

## Remodelling Ndebele Culture and Sensibilities through Modern Oral Art Forms

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### Abstract

*The main scope of the paper is to analyze modern oral art forms in view of their functions, the way in which they have evolved and the language which their users now prefer as a mode for their transmission. Given that over time the mode as well as the language of transmission has undergone some change, the paper then problematizes whether these traditional oral art forms should continue being called oral art forms in their modern state or they should just be labeled as art forms. By using Ndebele oral traditions as a basis for argument, the paper seeks to answer the following questions:*

- *Are modern oral art forms still playing the same roles as those of the traditional Ndebele society did?*
- *What are the effects of using the English language medium in the transmission of African oral traditions?*
- *What new dimension have modern oral art forms taken in transmission, form and content?*
- *What is the relevance and the implications of teaching contemporary oral traditions at universities and other institutions of learning?*

*This paper interrogates the influence of culture contact on the Ndebele oral art forms and how their worldview and their culture is projected through the modern oral traditions. Modern literary traditions are highlighted showing how they differ from the traditional Ndebele ones. In concluding, the coping strategies that could be adopted by learning institutions in their attempts to keep African oral traditions relevant in today's changing environments are suggested. The paper also notes the growing need by Higher Education institutions to review their curriculum in that direction.*

### Introduction

The paper traces the subsequent developments that have taken place on oral traditions through history up to today in the Ndebele society. The Ndebele society is used as a basis because it has come into contact with a number of Southern African societies as shall be shown as the paper unfolds. The paper begins by tracing the background of the Ndebele people and the history of oral traditions among them. However it has to be noted that the Ndebele people being referred

to here are those who are found in the southern parts of Zimbabwe and not those who are found at Mpumalanga province of South Africa. The paper scrutinizes oral art forms in the traditional society and in the modern society establishing some similarities and differences in the mode of transmission, the language used as well as the functions. In this paper the relevance of teaching traditional oral art forms is also interrogated. The arguments in this paper revolve around the idea that those sentiments being alluded to in cultural hybridity by Bhabha (1994), are not new in the Ndebele society. Having noted the changes that have taken place in the traditional oral art forms the paper goes further to examine the use of the word 'oral' in the oral art forms and the relevance of teaching and learning oral literature at educational institutions.

### **The Historical Background of the Ndebele People and their Oral Traditions**

In order to understand arguments raised in here it is important to highlight the history of the Ndebele people so as to make it clear who really they are. This part of the paper looks at the history of the Ndebele people and the history of oral traditions among them. However it has to be noted that this paper looks at the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. The Ndebele people who are found in Mpumalanga province of South Africa differ from the Ndebeles of Zimbabwe historically, culturally and linguistically although there are some similarities. The history of the Ndebele people cannot be enough without mentioning Mzilikazi, the king of the Ndebeles who was the son of Matshobana. First Mzilikazi fled from Zwidzwe king of the Ndwandwes to seek refuge under Tshaka, king of the Zulus in the Zululand. Mzilikazi then fled from Tshaka together with his followers in the first quarter of the nineteenth century Bozongwana (1983). He travelled northwards until he settled in the then Transvaal. This was before Mzilikazi's group was called AmaNdebele (Ndhlukula 1980). The original group that left Zululand was initially called the Khumalo as their leader Mzilikazi was from the Khumalo clan (Hadebe, 2006).

It is today still a controversy why the Khumalo renamed to Ndebele. It is important to note that in the Transvaal where Mzilikazi settled there was also a group called the Ndebeles who were led by their king Magodonga. Today the South African Ndebele still exists in Southern Transvaal at KwaNdebele homeland in the north-western part of Mpumalanga and these Ndebeles live in between the Sotho and the Tswana speaking people (Wilkes in Kotey, 1999).

As Mzilikazi moved northwards he assimilated Sotho and Tswana people into his group. Hadebe (2006:50) points out that "Mzilikazi assimilated a number of Sotho people through persuasion or coercion, or better still, by employing both means". The Sotho, that is the Tswana, Sepedi and Northern Sotho became more than 'the

original Khumalos who were of Nguni descent' (Ibid 2006:50). Bozongwana (1983: vii) asserts that:

All the tribes Mzilikazi conquered on his way from Natal were incorporated into the Ndebele tribe and while their young men served in the army, the girls became wives and queens. To be fully absorbed, the new comers had to give up their customs and adopt the Zulu ones.

The very fact that those incorporated had to forego their language shows that what Mamdani (1996), discusses as a scenario that took place after colonization of Africa by Europe is not a new phenomena amongst the Ndebele. What Mamdani (1996), says, is that in a colonial state for one to become a citizen there are certain minimum requirements that an individual had to attain. Among those requirements, language was a major. Mzilikazi's major strategy for nation building meant that for one to be fully incorporated, that individual had to assume the Ndebele culture and language, which makes it clear that the sentiments being alluded to by Mamdani (1996) as having transpired in the colonial state took place amongst the Ndebeles even before the conquest of Africa by Europe.

