Iingoma (Tradtitional Songs) and Izibongo (Traditional Poems): Implications for History Teaching and Learning in South African Schools

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Abstract

This article examines the embedding of *iingoma* and *izibongo* as valuable historical sources that should be utilised by educators in history classrooms in South African secondary schools. It shows how these sources can be used effectively by history teachers to re-enact the past in the classroom. Interviews with elderly people and *iimbongi* as well as written sources showed that traditional songs and *izibongo* are valuable historical sources that can be used to present a balanced account of the past in the classroom. *Iimbongi* claim that the use of *izibongo* in teaching history enhances understanding of South African history. Thus, *iimbongi* gave their own perspective on the significance and implications of employing *izibongo* as historical sources in the decolonisation of history. Written sources and interviews with *iimbongi* and elderly people were used as a basis for arriving at why and how sources like *iingoma* and *izibongo* may be incorporated into the history classroom to decolonise South African history. Using these historical sources in the teaching and learning of history helps to present different perspectives on the history of South Africa. The incorporation of *iingoma*, freedom songs, and *izibongo* in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase, as well as in Social Sciences, is a strategy to acknowledge and address the biases that exist in written history. It became evident that there is a link between written history on the one hand, and *iingoma* and *izibongo* on the other hand. The link is critical for engaging in the

process of transforming and decolonising South African history. It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should conduct in-service training/workshops for history teachers.

Keywords: Songs; Traditional poems; Historical sources; Re-enactment; Unforgotten people; Critical method

Introduction

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there emerged a debate around the teaching and learning of history in South African schools. This debate emanated from a view that during apartheid, history was presented and taught in schools in order to buttress the South African government policy of apartheid, which was bent on entrenching separateness, underdevelopment, inferior education for Africans, and inequality in all spheres of life, such as political, educational, cultural, residential, economic, and social areas. Under apartheid laws, South Africans were classified as first, second, and third-class citizens with unequal rights and privileges. These laws entrenched unequal access to resources and opportunities for Africans. Whites were the most privileged class, while Africans enjoyed no privileges at all. According to the "National Party's traditional hierarchical race structure"[1] and racial inequality, the apartheid government enacted laws that discriminated against Africans and debarred them from being citizens of South Africa, thereby pushing them to the periphery of the country.

To contextualise this article, the tumultuous changes that had been effected by the Department of Education (DoE) over the past twenty years and the turbulent history of curriculum transformation in terms of content[2] are examined to show how different history-teaching strategies came into being. Noteworthy, the use of *iingoma* and *izibongo* in history teaching and learning are dealt with in the context of how these historical sources help to decolonise South African history in the classroom.

The desire to transform history and to present it in such a way that it reflects the objective and critical historical development of the people of South Africa gave rise to the introduction of a new education system, Outcomes Based Education (OBE), which intended to prioritise the inculcation of skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge in learners. Killen aptly contends that while teachers have a responsibility to help "learners develop knowledge or skills… no single teaching strategy is effective all the time for all learners".[3] Different factors, most of which are beyond the control of teachers, render the teaching and learning activities a complex process.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for history, in line with OBE, Curriculum 2005 (C 2005), and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), intended

1 M Lipton, *Capitalism and apartheid South Africa, 1910 – 1986* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p. 23.
2 W Hugo, "Editorial", *Journal of Education*, 60(1), 2015, p. 5.
3 R Killen, *Teaching strategies for quality teaching and learning*, 2nd edition (Cape Town, Juta & Co, 2015), p. 25.

to make history learner-centred, emancipatory, and skills-based thereby placing learners at the centre of teaching-learning activities. These activities include giving learners topics to discuss as groups based on questions designed by the teacher or assigning learners the roles of historical figures in order to make them empathise with people from the past and understand how and why they acted and/or responded in particular ways. This teaching strategy enables learners to put themselves in the shoes of historical figures in order to enhance their empathetic understanding of the past. Robinson and Lomofsky correctly argue that, while OBE was an approach to teaching and learning, "NCS focussed more on outcomes and integration of content from different subject areas than on teaching content of specific subjects per grade".[4] The latter set out to simplify the teaching approaches and strategies as well as learning experiences. In the words of Killen, most learners "learn best through personally meaningful experiences that enable them to connect new knowledge to what they already believe or understand".[5]

The introduction of CAPS was "a way of restoring teachers' authority as subject specialists"[6], with guidance being given on content specification and clear and concise assessment requirements. The motto of CAPS is structured, clear, and practical instructions, helping teachers unlock the power of NCS. No wonder, then, that NCS and CAPS are based on similar principles, including Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). In terms of the NCS and CAPS requirements, learners must be given tasks/projects and assignments to investigate heritage as a compulsory activity in which learners are required to investigate local or national heritage sites, community memorials, and museums. The DBE prescribes that NCS and CAPS principles should be implemented in the teaching and learning of history. One of the seven principles of CAPS is: valuing IKS by acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution.[7]

Valuing indigenous knowledge systems deals with the acknowledgement of the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution.[8] These aims can be realised when learners are eager and

4 M Robinson & L Lomofsky, "The teacher as educational theorist", S Gravett, JJ de Beer & E du Plessis (eds). *Becoming a teacher,* 2nd edition (Cape Town, Pearson Holdings, 2015), p. 70.

5 R Killen, *Teaching strategies*…, p. 26.

6 M Robinson & L Lomofsky, "The teacher…", S Gravett, JJ de Beer & E du Plessis (eds). *Becoming*…, p. 70.

7 Department of Basic Education (DBE), Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, History Further Education and Training (FET) Phase Grades 10 – 12. Pretoria, Government Printer, 2011b, p. 5.

