake to the realities of ethnic prejudice against people of a Tsonga-Shangaan heritage. In fact, Ngobeni considers this behaviour to be deeply ingrained among both those who perpetuate demeaning ethnic stereotypes and those who are at their receiving end. A fact which he believes is made worse by the advent of social media:

> **Jack Ngobeni**: You can even check on social media, you are having these jokes [that] there was a taxi accident, four people and one Shangaan died. That thing on its own it goes to the subconscious, it seats on a person's mind, it damages a person's mind, it means that these ones are way lesser than being humans, you understand? Then we see ourselves and other tribes as better ones. Check this thing, it starts from an early age, you have two kids playing along together, they say they are three years, then you always…when there is this one [you say] *ja Shangane*, *iShangane*, and the young mind catches this thing very fast, and when the child grows up they have this mentality that I'm a person and this one is a Shangaan. It gets planted, that's why I'm saying the media sells more wrong information frequently, up until you believe it as a positive thing. You sow this thing, it's like planting a seed and then watering it, obviously it will grow whether you like it or not.[160]

Above, Ngobeni makes use of a very famous joke that pretends to recount a scene of an accident where the narrator counts, among the unfortunate victims, an X number of people (*abantu*) and one Shangaan. The crux of this joke lies in its attempt to draw sharp distinctions between humans "proper" and those who are interpellated as "Shangaan" who "fall short" of that status. The car accident joke, as narrated by Ngobeni above, and the narrative recounted at the beginning of this thesis about Shangaans as

[160] Interview with Jack Ngobeni, Kwaggafontein A, 29 October 2020.

people who do not foster their young, serves to explain that personhood is not a given, but a product of socialisation.

In *These Bones Will Rise Again*, Panashe Chigumadzi (2018) explains that the term *munhu* in Shona and *umuntu* in Zulu connotes a moral-philosophical orientation (e.g., one who espouses the ethical values of *ubuntu* and/or humanness) rather than denote a racial category (Chigumadzi 2018, Chapter 5). Taken against this context, the charge that Shangaans are not *abantu* is a moral condemnation, one which is also exemplified by the folk etymology that purports to explain how they got their name (as a people who abandon their young). Writing about the Lugbara of East Africa, John Middleton (1960) elucidates this point in that those who founded society (the hero-ancestors who came from the disordered outside regions) were considered asocial and amoral, hence they are thought to have committed incest and cannibalism, among other abominable acts (see Chapter 5 for a more comprehensive discussion on this). However, these hero-ancestors were considered amoral rather than immoral for their commission of these acts since, argues Middleton (1960), they did not yet "know the ties of kinship" (p. 270). Against this background, Middleton (1960) argues that those who come into society, from the outside, are homologised with these hero-ancestors and are therefore castigated as non-humans, thus rendering them fit for socialisation. He writes that:

> […] a client comes into a lineage territory as a 'thing', not as a 'person'. He has no kin. A newly born baby is also often said to be a 'thing'; it is only through socialization that he becomes a full 'person'. This maturity is measured by his possession of a soul and of personality (*talj*). […] We have here the concept of a 'natural' human being who is not yet a social person. (Middleton 1960, 269–70).

You might also recall my discussion, in Chapter 5, of Jason Hickel's (2014) work in Cato Manor, KwaZulu-Natal, where he explains that immigrants – and we might also add perceived cultural outsiders – in that part of the country are often discussed through a "register of inside/outside distinctions" and therefore imputed with powers that are thought to inhere outside society, thereby rendering them prone to accusations of witchcraft (p. 111). Furthermore, Hickel (2014) argues that these beliefs are rooted in a logic that casts witches as people who have "an excess of nature and a

deficit of culture" (p. 112). Similarly, Shangaans are thought to be "natural" human beings rather than "socialised" persons.

Godfrey Mabasa and the discursive construction of class difference in former KwaNdebele

Godfrey Mabasa was born in 1980 in Shigalo village, in the Limpopo province. His father, Mbhazima Mabasa, an erstwhile chairperson of a long-distance taxi association in Limpopo, was ambushed coming out of a meeting and shot seventeen times in what Mabasa believes was a taxi-related assassination. He recollects that, "What hurts me is that he had money amounting to around R8 000 on him. He had two cell phones and a car, but they took nothing because they just wanted him. Even now those people have never been found". His mother, Catherine Mkhabela, who initially ran a fruit and vegetable business out of their home, grudgingly took over her husband's taxi business with some help from Mabasa and his siblings.

Mabasa started school in 1986 at Shimambani Primary School in Shigalo. However, due to the taxi violence of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which Mabasa tells me was much worse in those days compared to today, his father decided to relocate the family to Suncity in KwaMhlanga. So, instead of buying a house in the Gauteng township of Tembisa, Godfrey's father got a stand in Suncity, motivated in part by the belief that he and his family would be safe as strangers in KwaNdebele. Mabasa looks back, with intrusive reminiscence, at the violence of the time, commenting that, "Back then taxi owners if they couldn't get at you, they would just attack your homestead". He continues stating, "Our coming here, we did not even bring our clothes, you won't believe, we didn't bring any furniture, we just came here [as we are]. We didn't understand as children, but my father did explain to us as we got older […]. So, we got here and stayed and saw it as a home".

Mabasa described to me the precarious conditions under which he and his siblings lived in those early years, "I grew [up] being told at home that I should not enter any taxi rank, you won't believe me when I tell you that even at my father's taxi association, no one knew me, they only saw me for the first time at his funeral". Mabasa speaks fondly of his father whom he says made sure they

had everything they needed, yet always encouraged them to study, “He liked to say these words in Shangaan, that everyone will eat the fruits of their own labour, that we should not focus on his business.”

In 1992, Mabasa enrolled at Siphumule Primary School for what was then still called Standard 3 (Grade 5). He looks back at these early days as particularly difficult for him because he could not speak neither Sesotho or isiNdebele, and so he could not understand even when teachers were talking to him, which made him the target of teasing from other children. He, however, has fond memories of his history and geography teacher, Mr Ntuli, whom he says was a very patient man who treated him well and did not seem to take issue with his language-induced learning difficulties. Mr Ntuli advised Mabasa to choose between Sesotho and isiZulu classes, whereupon he settled for the former stating that, “back then there were no isiNdebele classes”.

Although many of the teachers seemed to accept Mabasa, he had a tough time getting along with his fellow pupils who bullied him. As a new face in the community and the school, Mabasa was robbed of his pocket money. “I had to give people money because I was still new, I did not know anyone there. I had to bring money every day for the short break when we got out to buy sweets. I had to bring money so I could avoid being beaten up.”

In 2014, Mabasa and his mother relocated back to Shigalo, but his siblings, who are now married, still live in KwaMhlanga. When I interviewed him in 2021, he was in KwaNdebele visiting his siblings. In our discussion, he looked back at his traumatic early days in KwaNdebele, citing his difficulties with speaking the dominant isiNdebele language, something which he says made him an obvious target for teasing children. However, he mentions one teacher, Mr Ntuli, who offered him some much-needed support in those early days. However, these fond memories are sometimes overshadowed by memories of another teacher, Ma’am Masombuka, whom he says treated him with hostility not only because, he admits, he sometimes did not do his homework and often made noise in class, but particularly because

he was Shangaan. He recalled moments in his childhood when he was teased at school by both teachers and peers for being Shangaan, including a time when a parent of his two friends chased him out of their yard, yelling that she did not want "dirty" and "smelly" Shangaans playing with her children. Mabasa insists that this hatred was worsened by their class status as relatively better-off to the majority of those in Suncity, a fact which was made obvious by their face-brick built 11-room house, their father's taxi business, and their mother's vegetable stall:

> **Godfrey Mabasa**: I remember there was this lady who asked my mother directly what our surname was, and what her surname was, she said so you are not Ndebele, how can Shangaans build such a [beautiful] house. When we got to Suncity, the first brick house…it was 11 rooms…it was our house? They called our home *emaBig Houzini* [at the Big House]. So, people would say we are going to buy spinach at the Big House *emaShanganeni*, but others hated us because of that.[161]

Mabasa also recalls how his family were thought to be working for, rather than the employers of, a Ndebele man who was credited with being the "real" owner of his father's taxi business:

> **Godfrey Mabasa**: As a Shangaan you must be a person who is afraid of water and be a person who works for other people and not have people work for you at home. […] My father, he had people working for him, Sothos worked for him, Zulus worked for him. We had a driver at home, what was his name, he was [called] Petros […], he was a Ndebele […]. The funny thing is that when he hosted ceremonies, we would attend them. So, the people there thought that it was us who were working for his family [chuckles].
>
> **Researcher**: [Chuckles].
>
> **Godfrey Mabasa**: Or maybe it was him who had lied that he was a taxi owner or something, I don't know. So, it was us who worked for Petros's family, we were not his bosses, but he liked calling me *mlungu* [literally, a "white person" in isiZulu, but used *not* to denote a person's race but their status as a "boss" or an employer], I was about 14 or 15 [years old], he would always say *mlungu…mlungu* to me, *lekgowa…lekgowa* [*lekgowa* is a Sesotho version of the isiZulu term *mlungu*].[162]

Here it is important to flesh out some of the theoretical groundwork laid out in the previous chapter, particularly Worby's (1983) synthesis of anthropological semiotics and Marxist explications of ethnicity, in which he argues that ethnic labels or categories serve to connote social class positions in relation to other ethnic categories. Against this theoretical background, it can be argued that the label "Shangaan", which serves to define African itinerant traders, is confounded in actual practice when

[161] Interview with Godfrey Mabasa, KwaNdebele, 2021. Please note that the name of the interviewee, some biographical details, and the date and place of the interview have been altered and/or obscured to protect his identity.

[162] Interview with Godfrey Mabasa, KwaNdebele, 2021.

used in reference to Mabasa and his family who can apparently employ whomever they choose. The resolution, as shown above, is to refer to Mabasa, or any of his kin, as *umlungu* and/or *lekgowa* (that is to say, not an African person at all, but someone outside of the system of ethnic categories altogether).

Zwivhuya Makondo and the question of who is Nguni in South Africa?

Zwivhuya Makondo was born in 1985 to Rosemary Raserope and Tshifhiwa Makondo, in the Limpopo village of Muwaweni. Growing up in a polygamous family, Zwivhuya had 21 brothers and sisters, seven of whom were her full siblings. However, the tragic passing of her father when she was still in Grade 10 saw her large family break apart, with each of Tshifhiwa Makondo's three wives going their own way. "After our father passed", Makondo recollects with an unmistakable sadness, "we had separate houses, and everyone raised their respective families".

Raserope, now a widowed single mother, was still able to raise Makondo and her siblings from wages she earned working in a firm near Polokwane, assisted by Makondo 's four older siblings who, after matriculating, got jobs in the retail sector to help keep the family afloat. As a result, Makondo and two of her other siblings were able to study further and get university qualifications.

After matriculating in 2004, Makondo enrolled at the University of Venda to study for a BCom in Accounting. However, after graduating in 2008, she struggled to get a job as an accountant, instead settling for jobs as a bank teller before altogether leaving that industry to pursue a career as a teacher. Accordingly, in 2014, Makondo enrolled for a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course at the University of South Africa (Unisa). After graduating in 2015, she got a teaching job with an independent school in Limpopo where she worked for a little less than a year before getting a permanent job with the Department of Basic Education in the former KwaNdebele. Makondo now works as a teacher at Dumeleni Secondary School in Mathys Zyn Loop village, near Kwaggafontein.

When I interviewed her in 2020, she described KwaNdebele as a place beset by ethnic prejudice, especially towards people of a non-Nguni heritage. In particular, she singled-out the area of Waterval, Siyabuswa, as a site marked by ethnic discrimination against, in particular, the Tsonga-Shangaan. She explained to me how she would always be called a Shangaan, even when she went out of her way to explain that she was Venda. However, this discrimination lessened when she moved to Mathys Zyn Loop, a village near Kwaggafontein, although she confessed that she continues to be called "Shangaan" by her colleagues who use the term in jest, at least that's what she believes.

Makondo's stay in Waterval provoked an epiphany on how the term Shangaan was used to interpellate any person who did not speak ether one of the two Nguni languages – isiNdebele and isiZulu – in particular people who either spoke Sepedi or TshiVenda:

> **Zwivhuya Makondo**: If you go to Waterval in Siyabuswa, if you're not speaking isiNdebele you're a Shangaan.
>
> **Researcher**: Okay, so you could be like Sotho [or] Tswana?
>
> **Zwivhuya Makondo**: Sotho, Tswana, you're a Shangaan. But you ask yourself what if someone goes to Siyabuswa and he or she speaks in Zulu, is he or she a Shangaan? They don't refer to that person as a Shangaan. So, you will understand that maybe their knowledge, or their information is only guided by those people who will be speaking any other language except Ndebele and Zulu, then they are Shangaan. Because when I came this side, first time when someone called me a Shangaan I said no, I am not a Shangaan, I'm a Venda. They said yes, you are a Shangaan. Then I was like oh okay, maybe I should educate this person. So, the level of education is also a problem.[163]

My conversation with Makondo above revealed, among other things, much about how the term "*iShangane*" and/or "*amaShangane*" was used – in the rural setting of KwaNdebele – to label groups of people of non-Nguni descent (that is, people who are neither Ndebele, Zulu, Swazi, and Xhosa). Whereas in the preceding sections and sub-sections the term was shown to be mostly used to refer to black Africans who mostly hail from outside the bounds of South Africa, who do not have South African citizenship. Here we have a clear example of when the term is used to refer to perceived cultural outsiders (this would include Tsongas, Vendas, and Pedis), irrespective of their citizenship

[163] Interview with Zwivhuya Makondo, KwaNdebele, 2020. Please note that the name and some biographical details of the interviewee, place of the interview, and other details might have been altered and/or obscured to protect the identity of the research participant.

status. More interestingly, however, this conversation reveals that as a people the Tsonga-Shangaan – despite their Nguni heritage – are not regarded as forming part of the four Nguni sub-groups mentioned above. This last point cannot be merely attributed to the "ignorance" of the common person on the ground since official state appellation also delineates the Tsonga-Shangaan outside these four Nguni sub-groups.