It is alleged that the Sotho are the ones who called Mzilikazi's group AmaNdebele. Ndhlukula (1980:94) argues that:

*Okwenza AbeSuthu babize abantu bakaMzilikazi ngokuthi ngamaNdebele yikuthi ulimi lwabo lwaluhambelana lolwamaNdebele abawaziyo.*

(What made the Sotho call Mzilikazi's people the Ndebeles is because they spoke a language that was similar to that of the Ndebeles they already knew.)

However, Hughes and Van Veslen (1954) argue that, the Sotho referred to all raiding groups as 'Kimatebele' meaning warriors with long shields which in Nguni became AmaNdebele. Hadebe (2006:50) writes "Nyathi claims that the name 'Matabele' derived from Sotho verb 'hotebela' '*okutsho ukubhidliza, ukubulala kumbe ukuchitha*' meaning to destroy, kill or ruin". How Mzilikazi's group was named AmaNdebele remains an enigma (Hadebe 2006; Ndhlukula 1980; Rasmussen 1978; and Appleyard 1847).

The Ndebeles then crossed the Limpopo River in 1837 into what is today called Zimbabwe. Bozongwana (1983: Vii) outlines that:

After the surprise attack and destruction of his kraal Mosega in January 1837 by the joint operations of the two Boer commandants, Potgieter and Maritz, Mzilikazi decided to leave the Transvaal altogether and crossed the Limpopo River into the land now known as Matabeleland. By 1838 he had settled in the land which was formerly that of the AbeLozwi people.

In what is today known as Zimbabwe, Mzilikazi continued incorporating members from other groups such as the Sotho, the Venda, the Tonga, the Nambya, the

Shona and many Kalangas. It is clear then that the Ndebele people who were not of Nguni origin far outnumbered those who were originally Nguni.

Mzilikazi's strategies for nation building saw the Ndebele state growing bigger and as a result the customs and the language that was initially Zulu somehow took another dimension because of contact and dilution by those incorporated from other linguistic groups. A caste developed when Mzilikazi had settled in the present day Zimbabwe where 'the original Nguni group referred to itself as 'AbeZansi', meaning those from the south, while the Sotho group was known as 'AbeNhla', meaning those from the north and lastly the rest who constituted the majority of those who were incorporated in Zimbabwe were referred to as 'Amahole'. 'Abenzansi' were the most superior among the Ndebeles.

After the death of Mzilikazi, Lobengula his son took over as king of AmaNdebele. Lobengula's kingship did not last as the colonizers put pressure on him in an effort to colonize the country. It is claimed that he disappeared when the war was at its height as he was crossing Shangani River (Ndhlukula 1980). 1890 was a bad year for this is the year that Zimbabwe was colonized by the British settlers (Alexander et al 2000). This saw the Ndebele people's culture further being influenced by the European culture since the English culture and language became dominant over that of the Ndebele. After independence in 1980, English remained dominant and its influence on the Ndebele people continued. Despite Shona and Ndebele being national languages of Zimbabwe, English is perceived to be more prestigious than the two national languages and remains the official language in the formal sectors of the society and is the one that is used in formal domains.

The Ndebele society consists of people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the Ndebele people themselves have had contact with many peoples of Southern Africa. This means that there is no one person who is originally Ndebele, but if one is a Ndebele, he or she can either be a Nguni, Sotho, Venda, Kalanga, Shona, Tonga, Nambya, and so on. It is imperative therefore to conclude that the Ndebele society is a conglomeration of diverse linguistic and cultural groups. However, the Kalangas constitute the majority of the Ndebele people (Emmanuel 2012). Emmanuel (2012), points out that the Kalanga people constitutes 90% of the population of Matabeleland and 50% of the Zimbabwean population. There are three different types of the Kalanga dialects and these include the Tjikalanga, Lilima, Nanzwa/Nambya, Lozwi, Nyayi (Emmanuel 2012), and Nyubi.

The Kalanga people had a great influence on the Ndebele people due to their traditional religious practices that Mzilikazi appreciated. They were known for rain making through their god Ngwali of Njelele in Matobo. There were also traditional healers among the Kalanga people whose services were appreciated

and well received by Mzilikazi. Their oral art forms also found their way into the Nguni ones, mainly their traditional songs. During traditional dance the Kalangas are the ones who used the drum, but today this practice is common throughout the Ndebele society. In folktales their influence is evident in the narration of folktales through the use of the interjection remark *Kolobeja* or *Kolobedzwa* (Ndhlukula 1980). The influence of the Kalanga people's culture and language was inevitable because when the Ndebeles arrived in Zimbabwe they occupied the area that was originally that of the Kalanga people. However, although there was influence, there was no outright dislodge of the Ndebele culture and language. The Ndebele culture became a hybrid meaning that Bhabha's (1994) idea of hybridity is not new. Hybridity did not only come with colonialism but has always been a common phenomenon in African societies.