8 DBE, CAPS, History FET Phase Grades 10 – 12. Pretoria, Government Printer, 2011b, p. 5.

ready to conduct oral research among the previously subjugated and voiceless people such as workers, women, 'terrorists', and the 'illiterate' class—women, children, and people with disabilities—in order to recover the subjugated voices and the voices of the powerless and the vulnerable groups. Memories and experiences of men and women, the rich and the poor, the voiceless and the politically powerful should be given equal treatment, recorded, and made accessible to humankind through representations in the history of South Africa. These diverse voices should be reflected in history and be heard in the classrooms. Not only should our classrooms become a place where voices are heard, but these voices must also be subjected to critical scrutiny by being critically analysed, debated, and comprehended. Thus, IKS—of which oral tradition, genealogies, chiefs' bulls, songs, and *izibongo* are part—is another significant instrument of re-living the past[9] which, according to Lekgoathi, provides for innovation and critical inquiry in the history classroom.[10]

The Report of the History Ministerial Task Team (MTT) released in May 2018 to Minister Angie Motshekga further drew the attention of stakeholders. The MMT recommended that history be made compulsory in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.[11] The MTT also recommended that history should not only replace life orientation but also be a stand-alone subject in the General Education and Training (GET) phase. The implementation year was to be 2023, as recommended by the MTT. The challenge of the non-availability of adequately trained history teachers to meet the demand and the timeous provision of textbooks to schools catering for the restructured history content was cause for concern. Hence, the History MTT recommendations have not yet been implemented. Thus, in terms of the History MTT Report of May 2018, history should be made compulsory in the FET phase, with effect from 2023.[12]

Different approaches and strategies for history teaching and learning can be used, including the use of *iingoma* (traditional songs) and *izibongo* (traditional poems) not only as sources of historical knowledge but also as significant components of indigenous knowledge. Both are strategies that can be used by teachers to introduce history learners to various historical perspectives in South African history and to compare written sources with *iingoma* and *izibongo* in interpreting history. Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane contend that

9 J Mvenene, "Orality: Opportunities and challenges, a case study for research in Thembuland, Eastern Cape, South Africa", *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 12(1), 2013, p. 35.

10 SP Lekgoathi, "Voices of our past: Oral testimony and teaching history", J Bam & C Dyer (eds), *Educator's guide to the UNESCO General History of Africa for the FET Curriculum* (Pretoria, New Africa Education, 2004), p. 41.

11 E Van Eeden, "Editorial", *Yesterday & Today*, 19, 2018, p. i.

12 E Van Eeden, "Editorial", *Yesterday & Today*, 19, 2018, p. i.

indigenous knowledge is "a tool fundamental to understanding…the need for Africa to consider this knowledge rather than exclusively"[13] Western-aligned knowledge. Western culture and civilisation have considerable influence on the indigenous knowledge and culture of the African people. Western knowledge systems had made an impact on indigenous peoples' mother-tongue languages. Thus, the main purpose of integrating *iingoma* and *izibongo* in history teaching and learning was and still is to decolonise school history and use African perspectives on historical narratives in the classroom. It also brings diverse teaching and learning strategies for effective and quality teaching and learning into the classroom.

Iingoma, songs, and history teaching

Iingoma and songs, whether freedom songs or songs by mineworkers at work are historical sources that paint a picture of a particular period and the milieu of the time. Indeed, freedom songs can no longer be sung in public spaces as this may likely promote hate among South Africans. However, these liberation songs can be used as a vehicle for transporting learners back to the past and as examples of the content and context of apartheid. In this way, the history teacher can move cautiously and extract what is historically relevant from the songs to enhance learners' understanding of the past.

There is a difference between *iingoma* (traditional songs), *izibongo* (traditional poems), and more contemporary or choral music. *Iingoma*, unlike Western music, are not notated. Hence, reference is made to *iingoma* sung on different occasions, such as *imidudo*, *iigwatyu*, *umyeyezelo*, and traditional leaders' songs. The mention of liberation songs, like *iingoma* by mine workers at work, is relevant because it follows the pattern of traditional songs. Thus, there is a difference between traditional songs and music. The spotlight is on *iingoma* and songs. How *iingoma* and *izibongo* provide more perspectives on South African history is pivotal in decolonising history and introducing history learners to multi-perspectivity and diversity.

Iingoma and songs take learners back to the past and provide a picture of what could have been the historical context and how people thought about their conditions. *Iingoma* were sung without any tune and notations, that is, they are not regulated.[14] They were

13 I Schellnack-Kelly & V Jiyane, "Tackling environmental issues in the digital age through oral histories and oral traditions from iSimangaliso Wetland", *Historia*, 62(2), 2017, pp. 117-118.

14 Khuthala Ngoma, Personal interview on 30 October 2024, Department of Humanities and Creative Arts Education, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha Campus.

sung on different occasions such as *umdudo* and *umngqungqo*, during *umgidi* ceremonies (*umyeyezelo*) and war times (*igwatyu*). When dealing with relations among the colonial governing authorities, traditional leaders, and missionaries, the history teacher may use *igwatyu* to show African people's determination to defend their land, independence, and prestige against White extension of power into African spheres of influence. On a lesson about Nongqawuse's cattle-killing vision of 1856-1857, and Nongqawuse's blood relation with Mhlakaza, traditional songs can be used to highlight the importance and influence of *amagqirha* during colonial times. Traditional doctors (*amagqirha*) sang *umhlahlo*.[15] TB Soga provides a classification of traditional songs as *Igwatyu* (*eyomkhosi*), *Umqolo wenamba* (*eyohlanga*), *Ingoma kaMhala* and *Ingoma kaNdlambe noNgqika*.[16] The importance of traditional leaders' songs for Africans indicates the respect with which chiefs and kings were regarded. Learners may be made aware of why chiefs' and kings' songs were sung on important occasions like raining ceremonies. Songs served as unifying elements in African communities. They maintained people's allegiance to their traditional leaders.