John Wright (1983) traces the ways in which the term Nguni has been used across space and time, in both popular and scholarly parlance. He explains that the earliest mentions of the term can be found in the travelogues of the sixteenth century which describe the south-eastern shoreline as the country of the Nguni (Wright 1983, 1). Nevertheless, the term seems to have been used, among south-east Africans, in a more restricted sense, for example to refer to specific disparate clans rather than to designate an ethnic group (Wright 1983, 1–2). For example, in the nineteenth century, King Shaka seems to have appropriated the term "Mnguni" for use exclusively to designate his royal personage, an address which was later reserved for the Zulu royal family, including clans which claimed a genealogical connection to the Zulu clan, who used it to distinguish themselves from "amaTungwa" – a second-tier appellation when compared to the "Nguni" core of the kingdom – which nevertheless designated incorporated clans higher in status when compared to "amaLala", among other similarly interpellated groups, who were thought to reside on the margins of the Zulu state (Wright 1983, 3–4, 20–22; also see Kelly 2018, 20). Right around this time, the term was also used by both Thonga and Sotho-Tswana groups as a generic descriptor of the citizens of the Zulu state including non-Zulu people who were nevertheless culturally related to the Zulu (Wright 1983, 4–5). The latter would include offshoots of the defeated Ndwandwe such as the Ndebele of Mzilikazi, the Jele of Zwangendaba, and the Shangane (sometimes also called "amaZwide") of Soshangane. Wright (1983) explains that:

> In sum, during the 19th century there appear to have been three regionally distinct meanings of Nguni. South of the Thukela, the term designated primarily the Xhosa peoples. North of the Thukela, in the Zulu kingdom, it designated the dominant Zulu clan and closely related clans, to the exclusion of the great majority of the clans that had been incorporated into the kingdom. Among the Sotho and Thonga the word designated the people of the Zulu kingdom as a whole. (Wright 1983, 5)

Nevertheless, within these groups the use of the term remained restricted. Clans which were thought to be Nguni included the Zulu, Qwabe, Biyela, Chunu, Langa, Magwaza, Mthethwa, Ndwandwe, Mzimela, and Zungu, whose claims to that title were also the subject of contestations by others who disputed their claim while also pressing the legitimacy of their own claims (Wright 1983, 5, 23). Drawing from David Hedges' (1978) doctoral thesis entitled "Trade and Politics in Southern Mozambique and Zululand in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries", Wright (1983) argues that the appropriation of the term by the Zulu royal family served to cast them as the natural rulers of their newly consolidated conquest state since the term seemed to have imputed attributes of "antiquity of residence" and "political authority", something which would have cast them as the autochthons and therefore natural owners and rulers of the lands and peoples they conquered and incorporated into their kingdom (pp. 19–21, 23). For instance, Wright (1983) notes that:

> R. C. A. Samuelson, who had close links with the Zulu royal house, fixed this usage in print in his King Cetywayo Zulu Dictionary, published in 1923. In the work he gave as one his definitions of umNguni, "an ancient; a person belonging to an ancient stock", and wrote of the plural form, Abanguni, "the Zulus have this appellation in consequence of their tribe being the oldest native tribe from which the others have sprung". (Wright 1983, 25)

However, Wright (1983) explains that by the 1920s and 1930s the term Nguni was increasingly being used, in scholarly appellation, to distinguish the Swazi, Ndebele, Zulu and Xhosa from Thonga and Sotho-Tswana groups (p. 3), an adoption that Wright (1983) credits to the publication of Bryant's (1929) *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal*, which popularised the term thus propagating its ideological imputations of a "primordial ethnic unity" among the disparate groups it described (pp. 26–27).[164] (Today there exists a myth that the fabled Mnguni gave birth to four sons – Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele, who in turn founded the four Nguni sub-groups.) Against this background, it would not be

[164] One important qualification to make here is that Wright (1983) notes that: "Bryant, then, did not so much invent the modern usage of Nguni as put his own particular gloss on a usage which he had encountered among Africans in Natal and Zululand from the early 20th century onward, and convey this reworked meaning to a readership of academics and administrators which, for historically explicable reasons, was particularly receptive to it" (Wright 1983, 26).

farfetched to suggest that the term "Nguni" has not completely shed its archaic connotations, that it somehow still retains its imputations of autochthony, a status denied to the Tsonga-Shangaan, the Venda, and *some* Sotho-Twana groups, insofar as the latter appellation refers to the Pedi.

Edwin Hatendi and the notion of "Shangaan-ness" as itineracy

Edwin Hatendi was born in 1993 in a village near Espungabera, a township situated near Mozambique's border with Zimbabwe, to Shona parents Innocent Hatendi and Anesu Mabuwa, who had immigrated to Mozambique in 1990 from Zimbabwe. Edwin's father, Innocent, works as a security guard and looks after farming equipment in Espungabera, while his mother, Anesu, is a homemaker who is responsible for the upkeep of the homestead and for raising Hatendi's younger siblings and some of her grandchildren. Hatendi comes from a big family since Innocent has two other wives apart from Anesu. As a result, Hatendi has eight full-siblings and nine other half-siblings by his father's two junior wives. Hatendi's family owns some livestock and some land for grazing and planting crops, especially corn which they use to make mealie meal. Even though he grew up herding cattle, Hatendi was able to attend school until 2011 when he dropped out of Grade 9 because he could not afford the monthly school fees and the fees that one must pay to take mandatory tests and exams in Mozambique. After dropping out of school, Hatendi immigrated to South Africa. He recounts a series of events that led to his absconsion from school and his eventual immigration into South Africa, stating that, "Since some of my brothers were already in South Africa, they were already working. I told them that I am no longer going to school because I don't have money [...]. They asked me what I was intending to do, and I told them that with the little money I have, I was thinking of also coming to South Africa to find work. So, I was thinking that when I come here to South Africa, when I get money, I will then pay for my schooling when I go back home, but I was unable to get back into school when I returned home. So, I never went back to school".

Among his full-siblings, Hatendi tells me that it is only his oldest brother (the firstborn) who has remained behind in Mozambique, while the rest of his brothers and sisters were, at the time of our

interview, living and working in South Africa. Hatendi is married with two children, having met his Shona wife in 2014, on the Zimbabwean side of the border, during one of his frequent excursions into that country. Hatendi tells me that Espungabera is inhabited by mainly Shona, Ndau, and Ndebele people. He insists that there are no ethnic antagonisms between these groups. Interestingly, he also tells me that many of the wives in the area are actually South African-born women, especially from the Limpopo province, who met their husbands while they were working in South Africa and left with them when they returned home to Mozambique. When Hatendi arrived in South Africa, he first lived with his three brothers who were then living in the village of Gemsbokspruit engaged in carpentry work, making and selling tables and chairs. Hatendi joined them in doing this work for four years until he quit and opened a spaza shop in 2017 in the nearby village of Vlaklaagte No 2.

When I interviewed him in January 2022, he was still operating his spaza shop out of a residential space he was renting. During our conversation, he described KwaNdebele as a welcoming place relative to Payneville, a shantytown in Springs, Johannesburg, where he stayed for three months in 2015, during the biggest xenophobic attacks since 2008. Hatendi recalled how he had lived in fear since Payneville residents were often coerced into participating in vigilante activities which included administering beatings and, occasionally, “the burning of people alive”. Hatendi contrasts these horrid memories with the peace and calm of KwaNdebele which, although sometimes unwelcoming to foreigners like himself, is not a place prone to violent outbursts. Nevertheless, he does allude to sporadic inter-personal incidents of mistreatment such as former landlords who took items on credit but refused to settle their debts. This behaviour was further compounded by abusive customers who addressed him directly as a “Shangaan” during business interactions, while sometimes he overheard them talking with their companions, stating, “I am going to buy something from those Shangaans”, referring to him and his wife who took turns operating the shop.

Although he leads an economically precarious life sometimes punctuated with threats to his and his family’s lives, my conversation with Hatendi revealed him to be hopeful about the future:

Researcher: What are your hopes for the future, what do you intended to do in the future?

Edwin Hatendi: I wish to get my own stand, my own land and leave my father's plot at home, so that I can have my own homestead and take my wife and children and live with them, then I will see where life takes me from there.

Researcher: When you're talking about a stand, do you mean here or [back] at home?

Edwin Hatendi: At home because I can't buy one here since I don't have complete papers.

Researcher: Do you want them [papers]?

Edwin Hatendi: I do want them because if I can have them many other things would be easier.

Researcher: When you say things might get easier, do you mean in terms of getting jobs, or just settling in permanently?

Edwin Hatendi: Also, just settling in permanently, maybe the people I live with [in the community] when they hear that I bought a stand, and that I have an ID from here, they will then not differentiate that this one is not from here. Because another thing that makes people to talk that this one is a Shangaan, I am sure it's because they see that you stay here then you move, then you stay there, and again you move. Like I told you [earlier] that I started there by [the name of the local bazaar is withheld to protect the identity of the participant].[165]

In his comments above, Hatendi dreams of acquiring a piece of land in South Africa which he can permanently settle. He reasons that this would help dissuade people from calling him *iShangane*, a label he believes he acquired by moving around and never staying in one place for long. This is a striking revelation when taken together with the fact that the stem – *shanga,* – from which the name Soshangane derives – also connotes an act of wandering. In fact, the linguist Ximbani Mabaso (2018) explains that the term *ulushangane*, "in isiZulu means a 'wanderer', *umuntu ongahlali ndawonye* 'a person of no fixed abode'" (p. 315). Interestingly, in *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) argues that "if time is conceived as flow or movement then place is pause" (p. 198), therefore, "attachment, whether to a person or to a locality, is seldom acquired in passing" (p. 184). Against this context, it can be argued that Hatendi does not occupy space – read as a pause in time – long enough to form any meaningful attachments or convert that space into place, since he wanders from one village or township to another. First, because he was escaping xenophobic violence in Springs, Johannesburg. Second,

[165] Interview with Edwin Hatendi, KwaNdebele, 2022. Please note that the name and some biographical details of the interviewee, place of the interview, and other details might have been altered and/or obscured to protect the identity of the research participant.

because he was escaping abuse from a landlord who was helping himself to his stock. In fact, when I wrote this section, Hatendi had already left his last place of residence.[166]

Ethnic games and the politics of conformity in former KwaNdebele

As a result of the stigma attached to their identity, the Tsonga-Shangaan in KwaNdebele have sometimes tended to hide the truth of their ethnic heritage, passing themselves off as members of non-stigmatised groups. In the first instance, this strategy is adopted only partially, in which case one need only hide their identity when in public or when among people of a non-Tsonga-Shangaan heritage. In the second instance, this strategy is adopted through complete assimilation into a non-stigmatised identity, requiring one to hide the truth of their ethnic heritage even to other Tsonga-Shangaan people. The latter strategy has particularly been the preferred choice for those whose patronyms are "Zulu-sounding" who therefore find it easy to affect a Zulu and, sometimes, a Southern Ndebele identity. However, this strategy is also available to those who bear patronyms that are readily recognisable as "Tsonga" who have the option of using a matriname, if their mothers are not of Tsonga-Shangaan extraction. This has, of course, incurred the anger of other Tsonga-Shangaan people who, steadfast in their traditions and customs, castigate their "apostate" counterparts as timid and too willing to acquiesce to the compulsions of other groups. Jack Ngobeni, who is a proud Tsonga-Shangaan man, is one such individual who expressed disappointment in the Tsonga-Shangaan population in Kwaggafontein who, he insists, eschew their culture in favour of non-stigmatised groups:

> **Jack Ngobeni**: KwaNdebele is not dominated by Ndebele people, we are having people of many cultures, languages, and so on, who reside in KwaNdebele, but you won't see them, you know why, because the dominant language here is isiNdebele, you understand. From this block chief, from this block up until to my street, come I tell you the houses that are here, come I tell you, are dominated by Shangaan people, but you hardly hear them speaking Shangaan.
>
> **Researcher**: Why is that?

[166] It is important to note that Tuan (1977) qualifies his assertions by arguing that it does not only take duration to form attachments or to make a place out of space, but that it is the intensity or quality of experience that is more important (p. 185). From this vantage point, Hatendi is doubly disadvantaged, making him a transient par excellence.

Jack Ngobeni: I don't know, they speak isiNdebele. Others I even fight with them and say, why don't you speak our language? And they respond to me in Ndebele, we end up having [an argument], no it seems like you guys you don't love yourselves. I tell them that I always speak my language, whenever I feel like speaking my language I speak my language, but because I always find myself with activists the simplest language that we use it will be English, you understand, but when I'm alone and when I'm at home there are two languages that I speak – Sotho and Shangaan.[167]

The games that people play to keep their "true" identities hidden can sometimes be a double-edged sword, endearing them to members of a putatively dominant group while also alienating them with some of their kin and kith who might resent them for "kowtowing" to other groups while also seeing their pretensions as ultimately futile since, sooner or later, one is forced to host traditional ceremonies which may demand the performance, in full view of neighbours, of rituals in one's native tongue. Brenda Mabunda who, like Ngobeni, is a proud Tsonga-Shangaan woman, elucidates this point:

Researcher: Have you ever felt ashamed of being Tsonga?

Brenda Mabunda: No, not even a little.

Researcher: You've never felt tempted to hide?

Brenda Mabunda: If it meant going to jail, I would rather go to jail […] because it's who I am and I won't hide where I come from […]. [But] my aunt's child…at home when there was a funeral, we were sitting around a fire, they were debating, we were talking about all things Shangaan […], but when you come across him with his friends, he will not greet you, because he thinks you will talk to him in Shangaan, that you're going to expose him to his friends. But when he's walking alone, he'll greet you. He [once] came across my father, my father thought he's greeting his nephew, so my father greeted him in Shangaan, he just kept quiet and passed, then the other day he greeted him. So, they were sitting with my brother here, and he said I am not going to hide myself, if I come across you with your friends, I will tell them that you're a Shangaan, he's said if it's like that we rather end relations…don't expose me when we're among other people that I am Shangaan, like he's actually not proud that he is Shangaan.

Researcher: But would you blame such a person?

Brenda Mabunda: Yes, I blame them.

Researcher: Why?

Brenda Mabunda: Why, because, I don't know how I can explain this, he is hiding himself that he is Shangaan, if it happens that at his home there is a party or something, his family will be there, right? So, you see that his shame will be revealed.

Researcher: Or what you were saying earlier, that if there is a funeral, because the obituary reveals the truth.