These oral art forms were a societal property; no one could claim ownership or authority of any of these oral art forms (Ndhlukula 1980). It is clear also that what Bhabha (1994), calls hybridity in the post colonial scholarship is a phenomenon that the Ndebele culture was subjected to even before colonialism. The hybridity among the Ndebele was not only as a result of contact with European culture but also as a result of contact with other African cultures. The dominance of the Ndebele language was maintained by all means possible and that implied that sentiments from other cultures could be accepted but not anything to do with compromising the dominance of the Ndebele language. Although hybridity was common in the construction of the Ndebele state, it did not disrupt the interests of the ruling class, that is those of Nguni origin, but it actually strengthened the power of this ruling class. It is apparent that the Kalanga people are the ones who influenced most Ndebele oral traditions probably because they constituted the majority of the Ndebele population. It is not clear whether those groups that were incorporated into the Ndebele group ever had influence on their oral traditions or not. Today Kalanga and the Ndebele people know their histories from their oral traditions (Emmanuel 2012), and this shows that oral traditions had a greater function in these societies. The next part of this paper will therefore look at the functions of oral traditions in the Ndebele society.

### **Functions of Oral Art Forms in the Traditional Ndebele Society**

Amongst the Ndebele people there was and there still is "no such thing as art for art's sake" (Mao Tse Tung cited by Becker 1983; Perris 1983; and Boorman 1963). The oral art forms played some pivotal roles in governing morals of people within the Ndebele society. The use of oral traditions played fundamental roles across all age groups; choice of which one to be used depended on age. No one member of the Ndebele society could escape the oral traditions being used on him or her. These oral traditions were in the form of lullabies, folktales, proverbs, idioms, songs, riddles and praise poetry.

Soon after birth a crying baby was consoled through the lullabies while on the back of its mother or a female relative. Lullabies were also used when playing with a baby or with the intention of making the child sleep. These lullabies also played a part in language acquisition although are some that did not make sense at all. In the traditional Ndebele society there were no formal schools and children were socialized and educated through folktales and riddles. Their cognitive abilities were tested and strengthened through riddles. Folktales were narrated by the grandmother to her children in the evening before retiring for sleeping. These folktales were not just narrated for mere entertainment but their primary function was to impart life lessons to children. Guidance and counseling was done through the folktales at the earlier stage of lifespan development. Under folktales there were also myths which explained the origins of the Ndebele people. Myths could also be narrated to adults because they made them understand their society and things that were happening in their society could also be explained through myths. Soon after folktales the proverbs took over on those who were graduating from childhood.

Proverbs and idioms were used on those members of the Ndebele society who had passed the childhood stage. The proverbs and the idioms had the same function. According to Nyembezi (1954), the proverbs had functions such as avoiding harmful practices, to shirk indolence and embrace diligence, to inculcate good habits in children, to teach that life has difficult moments and they warn about bad practices that may result in sour relations within the family or society. Nyembezi (1954), goes on to say that, proverbs also reflected the people's life, their wisdom, their philosophy, their observations in life, their history and a memory bank for their language. Since the Ndebeles descended from the Zulu kingdom, these observations by Nyembezi touch them directly. To Miruka (1994), besides being vehicles of advice, caution and warning, proverbs were both art and part of socio-culture. Proverbs were also used in settling disputes, in conversations and where and where an older person was advising the younger (Chesaina 1991). These kept members of the society within the expected ethical boundaries of the society. Messages would be conveyed through these oral art forms indirectly. Proverbs and idioms were used for counseling the members of the society and that kind of counseling was preparatory, preventative and reactive.

There was also praise poetry. The kings and the chiefs would be praised by the griots whose societal responsibility was that of praising. The chiefs and the kings were praised through the narration of the names of their forefathers coming down to their grandfathers and their fathers and finally on them. The good and the bad deeds of the king or chief also constituted part of his praises and the griot is the only one who had the license to touch on such issues. Gramsci cited by Mumby (1997:349), argues that "All men are intellectuals...but not all men have in society

the function of intellectual." Where the king was praised was the platform where the griot could thank the king for his deeds that the society appreciated and where the griot would also express the society's concerns over the flaws of the king (Ndhlukula 1980, Nyathi 2001, Nyembezi 1958). There were also praises for the common men. An individual would compose his own praises and would praise himself. The composing of the praises started when young boys were herding cattle in the veld. Even domestic animals especially the bulls, the cows and the oxen were also praised. The bulls were praised for their prowessness in fighting other bulls, cows were praised for the milk that they provided and the oxen were praised for their drawing powers during ploughing. Praise poetry was also another tool for fostering the hegemonic tendencies. Mumby (1997) says that hegemony is domination through consent. Gramsci (1971:12), points out that hegemony is:

The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

The Ndebele king's praises were regarded as praises for the whole nation and this is common phenomena amongst many groups of Nguni descent where names of the kings have been used to name the nation or group, for instance, Zulu, Manala and Nzunza were names of kings but now they are names of the groups that they led. Such scenarios are manifestations of hegemonic tendencies by the leaders. The king's praises also drew in ideas to do with fierce and powerful animals, birds of prey and other vindictive phenomena of nature. The lion, the bull, the eagle, fire, strong wind, hail storm, lightning, thunder and heavy rain were common features in king's praises.