There were songs of freedom and about the liberation struggle in South Africa. Following the banning of political organisations by the National Party (NP) government in 1960, the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of Democrats (COD), operated a clandestine station called Radio Freedom in South Africa. Not only did Radio Freedom broadcast news from the ANC perspective but it also served as a channel to broadcast political music and freedom songs and to mobilise supporters within South Africa.[17] These songs are important because they express the feelings and wishes of the people who fought for freedom. When teaching the Road to Freedom section of Grade 12 history, these songs could add more meaning to the history of the liberation struggle. They re-live the past.

It is important to point out that Gunner comments that "music functions as a trenchant political site in Africa primarily because it is the most widely appreciated art form on the continent".[18] She goes on to state that music is Africa's most prominent popular art and it is most widely and systematically transmitted through the mass media which gives

15 TB Soga, *Intlalo kaXhosa* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1937), p. 152.
16 TB Soga, *Intlalo*…, p. 152.
17 SP Lekgoathi, "Radio freedom, songs of freedom and the liberation struggle in South Africa, 1963 – 1991", C Landman (ed.), *Oral history, communities and the liberation struggle: Reflective memories in post-apartheid South Africa* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2012), p. 187.
18 L Gunner, "Jacob Zuma, the social body and the unruly power of song", *African Affairs*, 108/430, 2008, p. 29.

it an extremely wide reach.[19] Gunner contends that music "constitutes a large, powerful platform through which public opinion can be influenced".[20] Revolutionary songs and political music served as pervasive and pivotal elements in mobilising the struggle against the oppressor.[21] Freedom songs were the prevalent musical form of popular expression under apartheid especially at mass protest gatherings, celebrations, and political funerals. Freedom songs, together with cultural forms such as poetry, theatre, and dance played a pivotal role in mobilising international support for the struggle against apartheid.[22] One example of a freedom song is given below:

Sobashiya' bazali ekhaya
Savuma, sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba no mama
Silandela inkululeko
Sobashiya abafowethu
Savuma sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba nomama
Silandela inkululeko
Sithi salani, salani, salani ekhaya
Sangena kwamanye amazwe
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba nomama
Silandela inkululeko
We shall leave our parents behind
We agreed and we entered other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom
We shall leave our siblings behind
We agreed to go to other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom

19 L Gunner, "Jacob Zuma…", *African Affairs*, 108/430, 2008, p. 29.
20 L Gunner, "Jacob Zuma…", *African Affairs,* 108/430, 2008, p. 29.
21 SP Lekgoathi, "Radio freedom, songs of freedom and the liberation struggle…", C Landman (ed.), *Oral history, communities and the liberation struggle*…, p. 189.
22 SR Davis, "The African National Congress, its radio, its allies and exile", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35(2), 2009, p. 349; SP Lekgoathi, "The African National Congress's radio freedom and its audiences in apartheid South Africa, 1963 – 1991", *Journal of African Media Studies,* 2(2), 2010, p. 139.

We are saying goodbye, goodbye, goodbye to everyone at home
As we entered other countries
Where neither father nor mother had ever been before
As we pursue freedom[23]

This freedom song takes us back to the apartheid era, which was characterised by brutal oppression when people sacrificed their parents, siblings, and home comforts to fight for freedom. Gasa and Lekgoathi contend that the above-mentioned freedom song originated among black youth expressing pain and resolve to be trained in other countries and return to free their land and people.[24] One informant pointed out that freedom songs were used to encourage freedom-loving people and opponents of apartheid to pluck up courage and be committed to the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa.[25] This was endorsed by Sikhelenge when he claimed that without singing freedom songs it was not possible to face the police dauntlessly and to continue fighting for the liberation of South Africans from the yoke of oppression.[26] They are of historical significance in enhancing the teaching and learning of history in South African classrooms.

Another song that, according to Gunner, "was often [sung as] a means of uniting those who faced a dangerous and powerful enemy, examples of which stretch back at least to the first use of *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* by the ANC in the second decade of the twentieth century"[27] is:

Siyaya ePitoli
Tambo siyaya ePitoli
Siyaya soyinyova
Pasopa we mabhulu
We are going to Pretoria
Tambo, we are going to Pretoria

23 SP Lekgoathi, "The African National Congress's radio freedom…", *Journal of African Media Studies,* 2(2), 2010, p. 141.

24 N Gasa, This song gives voice to our History. *The Sunday Independent*, 12 May 2011; SP Lekgoathi, "Radio freedom, songs of freedom and the liberation struggle…", C Landman (ed.), *Oral history, communities and the liberation struggle…*, p. 189.