Brenda Mabunda: Their secret, so there the truth will be revealed, that this person was hiding all along.[168]

[167] Interview with Jack Ngobeni, Kwaggafontein A, 29 October 2020.

[168] Interview with Brenda Mabunda, Tweefontein H, 2 October 2020.

Above, Mabunda betrays an instance of "prolepsis" or the act of flashing forward to an imagined future event – a ceremony of sorts, or worse one's own funeral where all will be laid bare. This is because funerals, particularly the part where the obituary is read out, ironically act to "exhume" the hidden aspects of people's identities, giving a full record of their names (which may include those given in remembrance of forebears), while also giving an account of who their parents were, and where they were born. More importantly, funerals demand the performance of ritual incantations – in one's native tongue – intended to incorporate the deceased into a network of lineage spirits. Failure in this regard might condemn the deceased to an eternity of what Lorena Núñez and Matthew Wilhelm-Solomon (2013) call "metaphysical itineracy" (cited in Moyo et al. 2016, 279).

The Tsonga-Shangaan are, however, not alone in playing these ethnic "hide and seek" games, other cultural minorities engage in similar strategies, veiling their identities even to those who share their ethnic heritage. Zwivhuya Makondo, a high school teacher who had been living and working in KwaNdebele for over five years, expressed shock that some of the pupils and parents she had come to know over the years were of Venda descent but had kept this truth from her:

> **Zwivhuya Makondo**: The fact that most people they would hide themselves, not wanting to show people that they are Venda, or that they are Shangaan for example, it has to do with their self-confidence. I've seen it a lot here, I've got people like around here, we've got people with the Mashudu surname, we've got Mulaudzi around here, they are Venda people but they hide themselves. I even found someone yesterday, that lady she's a Venda, she's got a family around here, but just yesterday [I got to find out], but I was here for the past five years, I didn't even know that those are the Venda people, why, because they hide themselves. Maybe they fear that these people will start calling them names and all that, but to me it has to do with your confidence, because if you're Zulu you're Zulu, totally, you don't have to be…like if you're in Venda you don't change to be someone, you're still a Zulu. Since I came here, I've never hid myself, I always say, even in the meetings, I would say, when I introduce myself, I always say I'm a Venda person coming from Venda, so that when I'm busy saying something, maybe the pronunciation, you know, they shouldn't suspect and ask, where does this one come from? Already they know. I would tell them, I would tell them before any meeting, should it be a parents' meeting, I would make sure that before I start I would say, never mind my pronunciation I am a Venda person, I am learning your language, and then I would continue. So, I've never…but there are people here who hide, I've seen it many times.[169]

[169] Interview with Zwivhuya Makondo, KwaNdebele, 2020.

Withholding the truth of one's ethnic identity from others of the same heritage, especially those who seem oblivious to the game being played, either because they are newcomers and are therefore novices, or are aware of the game but nevertheless choose not to play, is motivated by avoiding "embarrassing" situations where one is publicly drawn into a conversation, in full view of friends, in their native tongue. When one's ethnic heritage is not known by the wider public, people tend to develop a repertoire of strategies to handle public encounters with those of their kinfolk who refuse to play the game. Such strategies entail evasion tactics such as not replying to greetings or attempts to engage in public conversations by feigning to have not heard or recognised the person hailing them from across the street. Others, those who have chosen the route of complete assimilation, often indicate this by affecting a Southern Ndebele identity by perfecting their command of the language, which is well known for its emphatic or strongly enunciated *r*'s, and refuse to capitulate by engaging in conversation in their native tongue. Nevertheless, members of a dominant cultural group sometimes join in on these games, if only to remind those who are perceived to be merely affecting a non-stigmatised identity that their "secret" is well known. This might take the form of greetings, done in a language the perceived interloper understands, but pretends not to do. In other cases, one might be put to the test by being subjected to insulting comments directed at their bona fide group, in a conversation deliberately initiated for that purpose. Imogen Tyler (2020) calls these small and subtle acts, "the power-inflected micro-aggressions of everyday interactions" (p. 99).

Gossip and shaming among the Tsonga-Shangaan in former KwaNdebele

The Tsonga-Shangaan in the former KwaNdebele employ a number of strategies that serve to discipline their members into remaining loyal to the group and therefore dissuade them from adopting a non-stigmatised identity. This mostly entails the use gossip and shaming among those who refuse to play these "hide and seek" games, who allocate nicknames to those of their brethren who attempt to pass for non-stigmatised groups. These demeaning names are usually predicated on the victim's strategies for passing. For instance, a person affecting a Ndebele identity might be mocked for their

ostentatious displays of a Ndebele vocabulary and ascribed a nickname which alludes to this fact. Others might be mocked for their commitment to attend Ndebele traditional ceremonies and their zealous participation in the festivities thereof. An extreme example of the latter is when a Tsonga-Shangaan male youth submits themselves, often against the wishes of family elders, to a Ndebele initiation camp, an event which is thought to bring shame to the rest of the family.

A more direct strategy for dealing with those who "hide" their Tsonga-Shangaan heritage is what can be called "outing" or the attempt to pressure those who affect a Southern Ndebele identity to speak their native tongue in public. This might take the form of elders who, when they come across youths in the company of their peers, stop them to enquire, using Xitsonga, about their parents and their wellbeing. In these situations, the concerned youth is forced to give answers in Xitsonga, while in other cases they might persist in their use of isiNdebele in a futile attempt to remain incognito since their demonstrated comprehension of the questions posed "outs" them as a covert "Shangaan" (of course, this is not always done for mischievous reasons, there are cases wherein the elder concerned is oblivious to the game being played). Should the youth refuse to capitulate and revert in Xitsonga, this will render them vulnerable to gossip, all the more if they altogether evade conversation by feigning a poor grasp of the language. This last point reveals that there is also an age dynamic to these games which betrays intergenerational tensions. This is because while older members of a stigmatised group express themselves freely in their native tongue, even in public, those of a younger generation seem to eschew their stigmatised heritage and profess a poor grasp of their native tongue, especially when they are in the company of their peers.

Erving Goffman (1963) called this phenomenon "double living", a concept which describes how those with a stigma might affect a non-stigmatised persona when in public while also remaining true to their stigmatised identity in closed circles. While Harald Eidheim (1969, 50), writing about the Sámi of Norway (a stigmatised group who are interpellated as "Lapps"), argued that for a stigmatised people there are two "spheres of interaction", one private and another which is public, and that while

one could freely engage in conversation in the private sphere they, however, found themselves in a "double-bind" situation when they publicly encountered their brethren whose offers to engage in conversation, if refused, would hurt one's standing in the Sámi community, while an acceptance to engage in conversation would "out" one as a covert "Lapp".

Although I found no parallels in KwaNdebele, David Webster (1991) explored another interesting dynamic, one which revealed gender differences between men and women of a stigmatised Thonga heritage. Focusing on KwaDapha, a village in Kosi Bay (northern KwaZulu Natal), Webster (1991) writes that in this village, "husbands and wives, or, more pertinently, fathers and daughters or even brothers and sisters often portray themselves as having differing ethnic affiliations, namely, Zulu and Thonga" (p. 244). While men, for reasons of migrant labour, find a Zulu identity advantageous, women who are often excluded from work in town and/or in the factories, tend to find a Thonga identity more suited to their circumstances since it proffers greater authority within the domestic sphere (Webster 1991, 252). For men, for whom a Zulu identity is more ideal, one might perform this identity through acts of ethnic elision or by adopting a Zulu surname that approximates their actual Thonga surname. For instance, a Tembe man (Tembe being a predominantly Thonga surname) can, when in town doing migrant labour, present himself as a Mthembu (Mthembu being a predominantly Zulu surname) (Webster 1991, 251–52; also see Niehaus 2002, 574). In KwaNdebele there is, however, an inverted version of the latter phenomenon, where those Tsonga-Shangaan who bear surnames that might be understood as Zulu or Southern Ndebele, attempt to produce idiosyncratic spellings, along with corresponding sound-shifts, that differentiate them from their Zulu or Southern Ndebele cognates. I expand on this in the following section.

Ethnic names and the "counterfeiting" of identity in South Africa

As is apparent from the foregoing discussions, the Tsonga-Shangaan are a group that confounds both ethnic and civic categories of belonging. This fact is epitomised by their double-barrel ethnonym which betrays what Thurka Sangaramoorthy (2019) has called a "transient sociality". This fact is made more

obvious by those, among the Tsonga-Shangaan, who hail from the Mpumalanga province's lowveld regions who often bear "Zulu-sounding" names. These names are often a source of confusion for those who are not cognisant of Gaza Nguni history and therefore open the Tsonga-Shangaan to accusations of identity counterfeiting for purposes of acquiring a citizenship. Such accusations, as we have seen in the opening of this chapter, are also levelled at foreigners who bear putatively "Zulu" names such Elvis Nyathi who was accused, by members of Operation Dudula, of having "bought" his name. These suspicions were no doubt stirred by Elvis Nyathi's surname which, as a predominantly Zulu patronym, blurred the lines between a Zulu and a foreign identity. Facing a similar dilemma, some members of the Tsonga-Shangaan who bear "Zulu-sounding" names have tried to differentiate themselves from their Zulu brethren by transliterating or generating idiosyncratic spellings for their names in ways that follow Xitsonga orthography thus effecting a sound-shift that differentiate them from their "standard" Zulu versions. For instance, Ngobeni recounts instances when he went out of his way to make it clear that he is a Ngobeni and not a Ngubeni,[170] the latter being the standard Zulu spelling for his surname:

> **Researcher**: There is this thing, I think they no longer do it now […] but at the beginning of each school year, in primary school, the teacher would come into class..
>
> **Jack Ngobeni**: Yes, have a list of Sothos, Tswanas, *ai* chief […] I remember when we were…was it Grade 10? Yes, if it was not Grade 10…there was this lady, I forget her name [clicks fingers], always when the teacher would get into class and ask how many Sothos, Ndebeles [etc.], and she was a Ndlovu, *ai* chief, she would stand with the Ndebeles, and I was like, really, honestly, *ai* chief come on!
>
> […]
>
> **Researcher**: You never felt the urge to lie about…because your surname is Ngobeni, that sounds to me like a Zulu surname.
>
> **Jack Ngobeni**: Yes, I always correct people when they say Ngu- I say it's not Ngu- it's Ngo- …I always correct people when they spell my surname the other way round, because the Zulus they are having a /u/ [and] I am having an /o/.
>
> **Researcher**: Yes, so that's why I'm saying it's easy for you, if you wanted to, in a situation where you felt that possibly you could be discriminated against, because you're Tsonga.
>
> **Jack Ngobeni:** No, not at all. *Brah* I remember, what day was it? I remember, I went to Sandton, then from Sandton I decided to go to MTN, the Joburg [taxi] rank, then there were these taxi owners, that old man [he said], "*Mfethu uwubani"* [my brother, who are you]? You know Zulus when they greet it's as if they are fighting, and then I was like, "[I am] Ngobeni," [and then he says], "Oh, Ngubeni!" I was like,

[170] I have also met people who insist that even this purported Tsonga version spelt with an /o/ instead of a /u/ is partial, arguing that the rest of the surname is spelt with a /v/ as in Ngoveni instead of the putative Ngobeni.

> "I am not Ngubeni I am Ngobeni." [He says], *"Ye uthini* [what did you say]?" I said, "Ngobeni, Ngobeni, I am Shangaan." [Then he said], "Oh!" I always correct people. I am not shy, and I can't disown myself.[171]

Ngobeni is not unique in this, in fact for any Zulu patronym one can almost always find a version, among the Tsonga-Shangaan, that has been rendered following Xitsonga orthography. For example, Hlungwani in the place of Hlogwane, Ngoveni and Ngobeni in the place of Ngubeni, Khosa in the place of Khoza, Mathevula in the place of Mathebula, and so forth.[172] Godfrey Mabasa is another example of this since his surname is spelled Mabasa while the standard Zulu version is Mabaso. Nevertheless, Mabasa apportions these differences to bureaucratic ineptitude:

> **Researcher**: Why do you spell your surname with an /a/ and not an /o/ at the end?
>
> **Godfrey Mabasa**: It's Xitsonga […], the ones who have it spelt with an /o/ it was because of those days of Bantu Education, when people were asked what's your surname…it's Mabasa, and then you find that the person [official] writing there is a Nguni person, you see, or they are Sotho, that's why you will find people in Giyani writing their surname as Mabaso, [and] that's the Zulu version…the M-A-B-A-S-O, but you will only realise when they are saying their clan praises that this person is not a Zulu from Natal, they are Tsonga, because there are Zulu Mabasos in Natal. Personally, I am proud of it, I like it how it is, even my children use this version.[173]

However, such attempts at differentiation are doomed to failure. This is because the minute changes that transliteration produces in pronunciation only serve to heighten the "uncanny valley" effect which describes the feeling where a thing becomes "threatening" precisely because it is eerily familiar, but not quite the same (see Jentsch 1906; Freud 1919; Mori 1970). For scholars of a postcolonial bent, the latter phenomenon would be best explained by what Homi Bhabha (1984) has called the "ambivalence of mimicry", a concept which defines that which is "almost the same, *but not quite*", or that which is "at once resemblance and menace" (Bhabha 1984, 127, emphasis in original). A similar explanation can be derived from Freud's conception of the "narcissism of minor differences" which describes an

[171] Interview with Jack Ngobeni, Kwaggafontein A, 29 October 2020.

[172] However, there is literature that suggests that some of these spellings have a longer history prior to apartheid state bureaucratic processes to document homelands citizens. Furthermore, some patronyms that are generally attributed to Gaza Nguni influences among the Tsonga might also have a longer history prior to their incursions in the early nineteenth-century, for instance the surnames Khosa and Ngubane are attributed to earlier Tsonga polities in some of the literature (see for example Webster 1986, 630; Leibhammer 2007b, 24).