Songs were also part and parcel of the Ndebele oral traditions. There were different types of songs which were sung during different events such as funerals, traditional religious events, weddings, war, and national events such as the first fruits festival. Some songs such as the one that was sung during the first fruits festival were considered to be sacred and could not just be sung anytime anywhere (Nyathi 2001). Just as praise poetry, songs were also used to highlight the king's strengths and weaknesses. Nyathi (2001: 27), points out that "Songs were sung about the king; these were songs where messages were meant to bring to the attention of the king his shortcomings or excesses." These Ndebele oral traditions played complementary roles. Some of the Ndebele songs were taken from the Kalanga especially the religious ones, particularly those that were accompanied by drum beating. The Ndebeles originally did not have the drum when they came from Zululand and they only started using the drum when they had come into contact with the Kalanga people.

## Modern Oral Traditions

Cultures are dynamic and so are the oral traditions because they are products of cultures. The oral traditions have not remained static but they have always been changing with time. This has seen the oral traditions taking new forms in their content, their types, the mode and the language of transmission. There are a number of factors that have influenced this change key among them being culture contact. The types of oral traditions that are now found in the modern Ndebele society are the following:

- Narratives
- Common phrases
- Idioms
- Jokes
- Proverbs
- Poetry

## Narratives

There are different forms of narratives and these include political myths, moral narratives, cognitive narratives and other different types. However it should be noted that these modern types of narratives are difficult to classify. There should be criteria in the classification of the narratives. In this article the classification used is that of function. Other criteria that can be used in the classification of these modern narratives can be content, what the tale is about, the medium used in the transmission or the language that is used.

Moral narratives are very common today in the Ndebele society. These moral narratives are usually transmitted electronically, that is via the internet or through cell phones. Through the internet people can share these narratives globally. Zimbabwe has in the past decade seen people migrating to all parts of the world. These people have not lost contact with their friends and relatives who remained in the country and those who migrated to the other parts of the world. They have remained connected electronically. In the process of communication people usually send or forward these narratives that usually carry moral lessons. The following is an example of a narrative that was forwarded to many people on the internet:

### *Did You Know These Facts*

Death is certain but the bible speaks about untimely death! Make a personal reflection about this...very interesting, read until the end... It is written in the bible (Galatians 6:7) "Be not deceived God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that he shall reap." Here are some men and women who mocked God.

John Lennon (singer), some years before, during his interview with an American magazine, he said:

Christianity will end, it will end, it will disappear. I do not have to argue about that. I am certain. Jesus was ok, but his subjects were too simple, today we are more famous than him (1966).

Lennon after saying that the Beatles were more famous than Jesus Christ, was shot six times.

Tancredo Neves (President of Brazil), during the presidential campaign, he said if he got 500 000 votes from his party, not even god would remove him from presidency. Sure he got the votes, but he got sick a day before being made president, then he died.

Cazuza (bi-sexual Brazilian composer, singer and poet), during a show in Canecion (Rio de Janeiro), while smoking his cigarette, he puffed out some smoke into the air and said "God that's for you." He died at the age of 32 of lung cancer in a horrible manner.

The man who built the Titanic, after the construction of a Titanic, a reporter asked how safe the Titanic would be. With an ironic tone he said "Not even God can sink it." The result I think you all know what happened to the Titanic.

Marilyn Manroe (actress). She was visited by Billy Graham during a presentation preacher had to say, she said "I don't need your Jesus." A week later she was found dead in her apartment.

Bon Scott (singer), the ex-vocalist of the AC/DC. On one of his 1979 songs he sang "Don't stop me ; I'm going down all the way, down the highway to hell." On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1980, Bon Scott was found dead, he had been choked by his own vomit.

Campinas in 2005 in Campinas, Brazil a group of friends, drunk, went to pick up a friend. The mother accompanied her to the car and was so worried about the drunkenness of her friends and she said to the daughter holding her hand, who was already seated in the car "My daughter, go with God and may he protect you." She responded "Only if he (God) travels in the trunk, cause inside here its already full." Hours later, news came by that they had been involved in a fatal accident, everyone had died, the car could not be recognized what type of car it had been, but surprisingly the trunk was intact. The police said there was no way the trunk could have remained intact. To their surprise, inside the trunk was a crate of eggs, none was broken.