25 Wiseman Mbulelo Ntenjwa, Personal interview on 20 August 2012, Qobo-qobo Village, Centane.

26 Ndyebo Sikhelenge, Personal interview on 12 September 2012, Extension 1, Butterworth.

27 L Gunner, "Jacob Zuma, the social body and the unruly power of song", *African Affairs*, 108/430, 2008, p.37.

We are going to cause mayhem
Watch out, you Boers![28]

On examining the history of the mining industry and the working conditions of the mine workers, a look at songs which mine workers sang when work became unbearable, gives one the feel of the time. The significance of singing by mine workers was that they plucked up courage and were invigorated to continue working through their songs which were sung to the tone of traditional songs. They would sing *Shosholoza*, which ran as follows:

Shosholoza, shosholoza, kulez' intaba (x2)
Isitimela sibuya eSouth Africa
Wen' uyabaleka, wen' uyabaleka,
Kulezo intaba
Isitimela sibuya eSouth Africa
Push, push in those mountains
The train is coming from South Africa
You are running away, you are running away,
In those mountains
The train is coming from South Africa.

The working conditions of the workers are implied in the song itself, as it takes one back into the past and enables teachers and learners to conjure up images of the mining industry, long working hours, hard labour, and how workers united in the face of unbearable working conditions. For a history teacher and learners to understand and reflect on the deeper meaning of 'Shosholoza', they must have knowledge of the language and culture of the people who sang the song. As Seelye has noted,

knowledge of the world's languages and cultures is more vital than ever. In order to compete in the global community, we must be able to communicate effectively and to appreciate, understand, and be able to work in the framework of other cultures.[29]

28 SP Lekgoathi, "The African National Congress's radio freedom…", *Journal of African Media Studies,* 2(2), 2010, p. 145
29 HN Seelye, *Teaching culture: Strategies for intercultural communication* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1994), p. vii.

In terms of CAPS, learners should "engage critically with issues of heritage and public representations of the past"[30] in the history curriculum. Through songs, learners "recognise that there is often more than one perspective of a historical event".[31]

The importance of culture as an aspect of IKS is also evident in Goulet's assertion:

> *when people are oppressed or reduced to the culture of silence, they do not participate in their own humanisation. Conversely, when they participate, thereby becoming active subjects of knowledge and action, they begin to construct their properly human history and engage in process of authentic development.*[32]

It must be pointed out that history learners and most history teachers do not relate and align isiXhosa literary genres with the history of South Africa and, subsequently, do not use them to enrich their knowledge of history. Thus, the link between written history and oral history as an indigenous methodology of research in the form of oral evidence, oral tradition, *iingoma* (songs), *izibongo* (praises), *izikhahlelo* (praise names), chiefs' bulls (*awakuloNkomo*: counsellors), and *iminombo* (genealogies) is blurred. This lack of such an important source of knowledge was and still is critical for hindering the process of transforming and decolonising South African history.

Iingoma are also forms of historical sources that paint a picture of a particular period and portray the milieu of the time. *Iingoma* carry a historical message about the culture, customs, and traditions of a nation. For example, *iingoma* were sung during the era of industrialisation in Butterworth, which depicted the life led by factory workers. This *ingoma* is reminiscent of the social and economic conditions of workers in the Butterworth industries during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. It ran as follows:

Intsimi yam itshile,
Ndinomolokazana, owakh' umolokazan' akenjenjwalo,
Ndiyamba, wayibulal' ibhodi xa izakuphatha.
Soze ndingendi mlingane, ndiyahamba.
Lishush' ibhelu ematankini.
Owakh' umolokazana akenjenjwalo

30 DBE, CAPS, History FET Phase Grades 10 – 12. Pretoria, Government Printer, 2011b, p. 9.
31 DBE, CAPS, History FET Phase Grades 10 – 12. Pretoria, Government Printer, 2011b, p. 9.
32 D Goulet, "Participation in development: New avenues", *World Development*, 17(2), 1989, p.165.

My mealie field is barren and scorched
I have a daughter-in-law whom I endeared and loved like yours
I will leave my homestead for you bewitched a sub-headman on the eve of assuming rulership
Nothing will temper with my marriage, my fellow women, I will go and see my husband
But I will leave to catch my husband's concubine in the Tank Town
As you respect and revere your daughter-in-law, so should I do

Iingoma were sung on important occasions, such as those performed during the rituals of passage from boyhood to manhood (*uSomagwaza*), during war times (*iGwatyu*), during ancestral worship rituals (*uMdudo*), and during *umgidi* ceremonies.[33] Each *iKumkani* (King) and *iNkosi* (Chief) had his *ingoma*. For example, *UKumkani* Sarhili's *ingoma* was *uMqolo weNamba*; *uNkosi* Rharhabe's (d. 1782) was *uMdudo*. *UNkosi* Maqoma's (1798-1873) ingoma was: *uGusawe*. *UNkosi* Ngqika's (c. 1775–1829) *ingoma* was: *iNjinana*.[34] *UNkosi* Ngqika's sons from various houses were Sandile (1820-1878), Maqoma, Tyhali (d. 1842), Anta (1810-1877), Xhoxho (d. 1878), Matwa (1810-1847), and Thente (d. 1842). *UNkosi* Ndlambe's *ingoma* was: *uWankuntuza* (*ingoma kaMfi*). *UNkosi* Ndlambe (1740-1828) was the brother of *uNkosi* Mlawu (d. 1782), and both were sons of *uNkosi* Rharhabe and Princess Nojoli.[35] (Mqhayi, 1914:50). On the death of Mlawu in 1782, a regency was created under Ndlambe, who initially refused to surrender his regency to the 17-year-old Prince Ngqika (1775-1829) in 1795. Notable African Church leaders did have their own songs. For example, one of the prominent Church figures, Richard Tainton Kawa's favourite *ingoma* (song) was *Umhlaba weAfrika uyalila*.[36] Ntsikana (d.1822) was popularly known for his *ingoma*: *ulo Tixo mkulu/uloNgub'enkulu*, which was recorded in 1844 by Ludwig Dohne, a German missionary working among the amaXhosa.[37] According to uKumkani Xolilizwe Mzikayise Sigcawu, *iingoma* were and are used on interacting with ancestors during ancestral worship to honour and show respect to ancestors.[38] These were sung to