[173] Interview with Godfrey Mabasa, KwaNdebele, 2021.

obsession over what are seemingly negligible differences that, nevertheless, produce anxieties over potential category confusion (see Freud 1919; Ignatieff 1999; St Louis 2005; Matsinhe 2011).[174]

Reflections

I began this chapter with the tragic story of Elvis Nyathi's death on Thubelihle Street in the slums of Diepsloot. I drew parallels between Nyathi, a Ndebele man from Zimbabwe, whose Nguni identity ought to have afforded him some protection from the murderous passions of an angry mob and the Tsonga-Shangaan who, in the weeks following Nyathi's death, expressed anxieties around their own status as full and authentic citizens in South Africa, in particular those Tsonga-Shangaan who inhabit the lowveld regions of the Mpumalanga province who often bear "Zulu" patronyms. However, like Nyathi, their Nguni heritage, instead of affording them some insulation, has become the very blemish marking them as interlopers and "illegal" sojourners in the country, accused of "counterfeiting" their identities for the sake of acquiring a South African citizenship. This has meant that although they have a civic citizenship, they are nevertheless castigated as "foreign" to the South African nation-state. This fact is epitomised by their double-barrel ethnonym which betrays an ambivalent state of *liminal belonging*, positioning them betwixt and between a South African and some other identity.

[174] Julia Kriesteva (1982) also elucidates the latter point through her conception of "the abject" as that which shatters the illusion of a separation between subject and object or, for my purposes here, that which shatters the Self-Other dyad.

Chapter 8 – *AmaShangane*, *amaKula*, and *abantu bakaMugabe*: Shifting ethnonyms and the discursive construction of difference in former KwaNdebele

Introduction

The term iShangane (sing.) and amaShangane (pl.),[175] is deeply ingrained in South Africa's ethnophaulic lexicon and has consequently become the focus of many folk etymologies which retroactively try to make sense of its widespread currency. The most popular of these etymologies harkens back to the mine migrant labour system and claims that the Shangaan – who are interpellated as *amaShiya'ngane* (i.e., those who abandon their children) – acquired their name because they came from a distant land, leaving their children behind, to eke out a living in South Africa (also see Maluleke 2017, 44; Mabaso 2018, 314). A variation of this etymology inverts the chronology by claiming that this name was ascribed to them after they shamelessly abandoned their children with South African girlfriends when their work contracts ended, and they returned to their bona fide families in their home countries.

However, as was discussed in the opening chapter to this thesis, there are fragments of oral traditions that indicate that the term derives from the founder of the famed Gaza Nguni empire, Manukuza kaZikode, who took on the name Soshangane to extol the military prowess of his regiments who came to be known as amaShangane, "the Destroyers" (Massie 1905, 64). This is because the term, *ukushanga,* from which the name is derived connotes the military act of attacking and displacing an enemy from their homeland (Mabaso 2018, 315). Therefore, the ominous name amaShangane would have served as a useful device in the context of nineteenth-century upheavals that have been called "*uMfecane*" in the historiography of south-east Africa. Nevertheless, the term has undergone a process of pejoration and has thus become a slur for immigrants of African descent as well as for cultural

[175] In the popular parlance, the prefix /i-/ in the term 'iShangane' is considered to be particularly insulting as many believe it to be a form of 'objectification', as a result they insist that the term should instead be prefixed with /um-/ to indicate that it denotes a human referent.

minorities who fall outside the pale of a putatively autochthonal identity. Ironically, the term "Tsonga" is widely theorised to derive from the Nguni term "iThonga" (sing.) and "amaThonga" (pl.) which described those who lived on the margins of several powerful Nguni polities in nineteenth-century south-east Africa, who refused to assimilate into Nguni cultural forms. Nevertheless, the term Tsonga has undergone a process of amelioration and has thus become a respectable descriptor for a South African ethnic group.

Drawing on the extant literature on the Tsonga-Shangaan, this chapter locates the semantic shift between the terms "Tsonga" and "Shangaan" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First, it argues that the amelioration of the term Tsonga can be attributed to the machinations of missionary ethnographers and linguists in the early 1900s who used the term in their standardisation of east-coast dialects and the consequent amalgamation of disparate groups of Xitsonga-speakers into one coherent ethno-linguistic group. Second, it argues that the pejoration of the term Shangaan can be attributed to the mine migrant labour system in the late 1800s where Shangaan immigrants formed the bulk of the labour force in the Witwatersrand Basin, rendering them a major source of competition for local sources of labour, and thus opening them to stigmatisation. Finally, this chapter argues that the term Shangaan does not refer to a primordial ethnic or national identity but has come define a set of socio-economic relations between black South Africans and African immigrants, while also serving to delineate ethnic and socio-economic disparities among black South Africans themselves.

The term "Tsonga" and its etymology

The term "Tsonga" is derived from variants such "Thonga" and "Tonga" which were used by the Gaza Nguni to denote groups that resisted their suzerainty or did not assimilate into their culture. There is no consensus on the etymology of the term, however there is agreement among various scholars that it took on pejorative connotations (see Junod 1912, 15; Rodney 1971, 513; Worby 1994, 376; MacGonagle 2007, 117; Mabaso 2018, 313–14). For instance, MacGonagle (2007), drawing from Beach (1980) and Rennie (1984), maintains that the term was considered derogatory and basically

described either a “chiefless” or “subject” people (p. 117). The term would later be adopted by settlers in Natal who used it to distinguish between Nguni and East Coast groups (Harries 1981, 45). For instance, Natal explorer Vincent Erskine (1875), when arguing with some of his contemporaries, commented that, “Tonga simply means something which is not a Zulu” (p. 124). There is however some evidence to suggest that the term merely defined a political status and/or a political existence either outside and/or on the fringes of a circumscribed polity and therefore was not an essential marker of ethnic difference (see Worby 1994, 375). This is further evidenced by stories that tell of Mousinho de Albeuquerque, a Portuguese officer, who is said to have raided Shayimithi – one of the Gaza kingdom’s shrine capitals – in the aftermath of the 1895 Luso-Gaza War and “abused the Gaza king saying Gugunhana was no longer an *Nguni* but a lowly *Matonga*” (Rodney 1971, 533–34). Nevertheless, Harries (1989) furnishes us with two theories on the etymology of the term. He writes that:

> There are two hypotheses as to how the Nguni arrived at the term ‘Tonga’. The first is that a phonetic soundshift caused the Tsonga word /ronga/, which denotes ‘easterners’, to be pronounced /tonga/ in Zulu. The second is that the original inhabitants of the East Coast were called ‘Tonga’ before waves of Bantu-speaking immigrants entered the area some time before the sixteenth century. Despite the imprecision with which the Zulu used the term, the Natal colonists adopted the word as a general term applied to those people living along the coast north of the Zulu border regardless of their actual linguistic or cultural affiliations. Because of the derogatory overtones with which the term was imbued, however, it was never used by the people to whom it was applied. It was only in the twentieth century that linguists expurgated the abusive connotations from the term, initially by introducing an aspirated /h/ and finally by adopting the term ‘Tsonga’. (Harries 1989, 85)

Following Harries (1989), Tsonga would then be a term that the Swiss missionaries would later use to consolidate these disparate groups into a single and coherent ethnic identity. In the early 1900s, the missionary ethnographer Henri Junod was very central in the adoption of the term Tsonga which he applied to the rest of the immigrants settled in the Transvaal. This he did mostly to consolidate these disparate groups of immigrants into a coherent and easily manageable ethnic unit for his mission, however he was also influenced by an impetus to ensure that what he observed corresponded with European patterns of group differentiation and/or categorisation. To consign these language clusters into a single ethnic unit, Junod singularly relied on the similarities of dialects spoken among them,

deeming it a sufficient criterion to tie them into a close-knit community (Harries 1989, 87).[176] Nevertheless, Junod was very much aware that the group of people he was tying together did not see themselves as a single and coherent group since their customs varied across different clans. He commented that:

> […] there is no true national unity amongst the Thonga. They are hardly conscious that they form a definite nation and therefore they possess no common name for it. The name Thonga (pronounce t -f aspirated h, not the English th) was applied to them by the Zulu or Ngoni invaders who enslaved most of their clans between 1815 and 1830. (Junod 1912, 14)

No doubt this is a position taken up by many other scholars and is a point that Harries (1989) also keeps going back to, arguing that these peoples were categorised and consolidated into a single ethnic unit by Swiss missionaries "did not come from a common cultural pool" and that their categorisation as such was therefore "totally arbitrary" (p. 89). Nessa Leibhammer (2007b) writes similarly, arguing that:

> In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was no idea, or sense of, a Tsonga nation either in Mozambique or in South Africa. Even Van Warmelo, the government ethnographer tasked in the 1930s with identifying and categorising black South Africans along racial lines, whose work was to form the basis of the Afrikaner Nationalist Government's homeland policies, observed that the Tsonga-Shangaan were diffused people without a coherent notion of identity. (Leibhammer 2007b, 21)

This form of ethnicisation, which is seemingly externally imposed, is not necessarily anomalous. The naming of groups by outsiders who then impose a label on that group is not isolated to the Tsonga-Shangaan but seems to be a universal phenomenon found among many other groups (see Worby 1994; MacGonagle 2007, 11).

The term "Shangaan" and its etymology

The term "Shangaan", which is an Afrikaans transliteration of "Shangane", derives from the name Soshangane, the royal epithet of the nineteenth-century Gaza Nguni King Manukuza kaZikode. In its class six noun form, the term amaShangane is an eponymous name which – taken together with other class six nouns such as amaZwide and amaNxumalo – derive either from an apical ancestor and/or a

[176] Harries (1989) explains that Junod was influenced by nineteenth-century European nationalist ideas about the centrality of language when categorizing national groups (p. 87).

member of the lineage with a storied life history, and served to mark off a people as descended from and/or bonded by their allegiance to said ancestor and/or hero. The name amaShangane, and sometimes the name amaZwide, were used to describe the subjects of the Gaza Nguni kingdom in what is today southern Mozambique, south-eastern Zimbabwe, and some parts of South Africa's Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces in the better part of the nineteenth-century. Some scholars have thus argued that it is more appropriate to refer to the descendants of the Gaza Nguni by this term rather than the early immigrants into the Transvaal who were fleeing Gaza Nguni rule and were therefore ultimately classified as Tsonga by Swiss missionaries. Be that as it may, Harries (1989) has argued that the term became a catch-all descriptor for all Tsonga-speaking peoples of south-east Africa in the late 1800s (Harries 1989, 86; also see Mabaso 2018, 314).

However, Mabale (2017) insists that the term Shangaan denotes those people mostly populating the Mpumalanga province's lowveld regions such as Bushbuckridge. She argues that these people are the progeny of Gaza Nguni remnants who immigrated into the Transvaal in the aftermath of the second Luso-Gaza War (Mabale 2017, 6). This is a well-entrenched view in the literature, for example, Harries (1989) writes that, "in present-day South Africa, only the descendants of the Gaza Nguni immigrants who entered the eastern Transvaal after the second Luso-Gaza war of 1897, are officially classified "Shangaan" or "Tshangana" and in this way distinguished from the descendants of earlier immigrants, the Tsonga, who were in most cases never under Gaza rule" (p. 86). However, it is not easy to make this distinction since subjects of the Gaza Nguni started to flow into the Transvaal long before the disintegration of the kingdom and consequent capture of King Ngungunyane following the 1895 military defeat, and/or following General Magigwane Khosa's foiled rebellion in 1897, but also with the ecological disasters of the late 1850s and early 1860s, and the succession battles between Soshangane's sons Mawewe and Mzila in the early to late 1860s (Liesegang 1981, 180–81; Leibhammer 2007, 20). What's more, these migrations were compounded by migrant labour opportunities in the sugar cane plantations of Natal, the diamonds fields of Kimberley, and the gold

mines of the Witwatersrand, including opportunities in coal mining and rail construction throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century (Liesegang 1981, 180). It is also important to take stock of the fact that the Gaza Nguni state was a highly stratified polity wherein upward social mobility depended on assimilating into Nguni culture. For instance, John Rennie (1984) writes that under Gaza Nguni rule:

> […] the conception [of] 'Nguni-ness' was less a question of ethnic origin than of acculturation. It was thus open to individuals to adopt the Nguni language and way of life, and to become assimilated into the state, and to become upwardly mobile. The Nguni language became widespread, particularly among men, although women continued to use their own languages. Men adopted the pierced ears of the Nguni, the head rings, and renamed their clan by the nearest Nguni equivalent. Thus Ishwa became Dhliwayo, Nkomo became Sithole, Shiri became Nyoni, Shoko became Simango. They adopted the practice, apparently not done hitherto, of sacrificing cattle to ancestors. (Rennie 1984, 186)

This point – which was also noted by David Webster (1991) among the Tembe Thonga – serves to demonstrate that even the segment of the Tsonga-Shangaan population today considered, in popular discourse, as being of "pure" Nguni stock because they bear putatively Nguni patronyms might not be easily distinguished from those thought to be of "pure" Tsonga descent. Further complicating the matter is the fact that later migrants into the Transvaal adopted the customs and clothing styles of earlier immigrants (Nettleton 2007, 79). Against this background, it can be argued that by the time Swiss missionaries were forging a Tsonga identity in the early twentieth century they might have very well incorporated a variety of groups into this identity, including the Shangaan.

Nevertheless, the view that Tsonga and Shangaan constitute distinct and separate groups, only brought together by an expedient desire to be allocated a homeland during South Africa's Balkanisation era, is quite a pervasive one. For instance, it is argued that when the apartheid government introduced the homelands system in the 1950s partitioning parts of the country into ethnic enclaves, Tsonga-speaking communities, along with a few other ethnic minorities, were initially left out of this arrangement and therefore feared that they would be absorbed by their Venda and Sotho neighbours. In an attempt to buttress and consolidate their numbers, fifteen chiefs and numerous headmen from both the Tsonga and Shangaan communities convened a meeting on 23 July 1961,

where they agreed that the exclusive use of the term Tsonga tended to alienate the Shangaan section of the group, and therefore resolved that the two groups had to be unified if they were to be granted their own homeland (Mabale 2017, 46, 97–98). This successful meeting and consequent amalgamation resulted in a hyphenated "Tsonga-Shangaan" community, a union that culminated in the formation of the Gazankulu homeland in the early 1970s (Mabale 2017, 98).