Christine Hewitt (Jamaican journalist and entertainer) said the bible (word of God) was the worst book ever written. In June 2006 she was found burnt beyond recognition in her motor vehicle. Our very own Bhundu Boys sang a song mocking God calling him a drunkard and saying all sorts of things. Where are they now!!!

Many more important people have forgotten that there is no other name that was given so much authority as the name of Jesus. Many have died, but only Jesus died and rose again, and he is still alive.

This is a good example of a moral narrative that people share via the internet. However there are many narratives that are similar to this one. The major shortcoming of such narratives that are shared through the internet as a mode of transmission is that they are only accessible to people who have knowledge of computers and also having access to the internet. Those people mainly in the rural areas do not have access to the internet and as a result they are not part of these kinds of narratives that are electronically transmitted. This justifies that the narratives that are transmitted through the internet are only accessible to a minority in the Ndebele society. The group that shares narratives through the internet is perceived as the elite and therefore this kind of transmission can be regarded as elitist in its very nature.

There are some moral narratives that are not transmitted through the internet but orally and through written literature. Moral narratives transmitted orally are common when emphasizing a lesson or a fact. These are used in churches, schools and other gatherings that are concerned with social development. These narratives are mostly used in church when emphasizing the bible lesson. In schools these moral narratives are narrated during assemblies or during the guidance and counseling lessons. Most of these narratives favor human beings as the key characters. It is on rare occasions that animals are used as characters in such tales. Some of these narratives may be related to true life experiences and some may be drawn from the bible. It should be noted however that the bible and the Christian religion have played a very significant role in the evolution of these modern moral narratives.

Another type of these tales may be called the cognitive narratives. These cognitive narratives are those that which help the members of a society, particularly children to grasp, memorize or learn some aspects of their society. Some of these cognitive narratives may be related to subjects done at school such as geography, science, religious studies, language and so on. The following is an example of a cognitive narrative that is related to religious studies:

#### *The woman and the Lion*

Once upon a time there was a woman who was walking across a bushy area and she met a lion. She knelt down and prayed to God so that the lion does not eat

her. As she opened her eyes after concluding her prayer, she found the lion beginning its prayer saying that ' , 'God, you denied me to eat Daniel, so I don't think that you will refuse that I have to eat this woman'. The woman quickly took to her heels. Thus how the story ended.

One listening to this narrative would ask himself or herself who this Daniel is and from there one quickly refers to the biblical story where Daniel was thrown into the den of lions and through the intervention of God's powers the lions did not eat him. Therefore through this narrative children can easily grasp the biblical story about Daniel.

Among the teenage boys those narratives that are obscene are common. Teenage boys usually narrate tales whose contents revolve around sexual matters. They narrate these tales when there are no adults around. Some of these tales may be about a man who gets married and does not know what to do with the wife. The man goes to a doctor to consult about what he sees on the woman that is unusual to him. The doctor tells the man what to do and from there on the man refuses to go to work and we see a lot of children being produced. Such narratives are not bad or immoral, but they have an important function, that of nurturing boys into adulthood from childhood. Because of technological advancements the boys now share such narratives through cell phone messages and the internet.

Under narratives, there are also myths which Leeming (2005), says that they are narratives that describe phenomena that cannot be understood through an individual's experiences. Daba-Buzoianu and Cirtita-Buzoianu (2011:125), say that "...myths are a matter of thinking and communication that helps humans to understand and accept the world with all its duality and complexity." The myths can be said to be the narratives that explain any phenomena or reality. There are different types of myths and these include those about physical phenomena, those that explain behaviors in animals and some physical characteristics in them, those that are about human origins, Christian myths, and the political myths. Political myths, as narratives are common in the modern day Zimbabwean society. Politicians create some myths so as to safeguard their positions in the society. These political myths would justify their positions and the decisions that they make for the nation whether good or bad. Babu (1981) says that:

His power (the politician) rest on his ability to mystify the peasants, and on his capacity to convince them that their fate is intertwined with his own and that the stronger he gets, as a politician the better off the peasantry will become in the long run.

These myths are also used by the politicians to justify their continued hold on to power and to convince the masses that their flaws are the flaws of the whole

society. Popular myths from most African politicians today are those that blame their failures on colonialism. Tanasoiu (2005:117), observes that:

Through using different symbols, political myths employ pre-existing frames and an already established dynamic. In this way, they repackage an old story in order to galvanise passions, canvass support and stir energies with the objective of achieving electoral success or acceptance of a specific government policy.

The politicians create these myths after realizing that they have failed to live to the expectations of the masses so that at the end the masses disassociate them from those failures. Myths have a strong political force and their evocation have a strong mobilizing role, for they produce a reality of their own (Campana 2009). Myths can be as a result of real or unreal circumstances, but the major aim will be to drive a particular ideology.