33 KS Bongela, *Amagontsi: Uncwadi lwemveli* (Umtata, Afro Publishing Co, 1991), p. 68.
34 For more on *iingoma*, see SEK. Mqhayi, *Ityala lamawele* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1914); J Mvenene, "The implementation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the teaching and learning of South African History: A case study of four Mthatha high schools" (D.Ed, Walter Sisulu University, 2018).
35 SEK. Mqhayi, *Ityala*…, p. 50.
36 SEK. Mqhayi, *Ityala*…, p. 66.
37 Jacob Ludwig Dohne, *Das Kafferland und sein Bewohner* (Berlin, 1844), pp. 69-70.
38 UKumkani Xolilizwe Mzikayise Sigcawu, Personal interview on 10 June 1992, Nqadu Komkhulu (Great Place), Gatyana.

connect with the ancestors and to foster a sense of identity and belonging. [39]

Tracey eloquently states that: "in this respect it is like language. We all express our thoughts in words but use a great number of different languages. So, it is with music."[40] They carry messages reflecting the nature, course, and motives behind the rituals. Thus, *iingoma* carried a historical message about the culture, customs, and traditions of a nation, which is important for a clear understanding of the local and regional history of a community. Most of these songs are passed from one generation to another and are performed only during special occasions.[41] An example is that of *izibongo zeenkosi*, which give genealogies and examples of participation in battles in defence of the land. Similarly, *iingoma* sung during war times take warriors back to the past and detail how the forebears defended their country as a means of motivating men to march forward.

The historical value of *izibongo* in the history classroom

Izibongo or praise lyrics contain information that has historical interest. Vansina states that they usually contain phrases composed during the reign of a chief or king, thus giving lengthy historical accounts of the reign of the traditional leader, his character, and vision.[42] They also include poetry for wedding ceremonies, for relaxation and entertainment, and for funerals of well-known personalities.[43] Praise poems provide an image of the period under study and depict people's views and opinions about the traditional leader and their times. The historical importance of praise lyrics lies in the fact that they not only provide an understanding of the 'feel' of the time in which they were created, but also help to transfer the historian and learners mentally and imaginatively to the earlier time. They portray the world and a particular setting, putting the history teacher/historian in touch with the past, particularly with respect to the attitudes and feelings of the people.[44] Importantly, praise lyrics are not, like tales, handed down in freestyle; they have fixed texts, which are handed

39 UNkosi Dalubuhle Rholihlahla Maphasa, Personal interview on 16 March 2006.

40 H Tracey, *Ngoma* (London: Green & Co, 1921), p. 12.

41 T Qwabe, "Too vulgar and socially embarrassing, yet exceptionally and temporally acceptable: Songs performed in the rituals of passage to womanhood in rural KwaZulu-Natal", C Landman (ed.). *Oral history: Representing the hidden, the untold and the veiled* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2009), p. 99.

42 J Vansina, *Oral tradition: A study in methodology* (London, Routledge & Kegan, 1965), p. 149.

43 G Emeagwali, "*African Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications for the curriculum*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003 (Available at www.africahistory.net, as accessed on 12 Feb. 2017), pp. 4-5.

44 J Mvenene, "Orality: Opportunities and challenges…", Indilinga: *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 12(1), 2013, p. 32.

down unchanged from generation to generation.[45] This contributes to their historical veracity.

In another context, Lott, as cited by Bailey, declares that *iimbongi* "are considered to be the keepers of history and pass on information on the trials and tribulations of their people from one generation to the next."[46] Opland and Lott further state that *iimbongi* narrate the story of their people and use their knowledge of the past to educate and warn of misconduct.[47] They fulfil a complex role in society, inciting the audience to loyalty to their chief/king through the medium of their eulogistic poetry.[48] In their *izibongo* they reveal *umnombo* (genealogy) of their people and encourage community members to strengthen the society by building on their heritage.[49] Thus, *izibongo* are partly historical in content and intent.

Opland in Saunders and Derricourt made mention of *izibongo* of major historical figures such as *ooKumkani* (kings) Shaka, Dingane, and Cetshwayo, as well as collections of isiXhosa *izibongo*—one by Rubusana and two by Ndawo—as invaluable source collections of history to which scholars should turn their attention.[50] Yali-Manisi wrote a poem on *uKumkani* (King) Sabata Dalindyebo (1928–1986) in which he likens the abaThembu king to the sun, the elephant, and the python and further compares the king to his counterparts in other abeNguni kingdoms. This magnifying device shows that Dalindyebo was highly respected by abaThembu and other southern abeNguni communities.[51] Examples of traditional poems abound, such as *Aa! Zweliyazuza! ITshawe laseBhritani, ESandlwana, Umkhosi wemidaka* 11[52], *Izibongo* of *uKumkani* Hintsa[53], *A! Jonguhlanga!*[54], and *uKumkani* Shaka's praise poetry.[55]

45 A Van Jaarsveld, "Oral traditions of the Ndzundza Ndebele", HC Groenewald (ed.). *Oral studies in Southern Africa*. (Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1990), p. 18.

46 J Lott, "Keepers of History", *Penn State Research,* 23(2), 2002, p. 89, cited in HA Bailey, "Perspectives and the mapping of Africa", J Bam & C Dyer (eds). *Educator's Guide to the UNESCO General History of Africa for the FET Curriculum*. (Pretoria, New Africa Education, 2004), p. 9.