Nevertheless, Mabale (2017) argues that whatever unity might have been achieved under colonial and apartheid administrations amongst the Tsonga and Shangaan, the dawn of democracy has caused old ethnic divides to re-emerge. Mabale (2017, 99) argues that these divisions were much more apparent following the erection and unveiling, in 2005, of King Ngungunyane's statute in the town of Giyani, the former capital of Gazankulu now said to be mostly populated by the Tsonga while the Shangaan are said to hail from the Bushbuckridge area. About this erection of a "Shangaan" statue in a supposedly "Tsonga" stronghold, Mabale (2017) passionately comments that:

> There are deep resentments between the descendants of the Gaza Nguni and the descendants of the refugees who fled Gaza rule. It is rather a complex issue that the descendants of the subjugators, enslavers and despots would recommend the statue of their ancestor to be erected amongst the descendants of those who were enslaved and treated with cruelty. (Mabale 2017, 102; also see Maluleke 2017, 44)

The Tsonga-Shangaan are not the only group that has seen a resurgence of old divides with the dawn of democracy, there are many other examples of this sort. For instance, Mbongiseni Buthelezi (2004 and 2012) alerts us to attempts by both the Ndwandwe and the Buthelezi clans to re-establish their respective kingships which were both incorporated into the Zulu empire in the Shakan period. Efforts among the Ndwandwe have been underway as early as the late 1980s, however, they have been more concerted in the post-apartheid period beginning in the early 2000s (Buthelezi 2004, 5; Buthelezi 2012, 75–76).

How the term "Shangaan" became pejorated

The term "Shangaan" was not always imbued with the negative associations that it has come to connote in the South African popular imagination. In fact, the meaning associated with its coinage initially

conveyed a sense of pride for the Gaza Nguni and other groups that assimilated into the Gaza Nguni state. For instance, David Beach (1980) writes that:

> The Ngoni, Ndebele, Gaza, and Kololo groups of Nguni and Sotho from the south enjoyed tremendous prestige during the nineteenth century, and the exaggerated respect accorded these 'military' nations by Europeans in the twentieth century further encouraged less favoured peoples to benefit from a claimed association with one of the 'prestige' groups. Thus both the Tsonga and the Ndau-speaking Shona called themselves 'Shangaans' after the Gaza ruler Soshangane. (Beach 1980, 190)

Nevertheless, the term has since become pejorated. While many scholars attribute this pejoration to the machinations of apartheid technocrats (see Chasi and Lowane 2016, 51; Mabaso 2018, 317–18; Madlome 2022, 9), Patrick Harries (1989, 102) traces it to the mine migrant labour system in the late nineteenth-century and attributes it to a caste-like classification of miners where those who did the most demeaning jobs often found themselves at the bottom of a hierarchically ordered labour system. From this vantage point, the Tsonga-Shangaan – who mostly immigrated into the Transvaal from either war-torn and/or famine-stricken southern Mozambique – are said to have been more desperate for employment, a condition that would have pressed them into more dangerous and low-paying jobs.

Following Harries (1989), I am also convinced that the pejoration of the term "Shangaan" took place in the context of the mine migrant labour system. To this end, there is a plethora of literature on the migrant labour system in southern Africa beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, much of which shows South Africa to be the centre of regional mass migration flows. For instance, Mondli Hlatshwayo (2010) writes that the 1850s saw large numbers of immigrants who flocked to work for the British in the sugar plantations of Natal. With the discovery of diamonds in Kimberly in 1867, the 1870s also saw further immigration into South Africa, while some of the labour force was redirected from sugar plantations in Natal. The discovery of gold in the Eastern Transvaal in 1874 and the Witwatersrand in 1886 further deepened the need for yet more migrant labour.

Much of this recruitment work was done by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (Wenela), a South African recruitment agency with branches in what is present-day Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Lesotho, eSwatini and Mozambique. However, much of this

labour was drawn from Mozambique which, coincidentally, was experiencing a draught and an outbreak of rinderpest in 1896 which decimated cattle stocks thus making southern Mozambique particularly well-suited for the recruitment of migrant workers (Hlatshwayo 2010, 8).[177] For instance, Teresa Connor (2003) writes that the "Gaza province [in Mozambique] became a virtual goldmine for clandestine labour recruiters who could operate without any imposed rules and obligations" (p. 94). Accordingly, South African labour recruiters such as Wenela set up shop in the Gaza province in the early 1900s, with the result that more than two-thirds of the labour force in South Africa's mining sector were Mozambican migrants in the early 1900s (Connor 2003, 95). Connor (2003) further

[177] Charles van Onselen's (2019) *The Night Trains* documents, in detail, the horrid manner in which Mozambican miners were corralled, literally transported in carriages that were often converted coal and cattle trucks, and accordingly treated as something betwixt and between commodities and human beings, or more aptly, "human freight" (pp. 7, 9).Travelling between Komatipoort and Johannesburg, connected through the Eastern Main Line, in the dead of night, out of sight, van Onselen's (2019) writes that, "Not only was that which was out of sight also largely out of mind in a political dispensation that enjoyed the unending and overwhelming support of a socially blind white electorate, but also those operating an oppressive system on a day-to-day basis – the WNLA train conductors – found it easier to manage the discontent and chronic 'restlessness of the natives' while the migrants' circadian clocks were compromised. Disoriented, sleepy workers were less likely to object to, or resist, a dehumanizing mass-transit experience" (p. 11). The "hospital coaches" of these WNLA trains, explains Van Onselen (2019), neither had nurses or doctors manning them (p. 11). Furthermore, van Onselen (2019) shows how inhuman treatment by WNLA "recruiters", train conductors, and the prison-like conditions of the male-only mining compounds rendered these miners vulnerable to mental illness, silicosis, tuberculosis, and reduced them to a condition of social and, in the case of tens of thousands, actual death (p. 11). For instance, van Onselen (2019) writes that: "[M]igrant workers were not only confined to carriages for a day and a half, undernourished and without easy access to portable water, but also lacked the most basic ablution facilities" (Van Onselen 2019, 5–6). Many of the miners who had been forced, not recruited, into service "were frequently locked into railway carriages by WNLA conductors" (van Onselen 2019, 6). As it happens, the Eastern Main Line, Van Onselen (2019) explains, was originally conceived to transport bunker coal, heavy mining equipment, and other non-human cargo (pp. 28–29), he therefore writes, "whatever hard-wired economic virtues the new system encompassed, it was never designed to cater for, let alone give preference to, the comfort of its passengers. It was meant to – and did – enable the wholesale transportation of commodities but was almost totally indifferent to the needs of people. That same bedrock logic did much to inform the design, construction and operational realities of the new railway system" (p. 29).

explains that drought and cattle rinderpest in Mozambique, coupled with the disruption of the South African War on the labour supply to the mines, coalesced to increase the demand and flow for cheap labour from Mozambique (p. 110).

On the other hand, forms of work in Mozambique included rubber tapping in rubber groves, cotton picking in the plantations, road construction and repair, and contract work with certain Portuguese firms, among others. Much of this work was done through forced labour, enforced by local chiefs through the practice of *chibaro* and paid meagre wages, if any at all.[178] No wonder then that Wenela would have little to no trouble recruiting in Mozambique where evading local forms of (forced) labour in order to enter into contractual labour in South Africa had become, for all intents and purposes, a rite of passage. David Hughes (2006, 36) cites a Portuguese administer who wrote, in 1934, that: "The native of Mossurize, from boyhood, has only one ambition in life, which is to work for the Rand, and, as soon as he reaches the age of paying tax, he goes out on the path towards "John" [Johannesburg], as they say, given that he who does not work in the mines is not considered a man." Half of those who would leave to work in the South African mines would never return,[179] while those who did were able to pay bride-wealth and therefore accumulate wives and children while their counterparts who worked within Mozambique found it difficult to do the same (Hughes 2006, 36–37).

Against this background, I am well inclined to agree with Harries (1989) insofar as he argues that the term "Shangaan" became pejorated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in South

[178] *Chibaro* or "the Count" was a system of forced labour in Portuguese Mozambique overseen by local chiefs on behalf of the colonial government.

[179] Dudu Ndlovu and Loren Landau (2020), drawing from Alois Mlambo's (2016) *"Zimbabwe is not a South African province": Historicising South Africa's Zimbabwe Policy Since the 1960s*, write similarly about Zimbabwean immigrants who married local women and settled down. While others were forced to return home to collect their salaries and/or to renew their contracts (pp. 473–74). Tafira (2018) also writes similarly about Zimbabwean men who adopted Zulu and/or Sotho-Tswana names, married South African women and settled into local life, never to return home (pp. 101–02).

Africa's gold mining industry where the Tsonga-Shangaan formed the bulk of the labour force (Harries 1989, 102; also see Bryant 1905, 55).[180] However, I contend that this pejoration would not have been caused by the fact that the Tsonga-Shangaan engaged in "dangerous and heavy manual labour" since such work is often considered a marker of masculine pride and would have not incurred a stigma among miners who – despite their ethnic backgrounds – most likely also espoused a strong sense of masculinity. In fact, writing about the Central African Copperbelt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Brian Siegel (1989, 361–62) showed that the perilous nature of underground mine work was used to claim prestige, at least in the case of the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia).

Alternatively, I argue that in an environment teeming with "homeboy" associations, the numerical dominance of Mozambican immigrants, especially since they acquired a reputation as a reliable labour source (see Rennie 1984, 188), likely contributed to their stigmatization. Nevertheless, both these interpretations – that it was either the form of labour that Shangaans performed in the mines or their sheer numbers – do not necessarily explain how ethnonyms undergo a process of pejoration or acquire and maintain their derogatory associations over time. Consequently, I rely on a synthesis of both anthropological semiotics and Marxist explications of ethnicity (Worby, 1984). From a Marxist perspective, ethnicity is seen as a "by-product" of the division of labour and ultimately as a tool of capitalist exploitation used to distract the proletariat by keeping it divided along "tribal" lines. Anthropological semiotics, on the other hand, conceives of ethnicity as a product of signifying practices that mediate processes of identity formation. Eric Worby (1983) combines these perspectives

[180] I am however in disagreement with work that imbues these same imputations to the continued use of this term to those of its late nineteenth and early twentieth century antecedents, an act which enables the mischaracterisation of the present marginalisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan to an affect of colonial and apartheid histories. Here we can also take cue from Nessa Leibhammer (2007b) who writes that, "This notion of a Shangaan identity, however, did not remain static and continued to play itself out in the social and political terrain of South Africa in the twentieth century. Factors such as missionary proselytising, economics, and official segregationist politics contributed to further shifts in meaning, with the name subsequently becoming more widely used and differently understood as the twentieth century progressed" (Leibhammer 2007b, 21).

and argues that ethnicity entails discursive practices that govern social relations, in a synthesis that has three defining characteristics. Firstly, relations of property and power always entail the sorting of people into discrete social categories (*viz*., employer-employee, master-slave, etc.). Secondly, this act of stratification is complemented by a process of identity ascription. For instance, in the Gaza Nguni state *amaVulandlela* ("those who open the way") were comprised of assimilated groups who served as the vanguard of the army, a vocation implied by their name, giving a clear instance of when an occupational social category crystallized into a cultural identity (see Junod 1912, 424; Rodney 1971, 513).[181] Nevertheless, processes of identity ascription do not necessarily have a functional correspondence and can therefore be subjected to a process of re-interpretation. Lastly, these ascribed identities can, over time, take on a veneer of natural and historical significance (Worby 1984, 24–28).

Building on this synthesis, I contend that the term "amaShangane" acquired its negative associations during the peak of Mozambican immigration to South Africa, a situation caused by the factors outlined by Connor (2003) and Hlatshwayo (2010) above and further intensified by the Mozambican Civil War (1977–1992). However, as tensions eased and the Mozambican economy stabilized, this influx was significantly reduced. In contrast, the political tumult and economic collapse of the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe, which followed what has been termed the "Third Chimurenga" (Chigumadzi, 2018),[182] intensified Zimbabwean immigration to South Africa. Consequently, Zimbabwean immigrants have now come to constitute over a third of all immigrants in the country (Dube 2018, 1017; Tafira 2018, 73; Ndlovu 2020, 420).

[181] Another example can be found among the Southern Ndebele who – because of their indenture in Afrikaner farms – were bestowed names which coincided with the forms of labour they performed (see Delius 1989, 235).

[182] This was a "Fast Track Land Reform Programme" orchestrated by liberation war veterans which saw 170 000 families occupy 3 000 white-owned farms, a popular move that was initially opposed by the Zanu-PF government but later embraced in an act of political opportunism. This programme, which was reported as 'land grabs' or 'land invasions' in the media, took place between 2000 and 2001 and negatively impacted the economy causing hyperinflation and devaluing the Zimbabwean dollar.

Accordingly, Hashi Tafira (2018, 27–28) observes that the aftermath of the Third Chimurenga has led to the changing nomenclature of ethnophaulic terms, giving rise to new descriptors such as "*abantu bakaMugabe*" (the people of Mugabe) and "*Mazimbabwe*" (the Zimbabweans).[183] More importantly, the latter term shows that a name need not – in and of itself– be derogatory but can acquire these connotations over time. This is exemplified, in social media circles, by the expression "it's giving Zimbabwe", when describing a thing that is of poor quality or status.

From this vantage point, it can be argued that the label "amaShangane", in the late1800s and early 1900s, was used in the context of high Mozambican immigration to South Africa and defined immigrant mine labourers. However, in the post-2000 period it was "linguistically recycled" to include or label Zimbabweans who have since come to constitute the majority of immigrants in South Africa, while neologisms such as abantu bakaMugabe and Mazimbabwe are slowly introduced to refer to foreigners who serve in a range of menial jobs in the South African informal economy, as well as ethnic minorities who occupy the fringes of South African society. The following section presents ethnographic material that substantiates these conclusions.

The terms "Tsonga" and "Shangaan" in former KwaNdebele

In the former KwaNdebele, foreigners are often delineated into "amaShangane", who are immigrants of African descent who are also called "aboMkhozi", and "amaKula", who are immigrants of a South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Horn African descent who are also called "aboMyfriend".[184] The appellation amaShangane defines immigrants who typically work as itinerant traders selling woven

[183] The term *abantu bakaMugabe* is a Nguni expression meaning "the people of Mugabe", while the term *Mazimbabwe* is a colloquialized demonym which employs the plural noun prefix /ma-/ common in Nguni and Sotho-Tswana languages, to refer to Zimbabweans.