### *Idioms*

The progression of time partnered with urbanization, technological advancements, the introduction of new concepts and artifacts, migration, and culture contact have seen the Ndebele society having new forms of idioms. These idioms are now common among the younger generation in the Ndebele society. These idioms are an extension or modification of those that have always been in existence in the traditional Ndebele society. People have been observing what is happening in the society and at the same time coming up with these new idioms. Most of these contemporary idioms are those that were originally traditional but have evolved through the change of terms that are used in them. Those terms which signify those concepts that are no longer common in the modern society have been replaced by those that signify common concepts in the modern Ndebele society. The following are examples of such idioms:

*Amapatapata awela abangela mazwane*  
(Slippers fall on those without toes)

The original or traditional version of this idiom is as follows:

*Amajodo awela abangela mbiza*  
(Melons fall on those without pots)

Melons were common when the Ndebele people used to live an agrarian kind of life, and because today people in urban areas are no longer used to melons and do not have direct contact with them, it is this reason why the idiom changed to include the slippers because that is what they are used to and it was after an observation that one can only wear a pair of slippers by securing them on the foot through the use of toes. However this idiom has evolved even more further to include some other more modern artifacts for instance:

*Amaselifoni awela abangela malayini*  
(Cellphones fall on those without seem cards)

In Zimbabwe, between 1999 when the use of cell phones started to become common and early 2009, it was very difficult to get a cell phone line. Even if you got it, the price was too high; it was equivalent to that of a cow. However, because most people had relatives who worked in South Africa and abroad, they could get cell phones as their relatives sent them. Even if one had a cell phone, still it remained difficult to get a line and through this experience the idiom; 'Cell phones fall on those without lines then evolved'.

Some idioms that have come into existence have not come as a result of changing terms on the already existing ones but they are completely new. Through life experiences and observations of what happens within their society, the Ndebele people always come up with new idioms. These idioms become popular through use and just as in the traditional Ndebele society; there is no one who can claim authority of these art forms. One idiom that has become popular among the Ndebele is:

*Isizakuya eLuveve*  
(It is about to go to Luveve)

The pronoun 'it' here can refer either to a car, cell phone, computer or any other artifact or device that we may find being used by people in their day to day lives. Luveve is a cemetery in Bulawayo. When this idiom is used it means that the gadget or device being referred to is useless, is too old, is about to be thrown away or is no longer efficient. What is important to note is that this idiom is used even by children who don't even know what is synonymous with Luveve. This then leads us to the conclusion that when an oral art form comes into existence, its users are not worried about where it comes from but are only interested in what that oral art form means.

### **Common Phrases**

Under the traditional Ndebele oral art forms there are no common phrases. However an observation that has been made on the Ndebele oral art forms has shown that common phrases are a new type oral art that falls under the genre of modern oral art forms. These common phrases have come into existence as the people strive to survive under the harsh economic conditions. The Zimbabweans between the period 2007 and 2009 faced the toughest experience of their life because of the economy that was falling drastically. Such experiences saw some common phrases coming into existence. Popular among those phrases are the following:

*Bhakhosi*  
BACCOSI (Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention)

When the situation was very tough in Zimbabwe, in 2008 the government introduced a scheme that was called BACCOSI. The aim of the scheme was to make everyone in Zimbabwe to have access to the basic commodities at a very low price. In Matabeleland this scheme did not meet the expectations of the people after they had waited patiently and in anticipation of better lives after too much suffering because of hunger. The Ndebele people then began to use the acronym BACCOSI, in a rephonologized or transliterated way as *bhakhosi* in Ndebele. People then began to use this term as a phrase to refer to anything that is cheap or that which can be accessed easily. Today the phrase *bhakhosi* is used when people are referring to something that is cheap or that which is easily accessible. Even in institutions of learning when the students write an examination or exercise that is easy they say it was *bhakhosi*. Even when boys are talking of a girl who is loose they say she is a *bhakhosi*. When vendors are attracting customers they also say that their goods are being sold through *bhakhosi*. From the issue of *bhakhosi* it is apparent that when people are promised something when it is obvious that they have to get what they are being promised and their expectations are not met with, they attack or create mockery on policy makers through the creation of such oral art forms. When people's expectations are not met, and they can't do anything to challenge or confront the policy makers or the system, they console themselves by creating such oral art forms as the one about BACOSI.

