

# HISTORY IN POPULAR LITERATURE AND TEXTBOOKS FOR XHOSA SCHOOLS, 1850-1950S

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## ***Abstract***

*The challenges of the contemporary demands for the decolonisation history in South African schools and universities require careful attention to the background of history education in our context. This article explores traces of that heritage as it influenced Xhosa language schools in the Eastern Cape during the first half of the twentieth century. Through the examination of the writing of Xhosa history by local scholars it demonstrates a rich tradition of writing that has to date been largely neglected by historians, and presents the potential challenge of this work for an understanding of identity and patriotism both then and now. Through a preliminary examination of school textbooks of the time, with specific reference to the Lovedale Press Stewart Xhosa Readers, I offer suggestions for future research that might be able to inform contemporary debates.*

**Keywords:** Colonial education; History curriculum; History in Xhosa schools; Xhosa historiography; History textbook publishing.

## **Introduction**

The historical background to the teaching of history in Xhosa schools has been surprisingly neglected. A literature search yielded very little. In view of the current debates over the Africanisation of the subject in schools I therefore attempted to uncover whatever information I could on the topic. Given that it is impossible to gain an accurate picture of the school and classroom culture of the times under review, my enquiry is primarily based on an exploration of evidence relating to the literature that was in use in Xhosa schools. I hope what follows might provide the scaffolding for further research.

In his survey of literature available in Xhosa language readers in 1935, Doke notes that “no (history) textbooks were prescribed for the junior standards, but in Standard IV certain English books are suggested to teachers”. (Doke, 1935; Lestrade, 1967; Schapera, 1967; Bracket & Wrong, 1934; Ward, 1934). We have very little detailed information about what history was taught at primary schools and how it was taught in the early twentieth century. The Cape

Department of Public Education's voluminous *The Primary School: Suggestions for the Consideration of Teachers* (1923/1929) made broad suggestions on these matters which were roundly criticized by WM Tsotsi, a leading member of the Cape African Teachers Association (CATA), for making a distinction between the recommendations for white and black schools. In essence he was against the tendency to assume that Africans could only effectively engage with material that required them to remember the "stories of great man and great deeds simply told", while white children, he asserted, were being introduced to world history and civics. He also argued for a greater emphasis on South African history if the subject was to provide as platform for "critical citizenship".

At mission high schools at this time most textbooks were either published in Britain, by Longmans Green or Macmillan, or by South African publishing houses such as Juta or Maskew Miller. The texts used by African high school learners were usually the same as those prescribed in white schools in the Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Those that I have been able to trace for the early twentieth century are as follows (those published in Britain): *Macmillan's South African History Readers* (London: Macmillan, 1903/1906); William C Scully, *A History of South Africa from the Earliest Days to Union* (London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1915/1922) (based on the work of Theal and Cory); Cecil Servaas de Kock, Fowler & CJJ Smit, *Junior Certificate History Course* (London, Longmans Green, 1930). In later years the Fowler and Smit series came to be synonymous with apartheid school history. When I taught high school history at Wynberg Boys High School in Cape Town in the late 1960s their *History for the Cape Senior Certificate and Matriculation* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, multiple editions) was considered to be the bible for matric candidates. The other texts published in the Cape that I have been able to find are: George McCall Theal, *Short History of South Africa for Use in Schools* (Cape Town, 1888-1908 various editions); Joseph Whiteside, *A New School History for South Africa* (Cape Town, Juta, 1897); Marie Hartill & ED Slater, *Maskew Miller's Nieuwe Geskiedenis vir Zuid Afrika* (Kaapstad, Maskew Miller, 1912); M Hartill, *Maskew Miller's Elementary Course of South African History to 1820* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1920); *Maskew Miller's Historical Reader (new syllabus) for South African Schools* (Cape Town, Maskew Miller, 1920); RB Hawes, *Jutas History for Matriculation Students* (Cape Town, Juta, 1924); T Young & FW Reitz (after Theal & Cory) *Maskew Miller se korte geskiedenis van Suid Afrika vir gebruik in skole* (Kaapstad, Maskew Miller, [1921-full date not available]); A Jenner, *Juta's New History Reader for Primary School, Std. IV* (Cape Town, Juta, first impression, 1932).