47 J Opland, "Praise poems as historical sources", C Saunders & R Derricourt (eds). *Beyond the Cape frontier: Studies in the history of the Transkei and Ciskei* (London, Longman, 1974), p. 8; J Lott, "Keepers…", *Penn State Research,* 23(2), 2002, p. 89.

48 J Opland, "Praise poems…", C Saunders & R Derricourt (eds). *Beyond the Cape frontier…*, p. 8.

49 J Opland, "Praise poems…", C Saunders & R Derricourt (eds). *Beyond the Cape frontier*…, p. 8; J Lott, "Keepers…", *Penn State Research*, 23(2), 2002, p. 89.

50 J Opland, "Praise poems…", C Saunders & R Derricourt (eds). *Beyond the Cape frontier*…, p. 8.

51 J Mvenene, "Orality: Opportunities and challenges…", Indilinga: *African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems,* 12(1), 2013, p. 33.

52 SEK Mqhayi, *Inzuzo* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1943), pp. 70, 90, 98.

53 WB Rubusana (ed.), *Zemk' iinkomo, magwalandini* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1906).

54 St J Page Yako, *Ikhwezi* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1977), p. 35.

55 S Nyembezi, *Izibongo zamakhosi* (Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1958), p. 22.

A closer look at *uKumkani* Shaka's praise poem shows that for an understanding of its content and context, a teacher and learner must have insight into the amaZulu cultural expression, history, and language. By reading this poem and relating it to the Shakan period, learners could expand their historical knowledge of the origins and making of *uKumkani* Shaka. This understanding enables the teacher to appreciate the meaning contained in the symbols, metaphors, and similes used in the praise poem. As Nyembezi wrote:

Ulusiba gojela ngalaphaya kweNkandla,
Lugojela, njalo ludl'amadoda.
Indlondlo yakithi kwaNobamba,
Indlondl'ehamb'ibang'amacala
The feather that swallowed beyond Nkandla
It swallows as it eats men.
Old-Mamba from Nobamba,
Old-Mamba that goes around causing trouble. [56]

UKumkani Shaka is likened to a feared Mamba that sets out to murder and kill men, a merciless, bloodthirsty, and violent tyrant. Clearly, learning the praises of *uKumkani* Shaka is delving deeper into "a form of precolonial history outside of the dominance of settler colonial versions of history".[57] As can be observed from this poem, oral traditions, especially in the form of the praises of the kings, are historical records that are not just for memorising. Oral tradition, argue Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane, though previously sidelined by colonial and apartheid dispensations, has become historically relevant and is "often associated with communities whose history and narratives have been largely neglected".[58]

Thus, it is necessary to know the historical explanation behind the idioms and literary mechanisms that make up the poem.[59] This suggests that the praises of chiefs and kings require that a learner learn to engage analytically at the level of idiom, at the level of historical facts, and at the level of sociological understanding—that is, understanding the history and culture of a people. WB Rubusana sang *izibongo* of *uKumkani* Hintsa (*A! Zanzolo!*):

56 S Nyembezi, *Izibongo*…, p. 22.
57 *Daily Dispatch*, 29 August 2017, p. 9.
58 I Schellnack-Kelly & V Jiyane, "Tackling environmental issues in the digital age…", *Historia*, 62(2), 2017, pp. 115.
59 *Daily Dispatch*, 29 August 2017, p. 9.

NgusoRharhoba, uhlwath' olumadolo luka-Khala,
Umhle ka-Nyawoshe, uso-Zanzolo.
Umbheka ntshiyini bathi uqumbile,
Udumbhele imilenze, isibi esikhethwayo kweziny' izibi;
U-Nondwangu, imbhabalana entsundwana,
Abayikhuz' ukuhlaba ingekahlabi.
Ngu zigodlwana zemaz' endala,
Zingahlal' endleleni zilahlekile.[60]
He is Reverence, the sweet tall grass of Khala,
Graceful in movement, Starer,
Whose anger's seen in his eyebrows.
Hefty-legged, a better mote than others,
Wide-awake, the dusky little bushbuck,
Acclaimed for stabbing before it stabs.
He's the stumpy horns of an old cow,
If they keep to the path they're lost

It is worth noting that *UKumkani* Hintsa had *iKomkhulu* (a Great Place) on the banks of the Gcuwa (Butterworth) River on the site of the present-day Town Hall of Butterworth, and others at Holela (*kulo* Nogqoloza[61]) in Centane, Gatyana (Willowvale), and another at Mbinzana in Lady Frere near Komani.[62] This poem is significant for history teaching and learning. In terms of CAPS, learners must "organise evidence to substantiate an argument in order to create an original, coherent and balanced piece of historical writing".[63]

In one of *uKumkani* Sarhili's (*Aa! Ntaba!*) praise poems there is a section that reads as follows:

Yinamb' enkulu ejikel' iHohita.
Ovuk' emini akabonanga nto.
Kub' engayibonang' inamb' icombuluka.[64] *signifying:*

60 WB Rubusana (ed.), *Zemk' iinkomo …*, p. 13.
61 Nogqoloza was one of uKumkani Hintsa's (1789 – 1835) unmarried sisters after whom his iKomkhulu (Great Place) was named. She had a hump on her back (isifombo).
62 *Daily Dispatch*, 22 July 1922.
63 DBE, CAPS, History FET, 2011b, p. 9.
64 WG Gqoba, Isizathu sokuxhelwa kweenkomo ngoNongqawuse, WB Rubusana (ed.), *Zemk' iinkomo, magwalandini* (Lovedale, Lovedale Press, 1906), p. 228.