Another common phrase that became popular during the days of harsh economic conditions was *korokoza*. Initially *korokoza* meant illegal gold panning and those illegal gold panners were referred to as *amakorokoza*. Whenever people went out to look for basic commodities such as mealie-meal, sugar and cooking oil they would say I am going to *korokoza* and thus this became a popular phrase referring to looking for something that is crucial. From then on, the phrase became popular and it is still being used when someone is talking about looking for something that is very important. The term *korokoza* itself has been adopted from the Shona speech community which is the dominant group in Zimbabwe. The adoption of the term did not mean that in the Ndebele speech community there is no such equivalent for gold panning, but it is there and the term is *tshaketsha*, but however the Shona version seems to have gained more popularity than the Ndebele one. This shows that the indigenous languages of Africa have not yet stopped from donating to one another but the process is still there. It is not only English that Ndebele is adopting terms from but also from other indigenous languages that it comes into contact with. What should be noted however is that this common phrase is also popular among the Shona people and it became dominant among them before it was popular among the Ndebele.

The other similar common phrase is *phathelisa* (to engage into illegal exchange currencies of different countries). Those involved in this practice of the illegal foreign

currency exchange are called *Osiphatheleni*. To *phathela* in Ndebele is to bring something for someone or to someone. These illegal foreign currency dealers became *osiphatheleni* because they would stand on the pavements asking the passersby what they would have brought for them. They would not openly mention that they would be exactly talking about money as they would be trying to disguise themselves from the police. Thus the term *phathelisa* became popular and is now a common phrase and should now be regarded as part and parcel of modern oral art forms. However this common phrase has become popular amongst the majority of the linguistic groups in Zimbabwe including Shona and English.

Some common phrases have come into existence as a result of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The popular phrase *umkhuhlane* (disease) has become part of the modern oral art forms. The term *umkhuhlane* generally used to refer to any disease but today it refers to HIV and AIDS. When this phrase is uttered there is no Ndebele speaker who can need clarification as to which disease is being talked about but one would know that it is HIV or AIDS that is being talked about.

Still on HIV and AIDS, the common phrase *uhlelo* (program) has come as a result of the HIV and AIDS treatment through anti-retroviral therapy (ART). In both rural and urban areas the government and non-governmental organizations came up with programs to assist people so that they get access to HIV and AIDS treatment. People have referred to the programs as *uhlelo*, yet in Ndebele *uhlelo* used to refer to any program in general but today when one is talking about *uhlelo*, he/she will be referring to ART. When people say one is in *ehlelweni* they will be saying that individual is under anti-retroviral drugs.

Again on HIV and AIDS, the common phrase *uyatshisa* (he/she is hot or his/her temperature is high) has also entered the genre of modern oral art forms. The term *uyatshisa* used to be used when describing the condition of a child who is not feeling well. However today when people say *uyatshisa* they will be referring to a person who is having HIV or AIDS, the term no longer refers to a child who is not feeling well. Another common phrase is *uwuke engutsheni* (he/she woke up from the blankets). This one can also fit under idioms. Usually people do not go for testing until they are bed ridden. So when one recovers after being bed ridden because of AIDS, then people would say *uwuke engutsheni*. It has to be noted however that these oral art forms which have to do with HIV and AIDS related issues are not used when those who are being referred to are listening even if one is of a closer social distance.

## Jokes

Jokes have also become part of the genre of the oral art forms although Finnegan (1970) and Miruka (1994) have not included them as part and parcel of oral traditions.

Jokes are now a common practice among different societies of the world. Among the Ndebele and other African societies in general, jokes were not regarded as being part of the oral traditions. These jokes are transmitted through various channels. Some are transmitted orally, some through cell phones, internet, newspapers, magazines, television, radio and so on.

Although these jokes are meant to make people laugh, most of them carry some messages that are important in shaping the people's behaviors. These jokes are usually in the form of a narrative and this implies that there is an interface between jokes and narratives. Among the teenagers those jokes that are obscene are common.

These jokes are also usually transmitted in the English language especially those that are not transmitted orally. The sharing of these jokes through the English language has seen people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds coming into a common ground. These jokes and other narratives that are shared across different borders are evidence that people are now living in a global village. Through English, there is no narrative that can be associated with any society because it would have become common across various societies.

### **Differences between Traditional and Modern Oral Art Forms**

There are some notable differences between the modern and the traditional oral art forms. First, the modern oral art forms are not always transmitted orally but are also transmitted through various channels such as the internet, the cell phones, newspapers, magazines, books, radios, televisions and so on. The traditional oral art forms were transmitted through the word of mouth only. The accessibility to these different modes of transmission has created some differences within a single society. The modes of transmission have created different classes, where the modern modes, particularly the electronic transmission, have come to be associated with the elites. The modern oral art forms are only accessible to those who are literate, that is those who can read newspapers, books and magazines; those who have access to the internet whether via the mobile phones or computers; and those with access to the radio and television. This then leads us to see that the Ndebele people's culture has been remodeled because of the change from the extended family to nuclear family and the church from rural settings which favored communalism to urban settings that favor individualism. All these have also seen the Ndebele people's philosophy of life changing as well.