The only history texts that I have been able to discover which were prepared exclusively for African learners in South Africa prior to the apartheid era were Rev Joseph Whiteside's, *A New School History of South Africa* (Cape Town, Juta, 1897, reprinted 1906, 1916); Peter AW Cook's *South African History for Natives* (London, Longmans, 1932-1943); E Jacottet, *Historiea South Africa – E-Ngolet soeg Likoko* (South African History for Schools), (Moriya, Sesoto Book Depot, 1939); MW Waters, *Stories from History for Bantu Children* (Std. I & II; III & IV; V & VI) (Cape Town, Jutas, [194- full date not available]), and RW Wells, *History for Bantu Schools* (London, Nelson, 1946). The work of Mary Waters needs particular attention as she seems to come closest to a sympathetic treatment of Xhosa history in formal textbooks. Her textbook.

*Our Native Land* with a section on “Four Great Africans” – “Moshesh the Statesman”, “Khama the Christian”, “Ndhlovukazi the Queen” and “Aggrey the Prophet” and reference to “neighbouring peoples, the Matabele and the Ma Tshona”, and “the role of missionaries and their work” and “the coming of the white man”, mark a significant landmark in historical textbook production.

It is also important to note that the Xhosa *Readers* used in schools included historical topics and extracts written by a variety of experts in Xhosa and Eastern Cape history, which reflected the practices developed in England relating to the production of language *Readers* for schools that were developed during the nineteenth century. To the best of my knowledge no research has even been done on these works or on the teaching of history in the mission schools of the Cape prior to the advent of apartheid after 1948.

This narrative neglects the emergence of a strong tradition of popular historical work among the new Xhosa intelligentsia who were concerned to recover the histories of their own people. Some were written in Xhosa and some in English (Maseko, 2017). Much of this work has only recently been made available in translation. I have arranged the works identified with that genre by Jeff Peires and Jeff Opland in chronological order. My major source here refers primarily to Peires's notes on “Xhosa Historical Writing” in *The House of Phalo*, in which he divides that work into chronological periods (Peires, 1981:175-179).

## The early generation of historical writers

### *Late nineteenth century*

Peires (1981) associates the beginning of this tradition with the writings of William Gqoba, Isaac Wauchope, William Ntsikana and John Vimbe. William W Gqoba's key historical work includes *Imbali yama Xosa* (The History of the Xhosa People), (1887); *Imbali yase Mbo* (The History of the Eastern Territory) (1887); *Isizatu sokuxelwa kwe nkomo ngo Nongqause* (The motive for the Nongquause Cattle Killing, (1888) and *Isizwe Esinembali* (Xhosa History & Poetry) (Opland, 2015). Isaac Wauchope's writings includes *Inkosi zakwa Ngqika* (the Ngqika Chiefs), (1897-1898), *Iziganeko 1795-1828* (1898) (Annals of 1795-1828); *Amaroti akwa Xosa* (the Heroes of Xhosaland), (1908) and *The Natives and Their Missionaries* (Opland, 2008; Nyamende, 2000).

### *The later generation: Early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

A number of other writers are also referred to by Peires (1981) as making a contribution to the writing of Xhosa history during the first half of the twentieth century. Many of them draw on a mix of traditional *imibongi* and shared memory, and the evolving craft of historical analysis. There is no space here to make a critical evaluation of each of these works in terms of the criteria of modern historical research methodologies, but it is sufficient to my argument to establish that there was a healthy growth of historical literature of a variety of kinds at this time. I will list them by the date of their publications, though, given the nature of the constraints on publishing, many of these works were only published long after they were written, or they were published in an abbreviated, self-censored or edited form that does not always do justice to the original.

- Rubusana, WB (ed.). *Zemk Inkomo Magwalandini* (Away go the Cattle you Cowards). London: Butler & Frame, 1906 / Butler & Tanner 1911.
- Ayliff, J and Whiteside, J. *History of the Abambo, generally known as the Fingo*. Butterworth: Gazette, 1912 republished, Cape Town: Struik, 1962.
- Bokwe, JK. *Ibali likaNtsikana* (Ntsikana: The Story of an African Convert). Alice: Lovedale Press, 1914.