He is the great python which encircles Hohita.
He who is a later riser would have missed something.
If he fails to witness the uncoiling of the python.

This poem reflects that *uKumkani* Sarhili (1809–1892) had a great dynasty before whites usurped the power, authority, and influence of the traditional leaders. At the time, Sarhili lived at his *iKomkhulu*, in *Hohita*, Cofimvaba, before he was forced off his land by Cape Governor Sir George Grey in February 1858. His territory was about 2,535 square miles (4,079.687 square kilometres).

This poem is pregnant with symbolism and meaning. It reflects that *uKumkani* Sarhili's life was punctuated with setbacks and challenges. Before the Nongqawuse cattle-killing mania (1856–1857), *amaGcalekaland*, Sarhili's political domain, stretched from the Mbhashe River (currently a boundary between the Amathole District Municipality and the Oliver Reginald Thambo District Municipality) to Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth or eBhayi) and extended as far north as Komani (Queenstown).[65] It also encompassed iSidutyini (St Marks) and Hohita in Cofimvaba.[66] However, at the time the colonial towns of East London, Qonce, and Komani were not yet in existence until after the war of *Ngcayechibi*. Wielding much power, Sarhili was considered as great, valiant, defensive, dignified, and fearful. Thus, this poem is also relevant regarding land claims.

Herewith follows Melikhaya Mbuthuma's *umbongo* (praise poem) in honour of *uKumkani* Sabata Dalindyebo (*Aa! Jonguhlanga!*):

A! Jonguhlanga!
A! Jonguhlanga!
Yinina mntan' enkos' am ungasandijongi nje
Thole lesilwangangubo sakwaNdyebo
Ngqayi ngqayi yokuqhayisa

65 Mager posits that the district of Queenstown (Komani) was named after Cape Governor Sir George Cathcart's (1794-1854) hometown. See AK Mager, "Gungubele and the Tambookie Location, 1853-1877: End of a colonial experiment", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(6), 2014, p. 1159. However, uNkosi Mbuzo Ngangomhlaba Mathanzima asserts that the name referred to uKumkanikazi Nonesi, that is "the town of Queen Nonesi.", UNkosi Mbuzo Ngangomhlaba Mathanzima, Personal interview on 25 July 2018, Myezo, Mthatha.

66 UNkosi GawushiGqili Mcothama, Personal interview on 24 September 1999, AmaKhweleshe Komkhulu (Great Place), Centane; Robert Ndenze, Personal interview on 22 September 1999, Lusizi Village, Centane.

Isilo sam siyoyikeka
Sihlabe ngophondo phezu kweBumbana
Zatshw' izizwe zonke zanguqhusa-qhusa
Nditsho kuwe ke bhelu lentombi yakwaKhonjwayo
Hayi ke madod' umntaka Sampu madoda
Hayi ke madoda umntan' esilo madoda (1971).
A! Jonguhlanga!
A! Jonguhlanga!
Why are you avoiding my eyes, child of my chief?
Young son of the vulture chief of Ndyebo,
Clay pot, clay pot to be proud of.
My frightening animal,
It stabbed with its horn above the Bumbana.
All the nations started to scatter.
I refer to you, beautiful son of the daughter of the Khonjwayos.
Oh men, the child of Sampu, men.
Oh men, the child of an animal, men (1971).

The above poem is significant. It informs learners and teachers about *uKumkani* Sabata's *iKomkhulu* of Bumbane, Mthatha. His paternal and maternal origins are also mentioned. The poet tells the reader that Sabata was the son of *uKumkani* Sampu. It also highlights his maternal relations with amaKhonjwayo in amaMpondoland.

About the Nongqawuse cattle-killing vision of 1856-1857, Yali-Manisi produced the following *umbongo*:

Yayilishobo kwaloo nto
Ukuqalekiswa kwesizwe sikaXhosa
Kusuk' umntw' ebhinqile
Ath' uthethile namanyange
Uthethe naw' ewabonile
Azi babeye phi n' abantu balo mhlaba
Zaziye phi n' izigwakumbesha
Zaziye phi n' izidwangube.(1971)
That in itself was a shame
A curse to the land of Xhosa

For a female to emerge
And proclaim that she was addressed by the ancestors,
That she spoke to them in person.
Where were the people of this land?
Where were the great men?
Where were the dignitaries?

Contrary to the popular view based on written sources, Manisi presents a different opinion, which is in conflict with the assessment of Nongqawuse's role in the cattle-killing episode. According to the above poem, Nongqawuse's prophesy should not have been believed by the amaXhosa as it ran against their cultural beliefs and practices. Peires claims that between April 1856 and May 1857, it is estimated that about 40,0000 cattle were killed and about 40,000 amaXhosa died of starvation.[67] These figures exclude the number of cattle killed by lung sickness. Crais opines that "In killing, and not specifically sacrificing their cattle [to the ancestors], many Xhosa may have hoped to prevent further spread of the disease".[68]

Manisi exonerates Nongqawuse as the cause of the destruction of the amaXhosa through her prophesy. He puts the blame at the door of the whites, Sir George Grey in particular, and the missionaries in general. As he eloquently put it:

Kwaqal' ingqobhoko sathi samkel' uThixo
Kanti loo Thixo sithi siyamamkela
Le Bhayibhil' izel' inyumnyezi
Iphethwe yindod' ekhol' ijong' entshonalanga
Apha ngaphambili ngumqukumbelo
Ngasemva yil' ntunj' yokuhlal' amabhabhathane
Kanti kulapho kugangxwe khon' inkanunu
Evela phantsi kwendleb' iphum' esilevini
Kant' iqhawul' iminqambulo kwabanga phambili
Uthe wakuxakeka k' umhlaba yangena yajojobala
Yangena yathomalalisa
Inj' enkul' into kaGreyi

67 JB Peires, *The dead will arise Nongqawuse and the great cattle killing movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1989), p. 94.
68 CC Crais, *The making of the colonial order: White supremacy and Black resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 -1865* (Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1992), p. 209.