[184] The terms "aboMkhozi" and "amaKula" are both of Nguni coinage. The former simply means "our in-laws", while the latter colloquializes the derogatory term 'Coolie' by employing the plural noun prefix /ama-/ common in Nguni languages. While /abo-/ is a plural prefix for class 1a nouns in Nguni languages, sometimes shortened into /bo-/ and /o-/.

baskets, corrugated iron wash basins and chimneys, among other wares, while the appellation amaKula defines immigrants who own or operate spaza shops that sell a range of foodstuffs and other items for daily household use. Interestingly, the terms aboMkhozi and aboMyfriend are semantically equivalent since they both connote a sense of friendship. For instance, the term aboMyfriend derives from how shop-keepers are said to address their patrons during business interactions as, "My friend". While the term aboMkhozi, which is widely used to refer to one's in-laws, similarly translates to, "Our friends".

As a term of address for immigrants of African descent, Shangaan has therefore come to connote a status of itineracy as well as an "illegal" sojourn in South Africa, while the term Tsonga defines a South African ethnic group, albeit one considered less autochthonal to the South African nation-state. Khwezi, a young Xhosa man in his early 20s, explicates this dichotomy:

> **Researcher**: A Shangaan is a Xitsonga-speaking person, would you agree with that?
>
> **Khwezi**: Nah. [...] the Tsonga, they're in South Africa. So, if you're in South Africa you're now Tsonga, but when you're outside they say you're Shangaan, you're a foreigner.
>
> **Researcher**: So, you don't believe that the terms Tsonga and Shangaan are inter-changeable, you don't think so?
>
> **Khwezi**: No, I don't think so, because for one, they don't speak the same language. These are people coming from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Mozambique, and whatsoever, they [are] speaking Shona and other languages. Others they are speaking Nigerian.[185]

However, the term Shangaan is sometimes applied to South African cultural minorities in ways that suggest that they "fall short" of a putatively autochthonal identity. The Tsonga and the Venda, who are usually conflated with each other, are among the most likely South African groups to be labelled Shangaan. For example, Amahle, a Zulu woman in her late twenties, commented that:

> **Amahle**: Yes, there are Tsongas and Vendas, I don't know where it comes from that they started to call them both as amaShangane, when they refer to a Venda person they will say they are Shangaan, whether they are Tsonga or Venda, they just say they are Shangaan. A Zim[babwean] person is [referred to as] a Shangaan. So, that's what makes me feel that even us if we were in another country, they will call us amaShangane if we call other people amaShangane. I can't tell where this word comes from but that's how things were even when I was growing up. I don't know what your experience is, but I grew up seeing that people would differentiate between a Ndebele and a Shangaan, and especially when they say

[185] Interview with Khwezi, KwaNdebele, 2020. Please note that the names of interviewees and some of their biographical details have been altered and/or obscured to protect their identity.

> iShangane they are referring to people from Zimbabwe, from Mozambique, and Venda and Tsonga [people], as if people who are Tsonga and Venda are not from South Africa.[186]

Apart from referring to South Africans whose ethnic identities are considered to fall outside the pale of an autochthonal national identity, the term Shangaan also serves to define people, irrespective of their ethnic or national identity, who migrate into the country's economic hubs from the periphery of South African society. This ascription of national belonging mirrors that of apartheid spatial planning and the migrant labour system which, according to Michael Neocosmos (2006, 16), promoted a conception of belonging that was fundamentally urban. This meant that citizenship was granted to city dwellers while it was denied to those who were confined to the margins, who were only admitted to the city as workers. Today those who hail from the periphery of the city are similarly interpellated as "foreign" by city dwellers who no longer have roots in the former homelands. A further point of contention is the fact that those who travel "in-between" the city and its former apartheid homelands tend to have a stake in both places, a fact which renders them "transients" in the eyes of third-generation city dwellers, who see them arrive at the start of each year burdened with bundles of personal belongings, only to exit the city similarly encumbered on the eve of the December holidays. Amahle explicates this phenomenon:

> **Amahle**: You know, that's how people use the term here, even in Gauteng, in Mamelodi, if you can check there many people from here who are Ndebele and Pedi who are renting there, even when they refer to an Indian, iKula, they say iShangane. As long as they feel that the person does not belong in that land, in that territory, then they are iShangane.[187]

Like their Shangaan counterparts, amaKula are similarly mired in histories of itinerant merchant trade. Released from indentured servitude in the sugar plantations of Natal in the early twentieth-century, South Asian labourers were free to travel as itinerant traders, eking out a livelihood among South Africa's black population groups. Today those who have come to be interpellated as amaKula are often young men brought into the country by their older "benefactors" to operate spaza shops while living

[186] Interview with Amahle, KwaNdebele, 2020.

[187] Interview with Amahle, KwaNdebele, 2020.

among the local population. However, because of their high turnover, these young men are often accused, like amaShangane, of leaving behind a trail of unfathered children when they eventually relocate elsewhere in the country, or when they leave South Africa altogether. This criticism is often couched in sly remarks about the difficulty of pouring libations for children of foreign-born men.

However, there are inklings of a change in the use of these terms. Whereas the term Shangaan was inspired by the mass immigration of Mozambicans in the wake of South Africa's mineral boom in the late 1800s and the Mozambican Civil War (1977–1992), it seems that today amaShangane, although they are in part still considered to hail from Mozambique, are beginning to be conceptualised as those who come from Zimbabwe and are therefore interpellated as the "people of Mugabe" in an obvious reference to the inaugural president-cum-dictator of an independent Zimbabwe. For instance, Brenda Mabunda, a Mozambican-born Tsonga-Shangaan woman in her early twenties, expressed frustration at being "mis-identified" as a Zimbabwean:

> **Brenda**: When they say amaShangane they include Tsongas and Shonas, because they don't differentiate that Shonas are coming from Zimbabwe, and that other Tsongas come from Mozambique, so they think that they come from the same country. They are unable to differentiate Zimbabwe and Mozambique, that is why they say all of you are Shangaans, and they are not Shangaans those people. [...] And they don't usually refer to Mozambique, they just say amaShangane are coming from Zimbabwe, they say you must go back to Mugabe. Whenever there are fights or arguments, they say: Ja, you guys must return to Mugabe! [And] no, the president of Shangaans in Mozambique was not Mugabe, Mugabe was from Zimbabwe [...].[188]

The conclusion to be drawn from this material is that these terms mainly ascribe identities to a class of people who occupy – or are thought to be suited for – specific forms of labour in South Africa's informal economy. For example, hawkers who sell woven baskets and corrugated iron wash basins have, for the longest time, tended to be Mozambican immigrants, leading to their interpellation as amaShangane, a term that has become a blanket descriptor for all immigrant street hawkers of African

[188] Interview with Brenda Mabunda, Tweefontein H, 02 October 2020.

descent. On the other hand, spaza shopkeepers have largely tended to be South Asians (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrants) who are all interpellated as amaKula. The latter term, which is a colloquial rendering of "Coolie", initially described indentured Indian labourers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Mbowa 2020, 54); however, it has since become a descriptor for all shopkeepers of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent, including shop-keepers from the Horn of Africa (such as Somalis and Ethiopians). Furthermore, these terms can undergo changes to define shifting socio-economic relations between groups. For example, the mass immigration of Mozambicans is replaced by the mass immigration of Zimbabweans, leading to the introduction of neologisms such as abantu bakaMugabe to describe hawkers, while in other cases old terms are imbued with new meaning in an apparent act of "linguistic recycling".

This ethnographic material demonstrates how ethnophaulic terms acquire their meaning only in relation to specific contexts or situations of their use, and not by referring to a primordial ethnic or national identity. Instead, they work linguistically as "pragmatic shifters" that "define rather than reflect" a set of socio-economic relations (Galaty 1982, 5). These findings also reconfirm Erving Goffman's (1963, 12) insight that stigma refers to a language of relationships rather than to the essence of stigmatisable attributes.

Reflections

This chapter locates the semantic shift between the terms "Tsonga" and "Shangaan" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It argues that while the pejoration of the term Shangaan occurred during the mass immigration of Mozambican miners in the late 1800s, the amelioration of the term Tsonga can be attributed to missionary ethnographers and linguists in the early 1900s who used the term in their standardization of east-coast dialects and the consequent amalgamation of disparate groups of Xitsonga-speakers in the northern and eastern Transvaal. Furthermore, a diachronic analysis of the term "amaShangane", along with other ethnophaulic descriptors such as "amaKula", reveals that they do not function as essentialized markers of ethnic difference; instead, they constitute a set of discursive

strategies that locate people in relations of property and power. Finally, the chapter contends that the term amaShangane also serves to define ethnic and socio-economic disparities among black South Africans: delineating citizens whose ethnic heritage is considered to "fall short" of a putatively autochthonal identity, as well as those who come from the margins of South African society, who migrate to the country's economic hubs in search of a livelihood.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

Summary of findings

This thesis sought to interrogate the stigmatised status of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa, a status that has seen them castigated as foreign to the South African nation-state. To achieve this, it traced the historical antecedents of this stigma, its contemporary manifestations, and the ways in which those who have been interpellated as "Shangaan" have responded to and coped with their marginalised existence. More broadly, the thesis aimed to interrogate the relationship between ethnic identity and national belonging, using this question as a springboard to investigate the status of similarly stigmatised groups in the country. Such groups included the Southern Ndebele who – much like the Tsonga-Shangaan – are a group whose status as an autochthonal South African identity has been put to doubt.

The eagerness to put these doubts to rest is evident in several grassroots movements that seek to entrench an image of the Ndebele as a group that is not only extant within the bounds of South Africa, but one which is entitled to make patrimonial claims to the country's wealth. I have focused, in particular, on the KwaNdebele Movement and another, similarly-named group, the Ndebele Movement, as case study examples of how some Ndebele have begun to launch struggles for national belonging in the country. While the KwaNdebele Movement is a cultural protest organisation which mainly advocates for an increase in the curation of isiNdebele content on the national broadcaster's television channels and radio stations, the Ndebele Movement is a music band which similarly advocates for the increase in the curation of Ndebele music using, as rallying point, its encounter with a music compiler on one of the state broadcaster's radio stations who purportedly refused to playlist one of their songs claiming their music was "foreign", apparently confusing them with the Ndebele of Zimbabwe.

Both the leaders of the KwaNdebele Movement and the Ndebele Movement, along with other Ndebele cultural activists, express anxieties about the disappearance of Ndebele cultural forms, a fear

that is encapsulated in the aphorism *siyatjhabalala* or *siyafelela* (we are fading away), a disappearance that they fear might signal the end of the Ndebele nation. As a result, these organisations and those who sympathise with their cause see the dissemination of Ndebele cultural forms, through various media productions and through various acts of commodification, to a national and global audience as basis for salvaging Ndebele traditions and for entrenching Ndebele claims to national belonging. The KwaNdebele Movement and the Ndebele Movement are not alone in waging these struggles, other organisations involved in waging similar struggles include regional political parties and civic organisations who argue that the national government has, since the dawn of democracy, tended to ignore and sometimes outright marginalise the Ndebele. While the latter have generally called for more development in Ndebele areas, the former have launched political campaigns rooted in a rhetoric of secession where a desire for sovereign self-determination is proclaimed. These concerns are often expressed in heritage commemoration and other cultural events and are juxtaposed with memories that harken back to the nineteenth-century wars of dispossession where the Ndebele lost their lands and were condemned to an itinerant existence on white-owned farms and in various homelands earmarked for other ethnic groups. Accordingly, there are seeming cries for the Ndebele to reclaim their ancestral heartlands lost during the wars of dispossession. Such cries are couched in the language of a cosmological order that is out of balance, where ancient kings find themselves buried in lands where their descendants have long since been displaced, leaving them without anyone to tend to their graves. However, the struggle for national belonging for the Southern Ndebele seems to be dominated by calls to salvage Ndebele cultural forms through acts of commodification; first through the promotion of Ndebele music and other aesthetic expressions on national television and radio, and ultimately in the global markets. Calls to launch Ndebele cultural forms to a global audience while at once calling for a retreat to ethnic enclaves might seem like a contradiction in terms. However, Geschiere (2009) shows that they are in fact an expression of the segmentary and sedentary logic of autochthony movements

that have engulfed much of the post-colonial states since democratisation and decentralisation in the 1990s, processes that are in turn imbricated with the forces of globalisation.

As noted above, the Southern Ndebele are not the only group to have their status as an autochthonal South African identity put to doubt. In fact, the Tsonga-Shangaan seem to be the most stigmatised of South Africa's ethnic groups, so much so that the name "Shangaan" has come to define a status of itineracy as well as an "illegal" sojourn in the country. Following Harries (1989), I have argued that the term Shangaan acquired its negative associations during the era of high Mozambican immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where much of the labour force in the South African mining industry was largely drawn from the Gaza province in Mozambique, a feat which can be attributed to unscrupulous labour recruiters such as Wenela who exploited various periods of economic tumult in that country, for instance: rinderpest and draught in the late 1800s and a civil war in the late 1970s and early 1990s. Therefore, the term Shangaan is likely to have acquired its derogatory connotations as result of the politicised nature of ethnicity in this industry at the time when mining compounds were deliberately organised along ethnic lines and where miners organised themselves into protective "homeboy" associations. The high number of Mozambican immigrants would have meant, in this context, that they were seen as a domineering force by other ethnic groups, a fact which would have rendered them prone to stigmatisation. However, the stabilisation of the Mozambican economy in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, and the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy in the aftermath of the "Fast Track Land Reform Programme" between 2000 and 2001, saw a decline of Mozambican immigration into the country and an influx of Zimbabwean immigrants. Nevertheless, the term Shangaan remained current to define immigrants of African descent, even though it was now being used largely to refer to their Zimbabwean counterparts, a fact which has led to the introduction of neologisms such as "*abantu bakaMugabe*" to refer to African immigrants and groups thought to be foreign to the South African nation-state.

Following Galaty (1982) and Worby (1984, 1994), I have also argued that ethnophaulic terms such as “amaShangane” and “aboMkhozi” constitute a set of discursive strategies that serve to locate people in the informal economy, and that they are not – in and of themselves – essential markers of ethnic difference. For instance, in much of the ethnographic material presented in this thesis, the term amaShangane has come to define African immigrants that often serve in a variety of menial jobs or work as itinerant traders that sell anything from woven baskets and earthenware products to galvanised wash tubs and chimneys, irrespective of their ethnic or national heritage. Similarly, terms such as “amaKula” and “aboMyfriend” have come to define those who come either from South Asia, the Middle East, or the Horn of Africa who own or operate spaza shops that sell a range of foodstuffs and other items for daily household use. These findings reconfirm Goffman’s (1963) insights that stigma refers to a language of relationships rather than to the essence of stigmatisable attributes.