- Soga, T. *Intalo ka Xosa* (Life of the Xhosa in the Old Days). Durban: Butterworth Press, 1916).
- Plaatje, S. *Native life in South Africa*. London: King, 1916.
- Jabavu, D. *The black problem*. London: King, 1916.
- Molema, SM. *The Bantu*. Edinburgh: Green, 1920.
- Fuze, Magema M. *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* (The Black People and Whence They Came: A Zulu View). Emfudisweni Mission Press, 1927.
- Waters, MW. *Nongqause: A drama of the cattle killing*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1924.
- Cingo, WD. *Ibali laba Tembu* (The story of the Thembu), (1925/1927).
- Cingo, WD. *Ibali laba Mpondo: Nama Bhaca, Xesibe, Mpondomise itao namesake Ntu* (The story of the Mpondo, Baca, Xesibe & Mpondomise people: Social and cultural issues of African people). Pondoland East: Palmerston Mission Press, 19-- (full date not available).
- Soga, JH. *Abe-Nguni, aba- Mbo, Nama-lala* (1926 unpublished; eventually published as *The South Eastern Bantu; Ama-Xosa Life and Customs*). Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1930. Lovedale Press, 1931.
- Kawa, RT. *I-Bali Lama-Mfengu* (The History of the Mfengu). Lovedale Press, 1929.
- Ndamase, VP. *Ama-Mpondo: Ibali ne-Ntlalo* (The History and Ways of the Mpondo). Lovedale Press, 192- (full date not available).
- Ngani, AZ. *Ibali lama Gqunukhwebe* (The History of the ama-Gqunukhwebe). Lovedale Press, 1938.
- Msebenzi, (with Van Warmelo). *History of the Matiwane and the Amangwane tribe*. Pretoria: Government Printer, 1938.
- Ndawo, H. *Inxenywe yen-Tsomi zase-Zweni* (folktale/short story). Lovedale Press, 1920.
- Ndawo, H. *Iziduko ama-Hlubi* (history/poems in original form). Lovedale Press, 1939.

Most commentators, from AC Jordan to Peires and Opland, agree that the outstanding figure and prolific writer that emerges in this story is Samuel Edward Krune Mqhayi (1875-1945) who manages to span the traditional/

modern divide and remain true to his identity in his rural home at *Ntabozuko* (Mount Glory) near Berlin in the Eastern Cape, while navigating the constraints placed upon his writing by the mission and colonial regime. As Lev Shoots (2014) points out, Mqhayi's "histories" of important Xhosa leaders, though they do not amount to a formal historical account, constitute part of his "larger project regarding the national consciousness of the Xhosa and other peoples" and amount to "a way of pushing back against the loss of tradition" and "correcting stereotypes found in colonial histories" (Shoots, 2014:48-50). He seems to have been the only author/editor listed above whose work appeared extensively in school textbooks such as *The Stewart Xhosa Readers* published by Lovedale Press. Though we have no study of precisely how he influenced the project, an analysis of the contents of the *Senior Reader* demonstrates that a considerable amount of his writing was included. (see Appendix A which provides a list of Mqhayi's publications included in the *Stewart Senior Xhosa Reader* which was published from 1936 to the early 1940s).

Mqhayi wrote a great deal of material which ranged from the retelling of folk tales and *isibongi*, to modern novels, biography, natural history, poetry and plays, but his work never moves far from the overarching themes of Xhosa history, cultural identity, colonialism, missionaries and Cape politics. His much anticipated work on the history of the Xhosa, *I Bali le Zizwe ezi Ntsundu*, was uncompleted and the manuscript has been lost. The fragments of his historical writing have survived and have been edited and translated by Jeff Opland (2009) and his co-translators/editors, in *Abantu besizwe: Historical and biographical writings, 1902-1944*. This includes a variety of praise poems and historical writings including pieces on Nongqause, Ndlambe, Ngqika, Maqoma, Ntsikana, Rharabe, Sarhili, and Mpande as well as many writings and obituaries of the well-known figures including John Knox Bokwe, Rubusana, Richard Kawa, JT Jabavu, W Wauchope, W Mpamba, JH Soga, Dr AB Xuma, Charlotte Maxeke and many others. This rich scholarship was never to see the light in a consolidated document during Mqhayi's lifetime.

The works referred to above would have featured prominently in the library of the new elite of the Eastern Cape in the pre-War era. But they have still not made their way into formal historical literature to the present day, in whatever way that is defined. The recording of oral history, and the understanding of how it came to influence the emergent literature of those who had been educated in mission schools, was only engaged with seriously by historians from the time of the publication of Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition* in 1961.



This was closely followed by the ground-breaking volume by Monica Wilson and LM Thompson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. 1, which, strongly influenced by social anthropology, sought to bring African history into the mainstream of historiography for the first time in South Africa. But just as space seemed to be opening up for an Africanist approach to historical research, and the possibility of greater influence for those who situated themselves in the tradition outlined above, the new revisionist Marxist historiography came to dominate the field and class rather than race and ethnicity came to dominate historical scholarship at the end of the apartheid era.