Bayawath' ukuyibiza yingang' uJoji
KaGreyi
Yath' iyawulungis' umhlaba
Kanti ngexesha lenyala lesikizi
Ibimele mgama yakh' umkhanyo
Ijong' isiphumo sokufa kwezidumbu
Abantu bequngquluza bengatyiwa nkanunu
Kuba babekwaz' ukurhubuluza ngezisu
Bepheph' inkanunu besiya kumbulali
Ncincilili!
Ncincilili
It all started with religion, when we said we would accept God;
Yet this God we said we would accept,
This Bible is pregnant with abomination.
It is held by a man whose collar looks westward.
In the front is the turned over part of the collar,
At the back is an opening where butterflies stay,
And that is where a cannon is lodged
Which appears below the ear and comes out at the chin,
And it shatters the sinews of those in front.
And when the country was in a plight,
The cannon penetrated deeply,
It penetrated and calmed things down.
The great dog, the child of Grey,
Who is called Big George,
The son of Grey,
Said he was rearranging the land,
Yet in this time of shame and scandal
He stood apart, and shaded his eyes,
Watching the result of the piling of corpses.
People lay stark without any shots fired,
Because they knew how to crawl on their bellies,
Avoiding the cannon as they made towards the killer.
Ncincilili!
Ncincilili.

As reflected in the *izibongo* cited above, learners can learn and recite *izibongo zikaShaka*, *zikaHintsa*, and *zikaDalindyebo* as a way of ensuring that they "have a strong epistemological arsenal by which to critique Christian Nationalist history".[69] Mpela's and Maliwa's observations seem apt when they point out that *izibongo* are the cultural and historical sources that enhance teaching and learning of history.[70] They claim that most of *izibongo* trace the history of a nation and present the genealogy of a traditional leader of that particular nation. It may be a chief or a king whose historical background is brought to the surface through izibongo.[71]

Conclusion

Opland, in Saunders and Derricourt, points out that "historians will have to consider a number of factors in the evaluation of this [izibongo] material, factors such as the reliability of oral transmission or the problem of feedback".[72] Teachers and scholars need to tread cautiously when assessing the reliability of *izibongo* as historical sources. However, *iingoma* and *izibongo*, like oral traditions and *iziduko*, are foundational concepts to history learners at schools and students at universities.[73]

It is important to state that traditional songs and praise poems have a historical significance that history teachers and oral researchers must take heed of when preparing lessons and assessment tasks for learners. They play a crucial role in demystifying untruths, myths, prejudice, and bias and thus uncover the hidden voices, untold stories, and veiled memories of African societies[74], especially in a country like South Africa where voices of the non-hegemonic classes have been ignored or silenced for a very long time.[75] The use of these sources enables learners to "understand the range of sources of information available

69 *Daily Dispatch*, 29 August 2017, p. 9.
70 Rachel Mpela (imbongi), Telephone interview on 30 October 2024; Babalwa Maliwa (imbongi), Telephone interview on 31 October 2024.
71 Rachel Mpela (imbongi), Telephone interview on 30 October 2024; Babalwa Maliwa (imbongi), Telephone interview on 31 October 2024.
72 J Opland, "Praise poems…", C Saunders & R Derricourt (eds). *Beyond the Cape frontier*…, p. 8.
73 *Daily Dispatch*, 29 August 2017, p. 9
74 SP Lekgoathi, "Orality, literacy and succession disputes in contemporary Ndzundza and Manala Ndebele chieftaincies", C Landman (ed.), *Oral history: Representing the hidden, the untold and the veiled* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2009), p. 46.
75 T Moloi, "Oral testimonies by former members of the Azanian National Youth Unity (AZANYU): The sayable and unsayable in an oral history interview", C Landman (ed.), *Oral history: Representing the hidden, the untold and the veiled* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2009), p. 17.

for studying the past".[76] Learners will also develop skills in extracting and interpreting information from a number of sources. It is partly through using these historical sources that the history of different communities, political organisations, political leaders, and traditional leaders previously ignored are unearthed. Thus, these history sources remain relevant in uncovering hidden histories or untold stories.[77]

However, like written historical sources, songs and poems should be approached meticulously by subjecting them to critical analysis. It is the duty of a history teacher to put both written and oral sources under a microscope by applying critical analyses to available evidence. While songs and poems contribute towards uncovering or shedding light on the hidden or untold histories, they have certain limitations as historical sources. One of its limitations is flawed or selective memory, which in the words of Tosh, "can be gleaned from surviving members… of groups, like the memories of mostly old people about their youth which is often confused as regards specific events and the sequence in which they occurred".[78]

76 DBE, CAPS, History FET, 2011b, p. 9.

77 M Marks, *Young warriors: Youth politics, identity and violence in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2001), p. 15.

78 J Tosh, *The pursuit of history: Aims, methods and new directions in the study of modern history* (United Kingdom: Longman Group, 1991), p. 210.

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