More importantly, I have argued that there is a sense in which the Tsonga-Shangaan – as a people who have come under doubt as an autochthonal ethnic group in South Africa – have been rendered prone to stigmatised ethnicisation because they confound both ethnic and national categories of belonging. This is especially true of those Tsonga-Shangaan who inhabit the lowveld regions of the Mpumalanga province who often hold nominally “Zulu” names while they are not Zulu. This status is epitomised by their double-barrel ethnonym which connotes a liminal social existence. However, liminality in a period where there seems to be a move to embrace more “hardened” forms of social existence, or in a context where the nation-state is said to be under threat from what Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) have called “doppelganger anticitizens”, necessarily leads to anxieties around the indeterminacy of the ethnic body which, following Appadurai (1998), has the potential to provoke ethnocidal violence.

Nevertheless, the stigmatisation of the Tsonga-Shangaan has been subsumed – in the sparse scholarship on the question – within a discourse about xenophobia and consequently attributed to a holdover of colonial and apartheid histories. I contend that this paradigm has led to a perennial search

for the sources of contemporary violence in our traumatic past, either in the colonial and/or apartheid periods, and sometimes even in the pre-colonial past. This perennial search also tends to find the sources of contemporary violence in the psyches of its perpetrators rather than in the prevailing commonsense understandings for the causes of social strife, or in the structures that produce anomie among those in the lower rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy. As a result, this paradigm explains away the problem of endemic violence as a holdover of a troubled past, and not so much in terms of institutional survivals but mainly in terms of the psychological remains of colonial and apartheid violence. I argue that this view presents Africans as perpetually traumatised and therefore prone to violent action.

To counter this pervasive view, I focused on indigenous healing traditions that serve to reconcile histories of inter-ethnic violence among Africans. In particular, I have discussed Nguni and Ndau practices of spirit possession – a practice in which descendants of various Nguni groups are possessed by spirits of their erstwhile enemies the Ndau, while descendants of the Ndau are possessed by spirits of their erstwhile enemies the Nguni. Following Rekdal (1999) and Niehaus (2002), I have argued that these healing traditions are a means of encoding or incorporating cultural memories as well as a means of managing histories of mutual ethnic violence (or a means of re-membering the shattered aspects of our history). Furthermore, I have argued that these healing traditions attest to the ingenuity of indigenous institutions to not only manage histories of ethnic violence but to build solidarities that are often premised on said histories (the millenarian movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in much of the African continent which offered formidable opposition to European colonialism are a case in point).

More importantly, I have argued that these Nguni and Ndau healing traditions are situated within what can be called *the dialectic of autochthony and difference* in indigenous cosmologies. This is a long-standing tradition which conceptualises a consummate cosmological order as constituted by reconciling an ordered human world with the disordered regions that lie beyond settled human society

(a misanthropic zone or a space of *ubuzimumzimu* inhabited by cannibals, witches, and other entities). This cosmological schema betrays a cultural ethos that fetishises difference over originality since it paradoxically defines those who bring order into society as coming from these disordered outside regions. For instance, effective healers and effective rulers are often mythologised as itinerant figures that either wandered into society from the disordered outside or happen to be particularly proficient in establishing and maintaining a rapport with the entities that inhere therein.

There are, however, grounds to argue that democratisation and decentralisation in post-colonial African states, a process which unfolded within the broader forces of globalization in the late twentieth-century, has engendered an inversion of this dialectic giving rise to a cultural ethos that fetishes originality over difference, and a sedentary existence over one founded on itineracy. As a result, this cosmological schema is now being used to shore up a logic through which cultural misfits can be homologised with the misanthropic entities that inhere beyond an ordered human world and therefore render them amenable for "displacement" to those misanthropic regions. I have argued, for example, that the Tsonga-Shangaan have been displaced from the South African body politic and sequestered to this amorphous region, a fact which partially explains why ethnic violence in South Africa often takes on ritualistic qualities.

Limitations

This thesis has not adequately addressed the second research question, on how the Tsonga-Shangaan have responded to their stigmatisation. The thesis does this well when it comes to the question of the Southern Ndebele who also see themselves as a marginalised group in South Africa. This is because, unlike in many ethnographic studies where the researcher finds a group of people and settles among them in order to carry out participant observation, for this study I relied more on semi-structured interviews and my attendance of several cultural events. Therefore, the ethnographic material presented in this thesis mostly comes out of my attendance of specific cultural events and not necessarily from immersion in the social milieu or day-to-day lives of my research participants. This

constitutes a limitation in light of knowledge that short-time exposure to a researcher might limit the extent to which participants are willing to be vulnerable and share details that can only be shared when trust has been firmly established through long time exposure, a timeframe over which a researcher might cease to be seen mainly as a researcher but as something more. While I have managed to establish this kind of rapport with a few research participants, however the majority of those interviewed for this study were largely one-time encounters. This can be partially attributed to time constraints, Covid-19 regulations, and the design of the study itself.

Recommendations

It would be fruitful to investigate further how the Tsonga-Shangaan have responded to their stigmatisation, a study better conducted in a research area more widely populated by members of the Tsonga-Shangaan community. Furthermore, a study conducted in such a research context would reveal how those who are considered national minorities think and respond to their stigmatised status when domiciled in their ostensible cultural homelands. In this study, this was the case regarding the Southern Ndebele, a fact that helped yield rich and interesting ethnographic material, as hopefully exemplified by Chapter 6. Other interesting avenues to experiment with could include a study that juxtaposes two different research sites: one in a heterogeneous context, such as an urban or peri-urban environment, and another in a putatively homogeneous context, such as the former homeland environment.

Contributions

This study fills a lacuna in the literature on ethnicity in South Africa, where much emphasis has been placed on relatively dominant groups such as the Zulu and the Xhosa. The study further challenges the prevailing paradigm in the scholarship of inter-ethnic conflict in post-apartheid South Africa, which reads conflict as a consequence of colonial and apartheid logics. Accordingly, it argues against a perennial search for the sources of contemporary ethnic conflicts in their colonial antecedents, instead locating them in emergent processes of stigmatised ethnicisation. This view aligns with Goffman's (1963) seminal work on the subject, which argues that stigma connotes a language of stigmatising

relationships rather than the essence of stigmatisable attributes. This view is further reflected in the work of scholars of a "Marxian-and-semiotics" bent who maintain that ethnic labels function to locate groups in relations of property and domination. This outlook places the sources of stigma and ethnic antagonisms in the present, imbricated with structures of domination, rather than locating them in a traumatic past or in the psyches of stigmatised and stigmatising groups, a view that is both historicist and serves to pathologise black South Africans. If anything, Chapter 5 of this thesis has shown that there are extant indigenous institutions to deal with histories of violence and their resultant trauma.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Clearance certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Zwane

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H20/06/52**
PROJECT TITLE	Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr J Zwane
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Sciences/
DATE CONSIDERED	19 June 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Risk Level: Low
EXPIRY DATE	16 August 2023
DATE 17 August 2020	**CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor E Worby

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ **Signature** _____/_____/_____ **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B: Decision on research proposal

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG | FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Mr Job Zwane
Tweefontein E Stand 1452
Somarobogo
Kwamhlanga 1023
Mpumalanga
South Africa

Student Number: 1594397

03 December 2020

CC. Prof Eric Worby

Dear Mr Job Zwane

DECISION ON RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUBMITTED FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

I am pleased to advise you of the decision reached by the reader/readers of the Graduate Studies Committee on your proposal entitled: "***Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa***"

Reader's decision on proposal:

Accepted, but candidate should take note of warnings/ recommendations.

I confirm that Prof Eric Worby has been appointed as your supervisor.

Please take note of the information on the Criteria for submitting research for examination which is attached and ensure that the Faculty is informed of any changes of address during the year.

Kindly note that all MA and PhD candidates who would like to graduate as soon as possible must ensure that they meet the ETD requirements within six (6) weeks of receipt of the examiners' reports by the supervisor. **A student is required to remain registered in the Faculty until his/her graduation.**

Yours Sincerely

M Ntseare

Mpho Ntseare (Ms)
Faculty of Humanities
Private Bag X 3
Wits, 2050

Appendix C: Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet [English] One-On-One Interviews



Good day

My name is Job Zwane and I am a PhD student in Social Anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have undertaken a research project temporarily titled *Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa* where I am investigating community views on small ethnic groups (with a particular focus on the Tsonga-Shangaan) under the supervision of Professor Eric Worby. Interviewees will be limited to residents who are 18 years and older in the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality in the Mpumalanga province. The aim of this research project is to find out how ordinary South Africans define citizenship.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview to discuss the relationship between being a member of a specific ethnic group and being a citizen of South Africa. This activity will involve a face-to-face conversation with me and will last for no more than four hours. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital voice recorder.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will also not receive any direct benefits for participation. Should you wish not to participate you will suffer no penalties. You may withdraw at any time or choose not to answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be confidential/hidden as I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. However, it is important to note that complete anonymity might not be possible since these interviews will contain life history information that might be identifiable to others who might already know those details about participants. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume on another time suitable for you.

If at any time you have questions about this study please feel free to contact me on the details listed below. A research report will be available at the end of this study on the world-wide web in the Wired Space accessed through the university library website, and a physical copy will also be available in the university library. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the **University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)**, telephone **+27(0) 11 717 1408**, email shaun.schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Thank you so much for your time and participation!

Yours sincerely,

Researcher: Job Zwane, **Email**: 1594397@students.wits.ac.za, **Phone number**: 0798536923

Supervisor: Eric Worby, **Email**: Eric.Worby@wits.ac.za, **Phone number**: 0117174044

Lotjha

Ibizo lami ngingu Job Zwane begodu ngimfundi weziqu zobudorhodere (PhD) e-University of the Witwatersrand eJwanisbhege, ngaphasi komkhakha weemfundo zamaphilo wabantu emiphakathini (Social Athropology). Ngenza irhubhululo ngaphasi kwesihloko esithi *Ubudlelwano Hlangana Nobuhlanga Nobunarha: Ngokucalisa Esitjhabeni sama Tsonga-Shangana esiFundeni seMpumalanga, eSewula Afrika* (okusihloko sesikhatjhana) ngaphasi kwelihlo laka Phrofesa Eric Worby. Ngiyokurhubhulula ngokubuza imibuzo ebantwini ababahlali abaneminyaka eli-18 ukuyaphezulu ngaphasi kukaMasipala weThembisile Hani onzinze esiFundeni seMpumalanga. Umqopho werhubhululo leli kufunisisa kuhle ukuthi amaSewula Afrika ahlukanisa njani bonyana ngibuphi ubuhlanga beSewula Afrika begodu ngibuphi ubuhlanga bangaphandle.

Ngibawa ukukumema bona ube ngomunye wabantu engiyokubuza kibo imibuzo, sikhulumisane sobabili ngobudlelwano hlangana nobuhlanga nobunarha, namkha ukukhulumisana mayelana nokuthi kizo zoke iinhlanga ezikhona enarheni ngiziphi zala eSewula Afrika begodu ngiziphi ekungezangaphandle. Ikulumiswano le izokufaka hlangana mina njengomrhubhululi nawe njengomuntu ozibandakanyako erhubhululweni, izakuthatha isikhathi esingadluli kuma iri amane (4). Ngemvumo yakho ngizokuthanda ukugadangisa ikulumo yethu ngesigadangisi maphimbo.

Angeze kwaba neendleko eziphuma kuwe ngesikhathi uzibandakanya kulekulumiswano, begodu akukho okhunye ongakuzuza bunqopha ngokuzibandakanya. Nawunganasifiso namkhana itjisakalo yokuzibandakanya angeze uhlawuliswe. Nawufisako ungazikhipha kulekulumiswano ngesinye nesinye isikhathi namkhana ungakhetha ukungaphenduli imbuzo nawungafuniko. Amabizo kanye nemininingwana yakho izokubekwa kuhle begodu ifihlwe, ngizokusebenzisa amabizo ekungasiwo wamambala ukuthula ukubandakanya kwakho ngesikhathi sokuthulwa kombiko werhubhululo, kanye neminye imiphumela evela erhubhululweni. Noma kunjalo, yelela ukuthi angeze kwakghonakala bonyana sifihlele abantu abatjhidelene nawe imininingwana ekuvele sebayazi ngaphambi kokuthonywa kwerhubhululo leli (njenge minininingwana abangakghona ukuyibona bonyana emiyelana nawe nalokha ibizolakho singakalisebenzisi).

Nangabe unemibuzo ephathelene nesifundo namkhana irhubhululo leli ungangithinta emininingwaneni engenzasi. Umbiko werhubhululo uzakutholakala emaswapheleni wesifundo emazikweni wokuthintana iphasi mazombe (World-wide web) begodu nemakhasini weLayibhrari yeYunivesithi begodu nebuthelelo eliphathekako ngaphakathi kwe-Layibhrari ye-Yunivesithi. Nangabe ufisa ukuthola isirhunyezo sombiko werhubhululo leli, ngingathaba ukukuthumela lona. Nangabe unetjisakalo namkhana isililo ngomthetho kanye nomhlahlandlela ngekambiso yerhubhululo leli, uvumelekile bona ungathinta **iKomidi Lokuziphatha Kuhle Kwabarhubhululi Ngabantu lase Univesithi (Ekungasilo Lezamaphilo)**, umtato **+27(0) 11 717 1408**, i-imeli shaun.schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Ngithokoze khulu ukuzibandakanya kwakho!