Despite the constraints of apartheid on school curriculum, spaces were opened up for a more flexible approach to the matriculation history syllabus through the Joint Matriculation Board from the 1980s as the curriculum and the examination were specifically designed, in keeping with the New History approach to school history, to stress analytical thinking over rote learning. The changes were demonstrated in a new generation of textbooks like Jan J Breitenbach (ed.). *South Africa and the Modern World, 1910-1970*. (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1974) and Peter Kallaway (ed.). *History Alive 9 and 10* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1986-7), but these changes displayed scant regard for the tradition of historical writing represented by the Xhosa literary tradition referred to above.

Outside of the formal school curriculum, the Communist Party night schools curricula for adult worker education was concerned to emphasise the disastrous effects of colonialism and dispossession on African peoples in Southern Africa and stressed the creation of an economic underclass through the violence of political and economic control. However there was little recognition of the role of African culture in this account, and the role of African intellectuals and spiritual leaders was seldom highlighted. I am open to correction on this point as I have not been able to locate specific historical writing designed for use in the Worker's Night Schools.

Perhaps the most significant and sympathetic contribution to a revision of South African history with an emphasis on the role the black community in history prior to the 1960s is to be found in Eddie Roux's *Time Longer than Rope* (Roux, 1948:7). He set out to write "a general account of the political history of the black man [sic] in South Africa, the battles he has waged, the organisations he has built and the personalities that have taken part in the struggle". Yet, for all its strengths in foregrounding an African viewpoint relating to the history of South Africa, his focus on the effects of conquest

and modernisation, and the proletarianisation of the African population, this work lacks an awareness of the tradition of historical writing emphasised here.

Finally, the historical writing of members of the Non-European Unity Movement and the Teachers' League of South African (TLAS) by Dora Taylor (Nosipho Majeke), *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*, (Johannesburg, Society for Young Africa, 1952) along with Hosea Jaffe's, *Three Hundred Years* (Mnguni), (Cape Town: APDUSA, 1988) and *The Contribution of Non-European Peoples to World Civilization* (Wynberg: New Unity Movement, 1992), for all their strengths in emphasising an alternative historical perspective, also fail to recognise the tradition I have highlighted above.

## Conclusion

The challenges of history education in contemporary South Africa are daunting. The selection of curriculum content, and even the ethos and methodology of the discipline is a site of considerable contention. While the significance of world history for education at university and school is not challenged, the choice of focus relating to African and South African history represents considerable challenges. An attempt to consider our own historiography in all its diversity and the relation of various historical traditions to the theory and practices of the school curriculum seems to provide a key site for an exploration of these complexities and to offer the promise of a secure future for the subject in schools. A key challenge at the present time to those who would "decolonise" the discipline of history and the history curriculum at school and university would seem to be to return to the rich tradition referred to above, and attempt to see how it can be reshaped and revived to enable it to take its rightful place in current historiography.

## Appendix A

**Bennie, WG (Editor). Mqhayi's contributions to the Stewart Xhosa Senior Reader (Published by Lovedale press in various impressions between 1936 and the 1940s)**

ULUHLU LWEZIFUNDO (CONTENTS)	PAGES
IINCWADI ZESIKHOSA ZABAFUNDI <i>Umbongo weentaka (poem)</i> (Books of the Learning Centre)	5-7



<i>IITAKA EZIBALULEKILYO EMA-XHOSENI - I &amp; II</i> (Important features in the Church)	8-20
<i>IMBEKO</i> (Honour)	21-25
(+ FW Fitz-Simons no SEK Nqhayi) <i>UMZI WEENYOKA</i> (City of Snakes)	68-73
<i>UKUFIKA KWETSHAWE</i> (Arrival Date)  1. <i>AA! ZWE LIYA Z, UZA!</i> (AA! The world is Coming, Coming)  2. <i>BAYETHE! LANGA LIKHANYA !</i> (Put it ! The Sun shines)  3. <i>ITSHAWE LASE-BRITANI</i> (Awarded to Britain)	81-93
<i>IZIILO EZIKHULU</i> (These are the Great)	93-98
<i>U-DON-JADU</i> (Don-Jadu)  1. <i>Inciniba</i> (Ostrichs)  2. <i>Amazkhwenkwe</i> (Boys)  3. <i>Iintombi</i> (Daughters)	116-122
<i>IQAKAMBA</i> (Cricket)	153-158
<i>AA! LWANGANDA !</i> (AA! An increase)	187-190
<i>U-MAQOMO</i> (Not attributed – but since Mqhayi wrote on this topic it seems likely that it was his work)	190-192
<i>ABU – THWA, AMA-LAWU, NAMA-XHOSA</i> (Response to Schapera’s contribution on Khoisan)	139 – 242

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