The language of transmission is also another difference between the traditional and the modern oral art forms. In the transmission of modern oral art forms it is the Ndebele language that is used, but in the modern ones it is predominantly English that is used. How then do we come to label those oral art forms that are transmitted through the English language as Ndebele oral art forms? In view of the English

language being used in the transmission of the Ndebele oral traditions; can we then say that the Ndebele oral art forms still exist in this era of globalization? These are some of the questions that we need to ask ourselves when we are interrogating the issues of the English language in the transmission of the Ndebele oral art forms. The electronic transmission of modern oral art forms has also resulted in the use of the English language because these are shared globally and between people of different linguistic backgrounds. In looking at such oral art forms it then becomes debatable whether they can be labeled as being peculiar to a particular linguistic group or they can simply be labeled as global art forms? Because a people's culture is carried through their language and their literary works, we are also made to ask ourselves whose culture and whose philosophy are these modern art forms carrying?

Another difference between modern and traditional oral art forms lies in the content. The modern oral art forms have encompassed modern artifacts and what used to be common in the traditional Ndebele oral art forms that we see still featuring in the modern art forms are the animals. There are some other concepts that the Ndebele people, especially those who live in urban areas, which they are no longer familiar with. As has been shown earlier on for example 'melons' are now being replaced by cell phones. The Christian church has also taken centre stage in the modern oral art forms especially on oral narratives. The contents of those narratives that are shared via the internet relate closely to Christianity and the lessons being transmitted are those that which have to do with morals.

The function of these oral narratives seems to have taken a new twist. In the traditional Ndebele society there was no formal schooling and children were in most instances socialized by their grandmothers through oral narratives. The idioms and the proverbs were peculiar to those who were grown up. In the modern society narratives are peculiar to adults who have access to the internet. This also shows another shift because in the modern day society the adults are the ones who are now into narratives through the internet than children. In the traditional Ndebele society the narratives that adults could share amongst themselves were particularly the myths and the legends. Children in urban areas now listen to the narratives from the radios and televisions where there is no face to face interaction with the narrator. It is difficult today to say children are still being socialized through the oral narratives, especially towns and cities, as they now primarily spend most of their time watching television when they are not at school.

### **Orality in Modern Oral Art Forms**

In view of the modes of transmission of these oral art forms that have come into existence, it is however debatable whether the word 'oral' should be retained or it

should be replaced or should have another special way of retaining it. Through the internet, cell phone messages, books, magazines and newspapers, these oral traditions are not transmitted orally but in written form. In such instances the issue of orality is therefore contested. Why should these art forms be called oral when they are not transmitted orally? If the transmission factor is to be considered, then it becomes difficult to come up with an all encompassing term for these modern art forms. However, above all, an all encompassing term is needed because these new modes of transmission have become part and parcel of the Ndebele society's literary traditions. It is rather absurd not to have a term for concepts that exist in a speech community or to have a term that does not accurately represent the concept.

### **Modern Art Forms and the Curriculum in Schools and Institutions of Higher Learning**

Even after the realization that these oral art forms are changing with time, the schools and institutions of higher learning have not accommodated these modern literary traditions in the curriculum. The contents of the oral art forms that are taught in schools carry even some sentiments that are not familiar to the students. What is the whole point of teaching a Ndebele child who is leaving in urban areas about '*umthwentwe*' (a type of grass that pricks even when it is still tender) when that child is leaving in a different world altogether. While it is important that children should be taught those traditional Ndebele literary forms it is also important to consider those that carry the concepts that they are familiar with. The traditional Ndebele oral art forms are relevant because they help the students to understand their society's history and also as a means of exposing them to a diachronic appreciation of their culture.

There is no possible sensible justification in the continuation of including in the curriculum only those oral traditions that carry terms and concepts that are unfamiliar to the learners. Failure to adapt to the changing world means that people are resisting change and are suffering from nostalgia. Fixation with the past means that people are dogmatic yet living in a dynamic world. The curriculum should not be prescriptive or purist in its very nature but should address the contemporary issues of the society. The following questions need to be answered in view of the curriculum in a changing world;

- Since the oral traditions are also dynamic, does this therefore mean also remodeling the curriculum in schools and institutions of higher learning so that these institutions are in tandem with contemporary changes?
- How can universities engage in curriculum review and attain a distinctly African face?

## Conclusion

The modern oral art forms have diverged from the traditional ones in content by including those concepts that are known to their users. The idea of sticking to the traditional oral art forms and excluding modern ones in institutions of learning is tantamount to ignoring reality. It is in other ways a quest to advance the fixation with the past forgetting that even those so called traditional oral art forms have somehow undergone some changes through history. These modern oral art forms should be included in the curriculum since they are a true and clear reflection of the realities of the world of the learners. The quest to stick to the traditional forms of art removes from the current Ndebele users their potential of being innovative and also puts the language in a frozen form. That kind of approach has the potential of killing the Ndebele language because it is restricted from formally accommodating the new concepts that become part of its culture.

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