Ozithobako,

Umrhubhululi: Job Zwane, **I-imeli**: 1594397@students.wits.ac.za, **Iinomboro zomtato**: 0798536923

Umbonisi: Eric Worby, **I-imeli**: Eric.Worby@wits.ac.za, **Iinomboro zomtato**: 0117174044

Phela ra vuxokoxoko bya vutekaxiave **[Xitsonga]** **Nhlokohliso wo langutana**

Avuxeni

Hi mina Job Zwane, xichudeni xa Vukododela bya Social Anthropology (PhD) eYunivhesiti ya Witwatersrand, eJoni. Tanihi xiphemu xa tidyondzo ya mina, ndzi le ku endleni ka phurojeke ya ndzavisiso hi nhlokomhaka leyi nga ringanyetiwa ya *Nkumisiso wa ku hlangana ka Vutitivi bya Rixana na amukeleko erixakeni: Mhaka ya Vatsonga-Machangana va le ka Xifundzakulu xa Mpumalanga, Afrika-Dzonga* laha ndzi lavisisaka eka mitlawa ya rixaka leri nga ritsongo. (hi ku kongomisa eka Vatsonga-Machangana) ehansi ka vuleteri bya Professor Eric Worby. Vahlokohlisiwa ku ta tekiwa ntsena vaakatiko lava nga na malembe ma 18 ku ya ehenhla lava tshamaka ehansi ka Masipala wa Thembisile Hani eka Xifundzakulu xa Mpumalanga. Xikongomelo xa phurojeke leyi ya ndzavisiso i ku kumisisa leswaku maAfrika-Dzonga va vona vuakatiko ku ri yini.

Tanihi xiphemu xa phurojeke leyi, ndzi tsakela ku ku rhamba ku teka xiave eka nhlokohliso ku hlamusela hi vuxaka exikarhi ka swirho swa ntlawa wa rixaka ro karhi na ku va muakatiko wa Afrika-Dzonga. Nghingiriko lowu wu ta lava nhlokohliso wo va hi langutanile na kona wu ta teka tiawara leti nga hundzuki mune. Hi mpfumelelo wa wena, ndzi ta kombela ku kandziyisa nhlokohliso lowu hi ku tirhisa xikandziyisampfumawulo xa dijitali.

A ku na tihakelo leti u languteriweke ku ti hakela ku va u tinghenelerisa eka phurojeke leyi. Hi tlhelo lerin'wana, u nge kumi swo karhi ku va u tinghenelerisa. Loko u nga tsakeli ku tinghenelerisa a ku nge vi na ndziho wo karhi u nga ta wu hakela. U nga ha tihumesa eka phurojeke nkarhi wihi kumbe wihi kumbe u hlawula ku va u nga hlamuli swivutiso swin'wana loko u nga swi tsakeli. Nhlokohliso wu ta va wa xihundla hikuva ndzi ta tirhisa vito ra vuxisi ku kombisa vutinghenelerisi bya wena loko se ndzi vika ndzavisiso wa mina. Kambe u fanele ku lemuka leswaku vukalavito byo hetiseka byi nga tsandzeka ku fikeleriwa hikuva mihlokohliso leyi yi khumba vuxokoxoko bya matimu ya vutomi lebyi nga tivaka hi vanhu van'wana lava tivaka vatekaxiave. Loko u tikeriwa hi swin'wana kumbe u nga tshamiseki kahle hikokwalaho ka swin'wana swa nhlokohliso, hi nga hefemuka hi ku yimisa nhlokohliso ivi hi ya emahlweni kandzhaku, hi nkarhi wa wena.

Loko wo tshuka u vile na swivutiso hi ndzavisiso lowu, wa pfumeleriwa ku tihlanganisa na mina eka vuxokoxoko lebyi nyikiweke laha hansi. Xiviko xa ndzavisiso xi ta va kona emakumu ka ndzavisiso lowu eka webusayiti ya *Wired Space* leyi nga fikeleriwaka hi ku nghena eka webisayiti ya layiburari ya yunivhesiti, khopi na yona yi ta va kona elayiburari ya yunivhesiti. Loko u tsakela ku kuma nkomiso wa xiviko xa ndzavisiso lowu ndzi ta ku rhumela hi mbilu yo basa paa! Loko u ri na swivilelo hi mayelana na milawu ya matikhomelo ya ndzavisiso lowu, wa pfumeleriwa ku tihlanganisa na **Komiti ya Yunivhesiti ya Milawu ya Matikhomelo eka Ndzavisiso (yo ka yi nga ri ya rihanyo)**, riqingho **+27(0) 11 717 1408**, imeyili shaun.schoeman@wits.ac.za.

Ndzi khensa swinene nkarhi na ku tinghenelerisa ka wena.

Wa wena,

Mulavisisi: Job Zwane, **Imeyili**: 1594397@students.wits.ac.za, **Riqingho**: 0798536923

Mulanguteri: Eric Worby, **Imeyili**: Eric.Worby@wits.ac.za, **Riqingho**: 0117174044

Appendix D: Consent form

Consent form [English] one-on-one interviews

Title of project: *Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa* (provisional title)

Researcher: Job Zwane

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve.

I agree to the following:

(**Please circle the relevant options below**).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his / her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Ifomu lokuvuma [IsiNdebele] ikulumiswano buso-nobuso

Isihloko Sephrojekthi: *Ubudlelwano Hlangana Nobuhlanga Nobunarha: Ngokucalisa Esitjhabeni sama Tsonga-Shangana esiFundeni seMpumalanga, eSewula Afrika* (okusihloko sesikhatjhana)

Umrhubhululi: Job Zwane

Mina u……., ngiyavuma ukuzibandakanya erhubhululweni. Irhubhululweli ngihlathululelwe begodu ngazwisisa ukuthi ukuzibandakanya kwami kuyokufaka ini nani.

Ngiyavumelana ngalokhu okulandelako:

(**Rondela lokho okukhethako ngenzasi**)

Ngiyavuma ukuthi ukuzibandakanya kwami kuzakufihlwa.	IYE	AWA
Ngiyavuma ukuthi umrhubhululi angadzubhula ekulumeni yethu embikweni werhubhululo.	IYE	AWA
Ngiyavuma ukuthi ikulumiswano ingagadangiswa ngesigadangisi maphimbo.	IYE	AWA
Ngiyavuma ukuthi ilwazi engilinikeleko lingasetjenziswa ngabanye abarhubhululi ngingavezwa igama, kwezinye iimfundo nangabe nabo bayitholile imvumo yokuziphatha yeyunivesithi.	IYE	AWA

…… (isitlikitlo)
…… (ibizo lalo ozibandakanyako)
…… (ilanga)

…… (isitlikitlo)
…… (ibizo lalo ofuna imvumo)
…… (ilanga)

Fomo ya mpfumelelo [Xitsonga] nhlokohliso wo langutana

Nhlokomhaka ya phurojeke: *Nkumisiso wa ku hlangana ka Vutitivi bya Rixana na amukeleko erixakeni: Mhaka ya Vatsonga-Machangana va le ka Xifundzakulu xa Mpumalanga, Afrika-Dzonga* (nhlokomhaka leyi ringanyetiweke)

Milavisisi: Job Zwane

Mina, ……. ndza pfumela ku teka xiave eka phurojeke leyi ya ndzavisiso. Ndzi hlamuseriwile hi ndzavisiso na kona ndzi twisisa leswaku ku tinghenelerisa eka wona swi ta lava yini.

Ndzi pfumela eka leswi landzelaka:

(**U kombela ku tsondzela nhlamulo leyi nga yona**).

Ndza pfumela leswaku ku tinghenelerisa ka mina ku va ka xikalavito	INA	E-E
Ndza pfumela leswaku mulavisisi a nga tirhisa mitshaho yi nga boxi vito eka xiviko xa yena xa ndzavisiso.	INA	E-E
Ndza pfumela leswaku eka nhlokohliso ku nga kandziyisiwa mpfumawulo.	INA	E-E
Ndza pfumela leswaku vuxokoxoko lebyi ndzi byi nyikaka byi nga tirhisiwa handle ko boxa vito loko phurojeke hi hela, eka swa dyondzo hi valavisisi hi ku landza mpfumelelo wa milawu lowu nga nyikiwa.	INA	E-E

…… (nsayino)
…… (vito ra mutekaxiave)
…… (siku)

…… (nsayino)
…… (vito ra munhu loyi a kombelaka mpfumelelo)
…… (siku)

Appendix E: Interview questionnaire for mapping inter-ethnic relations



Research Project Title: *Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa* (provisional title)

The discussions are designed to ultimately help me answer some of the main research questions:

- *What are the historical and present sources of the stigma against the Tsonga-Shangaan (i.e., how are specific stereotypes about the Tsonga-Shangaan selected, in what way are they important to those who hold them, and do they have a functional objective)?*
- *How have those designated as Tsonga-Shangaan responded to this stigma?*
- *What is the relationship between the stigmatisation of some groups and national belonging – how does the case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa help us think through this question?*

Interview Guide

[Start the interview by introducing yourself on tape, state the name of the participant, state the date and location, briefly explain the purpose of the interview, end the short introduction by stating that the participant has been informed about the aims and scope of the study and has consented to being audio-recorded]

- What is your native language?
- What language do you speak mostly, and why?
- What is your ethnic identity, and on what grounds do you claim that identity?
- Do you think that members of your ethnic group are treated fairly and welcomed in your community, and in South Africa as a whole?
- If you believe you are treated fairly, why do you think this is so?
- If you believe you are not treated fairly, what do you think is the cause of this unfair treatment?
- What in your opinion are South Africa's "authentic" ethnic identities?
- In your opinion, which ethnic groups currently found in your community belong there and, if any, which do not belong?
- In your opinion, which ethnic groups are discriminated against in your community and South Africa as a whole and on what grounds?
- What makes someone a South African, please give examples?
- What makes someone a foreigner, please give examples?
- What are your thoughts regarding the place of Tsonga-Shangaan people in your community and in South Africa as whole?
- In your experience, how are Tsonga-Shangaan people treated in your community and what do you think is the cause of that treatment?
- What stereotypes or jokes do you know about the Tsonga-Shangaan and what do you think informs them?
- What do you think could be done to make your community more welcoming to all ethnic groups?
- Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share regarding what we have discussed today?

[Thank the focus group participants for their time and contribution]

Appendix F: Questionnaire for life-history interviews



Research Project Title: *Exploring Links Between Ethnic Identity and National Belonging: The Case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in Mpumalanga, South Africa* (provisional title)

These interviews are designed to ultimately help me answer some of the main research questions:

- *What are the historical and present sources of the stigma against the Tsonga-Shangaan (i.e., how are specific stereotypes about the Tsonga-Shangaan selected, in what way are they important to those who hold them, and do they have a functional objective)?*
- *How have those designated as Tsonga-Shangaan responded to this stigma?*
- *What is the relationship between the stigmatisation of some groups and national belonging – how does the case of the Tsonga-Shangaan in South Africa help us think through this question?*

One-on-one/Life History Interview Guide

[Start the interview by introducing yourself on tape, identify the interviewee, state the date and location, briefly explain the purpose of the interview, and end the short introduction by asking the participant to confirm that they have been informed about the aims and scope of the study and consent to being audio-recorded]

- Please introduce yourself, where and when were you born?
- Who were/are your parents and where did they come from?
- Where and when did you receive your education?
- How long have you lived in this community?
- What is your native language?
- What language do you speak mostly, and why?
- What would you say is your ethnic group, and on what grounds do you make that claim?
- What impact, if any, do you think your ethnic identity has had on your life, do you think it has made you more or less happy?
- Have there been any moments in your life when you felt proud of your ethnic identity?
- Have there been any moments in your life when you felt ashamed to claim/confess your ethnic identity?
- Have your ever felt discriminated against or treated unfairly because of your ethnic identity?
- What strategies have you used or still use to protect yourself from potential discrimination?
- Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share regarding what we have discussed today?

[Thank the interviewee for their time and contribution]

Appendix G: Non-medical HREC Covid-19 guidelines

HREC NON-MEDICAL GUIDELINES

FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH SAFELY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

April 2020

This document is intended to offer advice on how you might modify your study protocol during the current COVID-19 circumstances in order to limit transmission of the novel coronavirus and reduce risk both for the researcher and the research participants.

Researchers are advised to **follow national regulations, guidelines and protocols** in the collection of data during this time.

We are not saying that researchers cannot do face to face activities or that we will deny you ethics clearance if you want to do this, merely that you should consider other ways of collecting your data in the circumstances.

Consider whether your proposed **methodology can be adapted** in light of national restrictions around COVID-19. Studies that involve a door to door survey in a community, focus groups, or ethnography in a restaurant, for example, are not going to be possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies that involve handing out a hard copy questionnaire or doing face to face interviews, for example, may be adapted towards online modes of data collection. Please consult your supervisor in this regard if you are a student.

Some studies may not lend themselves to electronic/online data collection and some populations may not be reachable via such means. If your methodology cannot be adapted, then you may need to reconsider your research methodology. Please consult your supervisor in this regard if you are a student. If you decide to proceed with face to face data collection, then your application should outline the steps you will take to prevent transmission, adhere to social distancing rules, and promote safety of the researcher and participants.

Any **paper-based research** carries the risk of contagion, since the novel coronavirus can reside on paper for 2-3 days (some estimates indicate up to 5 days). Please avoid the exchange of paper between participants and researchers, unless there is a strongly justified need to use paper in the research and very carefully outlined plans are put in place to ensure sanitization. Also consider the risk of contagion when the use and exchange of **pens, digital devices, smartphones, tablets** are required for consent purposes.

Wherever possible, use **electronic means** to facilitate the consent process and data collection. For example, make use of email, online mechanisms such as Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Whatsapp, Skype, or Zoom to collect data wherever possible.

Considerations on how best to preserve participants' anonymity and confidentiality must be retained when alternative electronic platforms are used. For example, participants can be sent the PIS via electronic means and **consent can be recorded verbally**.

When switching to electronic/online means for your research projects, please consider issues such as **connectivity, online accessibility, and data costs**. This issue is relevant to both researchers and participants. For example, a study that involves interviews with Wits students should make use of **zero-rated platforms** to avoid incurring data costs. When considering a switch from face to face to online interviews, the researcher must consider whether the participants have access to Wi-Fi or data and if not, how such costs will be covered.

Please do not hesitate to speak to your research supervisor, contact your School Committee Chair, or get in touch with us for any queries related to your studies.

For more information on the COVID-19 situation in South Africa, please visit http://sacoronavirus.co.za, or call the official toll free call centre on 0800 029 999, or send HI to 0600 123 456 on WhatsApp.

Compiled by J. Knight, J. Watermeyer, M. Small

(HREC Non-Medical Chair and Deputy Co-Chairs)

Appendix H: Similarity report

Thesis Final Job Zwane 28 March 2025.docx

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